

Did the Far Right Breed a New Variety of Foreign Policy? The Case of Bolsonaro's "More-Bark-Than-Bite" Brazil

DAWISSON BELÉM LOPES, THALES CARVALHO, AND VINICIUS SANTOS

Far-right populist leaders often take office promising a revolution in policies. They project themselves as counterpoints to other political competitors and defend radical positions regarding a set of issues. These contents may include nationalistic-chauvinistic measures, antienvironmental attitudes, conservative postures toward human rights, and religious leaning. According to our framework, though, leaders will only be able to pursue sharp foreign policy changes in pluralistic societies if, first, they win internal disputes at policymaking venues. Second, some policies will depend on external support or, at least, the non-imposition of unsurmountable obstacles. An acute foreign policy change may occur if such "battles" are won—home and abroad. Otherwise, a few incremental and superficial shifts are the maximum outcomes these leaders can get. A within-case study on Bolsonaro's Brazil provides useful evidence for our argument.

Les dirigeants populistes de l'extrême droite arrivent souvent au pouvoir en promettant une révolution politique. Ils se présentent tel un contrepoint à d'autres concurrents politiques et défendent des prises de position radicales sur un ensemble de problématiques. Celles-ci peuvent comprendre des mesures chauvines et nationalistes, des comportements d'opposition à l'environnement, des postures conservatrices quant aux droits de l'homme et des tendances religieuses. Selon notre cadre, néanmoins, les dirigeants ne pourront appliquer d'importants changements de politique étrangère dans les sociétés pluralistes qu'à condition qu'ils sortent d'abord vainqueurs de conflits internes dans les lieux de prise de décision politique. Ensuite, certaines politiques dépendront du soutien externe ou, au moins, de la non-imposition d'obstacles insurmontables. Un important changement politique peut survenir quand de telles « batailles » sont remportées, tant sur le plan national qu'international. Autrement, ces dirigeants devront se contenter de quelques changements progressifs et superficiels. Une étude de cas du Brésil de Bolsonaro fournit des éléments utiles pour étayer notre argument.

Los líderes populistas de extrema derecha suelen llegar al poder con la promesa de una revolución en las políticas. Se proyectan como contrapunto a otros contendientes políticos y defienden posiciones radicales con relación a un conjunto de cuestiones. Estas posiciones pueden incluir medidas nacionalistas-chauvinistas, actitudes antiambientales, posturas conservadoras hacia los derechos humanos e inclinaciones religiosas. Sin embargo, según nuestro planteamiento, los líderes solo podrán llevar a cabo cambios bruscos en la política exterior de las sociedades pluralistas si, en primer lugar, ganan las disputas internas en las sedes de formulación de políticas. En segundo lugar, algunas políticas dependerán del apoyo externo o, al menos, de la no imposición de obstáculos insalvables. Si se ganan estas « batallas », tanto a nivel nacional como en el extranjero, puede producirse un gran cambio en la política exterior. De lo contrario, los máximos resultados que pueden obtener estos líderes son unos pocos cambios incrementales y superficiales. Un estudio de caso sobre el Brasil de Bolsonaro proporciona pruebas útiles para nuestro argumento.

Introduction

The arrival of far-right populist leader Jair Bolsonaro to power in January 2019 represented a critical chapter in the history of Brazilian foreign policy. During his electoral campaign in 2018, the retired army captain, who became an anti-establishment presidential candidate in Brazil after serving for 28 years as a lackluster congressman, did not manage to come up with a thorough plan of government. As foreign policy was regarded, Bolsonaro's set of proposals would involve objectives as vague as keeping Brazil away from partnerships with "murderous dictatorships" and conducting the country's international engagements with "no ideolog-

ical strings attached."¹ In actuality, his 4-year mandate as president brought about the multiplication of foreign policy formulators, a new emphasis on religion and Christianity, a liberally minded set of economic prescriptions, and a rhetorical crusade against "communism," "globalism," and the alleged "de-westernization" of the country. At the same time—and often quite contradictorily—Brazil has become more dependent on commodity exports to China, saw the deterioration of its commercial ties with old-time partners from Europe, and openly approached theocratic monarchies from the Persian Gulf. Talking points have changed from multilateralism to bilateralism, from pacifism to militarism. However, a virtual accession of Brazil to the Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) turned into Bolsonaro's foreign policy propaganda, in so much as Brasília kept complying with international regulation on environmental affairs and the peaceful settlement of disputes, and has not withdrawn from regional institutions,

Dawisson Belém Lopes is a Professor of International and Comparative Politics at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) and a Research Fellow of the National Council for Technological and Scientific Development (CNPq) in Brazil. Currently, he holds a visiting scholarship at the University of Oxford's Latin American Centre (United Kingdom, 2022–2023).

Thales Carvalho is a Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil. He was a Visiting Graduate Student at the University of California – San Diego (UCSD), United States, 2021–2022.

Vinicius Santos is a Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil. He was a Visiting Graduate Student at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2021–2022.

¹ See "O Caminho da Prosperidade," plan of government by Jair Bolsonaro (2018), available at https://divulgacandcontas.tse.jus.br/candidaturas/oficial/2018/BR/BR/2022802018/280000614517/proposta_1534284632231.pdf, accessed August 12, 2022.

despite the president's diatribes. Many different routes have been taken up to now, but with no apparent consistency whatsoever. A candid pair of questions that might stem from this depiction would be: What is actually behind Bolsonaro's erratic foreign policy? Are we witnessing an essentially novel phenomenon?

This paper aims to provide tentative answers to these questions at both levels, foreign policymaking and the ensuing policies materialized under Bolsonaro's presidency, by way of reviewing the recent history of Brazil and discussing some theoretical and conceptual ideas belonging to the broader spectrum of the so-called populist foreign policy. There has been some debate on whether far-right populist agendas are touching on foreign policy or not. Although they might diverge over some elements, there is a considerable overlap in terms of assuming nationalistic positions, coupled with the overall conservative agenda defended by populist leaders (Verbeek and Zaslove 2017; Sanahuja and López Burian 2020; Chrysogelos 2021). This category of foreign policy studies gave birth to an impressive and growing corpus seeking to understand developments in the United States (Boucher and Thies 2019; Löffmann 2019), Italy (Coticchia and Vignoli 2020), Hungary (Visnovitz and Jenne 2021), Turkey (Taş 2020), India (Plagemann and Destradi 2019), and even Brazil (Casarões and Barros Leal Farias 2021; Guimarães and Silva 2021).

Notwithstanding, this literature did not capture as yet the core ambiguity of Brazil's international stance in contemporary times. As far as the authors are concerned, Bolsonaro's Brazilian foreign policy does not entail an actual rupture with core historical principles upheld by diplomats and top officials, as he was not able to pull social and institutional levers in order to deliver new policy contents. Here is our assessment: there might be some transformation in progress, as it typically happens when new leaders come to the office, but there is much more continuity than foreign policy commentators would be willing to admit. Bolsonaro utterly failed in bringing up a revolutionary foreign policy in today's Brazil; his international moves are intensely superficial and mostly innocuous. In a few words, when it comes to foreign policymaking, Bolsonaro signifies more barking than biting. This article makes the case for not taking Bolsonaro's populist foreign policy at face value and shows why his ordinary day-to-day acts radically depart from his incendiary rhetoric.²

Our argument relies on public policy literature, namely on the theory of punctuated equilibrium, to posit that when a leader attempts to dramatically modify one given policy agenda, they might need to count on enough political and bureaucratic resources to change the course; otherwise, inertia will prevail. For any change to happen, one president will mobilize their political capital and apply every measure within their reach, such as presidential diplomacy, political rather than technical appointments, and even the provision of side payments of any sort. When a move for change faces resistance at the societal level, the Parliament and the Supreme Court will possibly act to block it. The opposite reasoning also holds true: when the president does not want

any change in foreign policy to come about, it suffices to leave the issue in the hands of bureaucratic agencies.

It seems a singular opportunity to conduct this within-case analysis on Brazil for a few reasons. First, the country is structured around a presidential system, which means increased institutional options for a leader to advance their agenda due to the concentration of agenda-setting mechanisms and bureaucracy control at the executive branch, not to mention the chief of state's capacity to conduct presidential diplomacy. Second, despite there being arguable attempts to undermine Brazil's democratic regime during Bolsonaro's presidential term, the country still remains a democracy according to most mainstream academic metrics (e.g., Freedom House, Polity, and V-Dem), hinting that those levers and venues that prevent higher levels of societal disagreement might have played a protective role, and must now be taken into consideration. Third, Brazil is not a great power, so her actions tend to be highly constrained by major powers in the international arena, which suggests material limits for a foreign policy turnaround to happen (Escudé 1992, 2016; Belém Lopes, Casarões, and Gama 2020). If our claim is correct, we should see that Bolsonaro was only able to implement his foreign policy agenda when, first and foremost, he won "battles" fought inside domestic and international arenas.

This paper is organized as follows. To begin, we review the concept of "far-right populist foreign policy" while describing the theoretical framework utilized to understand how populist leaders can (or cannot) dramatically shift a country's foreign policy. Second, we discuss the policy formulation and decision-making venues in which Bolsonaro had to wage political battles in order to move ahead with his agenda. Third, we evaluate the implementation of Brazil's foreign policy under Bolsonaro, presenting evidence on when and how the president was (not) able to fully implement his plans at the international level. We conclude this essay by offering some final remarks.

A Model for Understanding How Far-Right Leaders Can (or Cannot) Change Foreign Policy

If we are talking about sharp changes in public policy, the punctuated equilibrium theory becomes handy to our puzzle. According to the existing body of evidence, policies will remain similar or undergo incremental change while they stay in the hands of a limited number of politicians, bureaucrats, and interest groups. The first condition to be met for disruptive policy changes to occur is the politicization of an issue, that is, a steep gain of political salience (True, Jones, and Baumgartner 2007; Baumgartner and Jones 2009). This is what leaders such as Trump, Orbán, and Bolsonaro usually do with foreign policy: by way of symbolic gestures and rhetorical moves, they exploit it to their own political benefit, which is not necessarily in tandem with the best interests of a nation (Bolton 2020; Casarões and Barros Leal Farias 2021). When this politicization happens, an increasing number of actors are incorporated into the making of these policies. In the field of foreign policy, it sometimes means a downgrade in the role assumed by diplomats, as new types of actors also start influencing a country's policymaking (Belém Lopes 2020).

What happens next is crucial for the puzzle: novel actors often battle for influence inside specific venues—that is to say, political arenas—as a means for having their ideas implemented. Such arenas can be (but are not restricted to) legislative chambers, courts, bureaucracies, subnational

² It is fair to note that constructivism, an important theoretical strand in foreign policy analysis, concedes great explanatory power to words and speeches in international relations/foreign policy/diplomacy. In the same way, postpositivist approaches will place heightened emphasis on the role of narratives and resort to discourse analysis as a method to make sense of the world. Although acknowledging their importance, as well as their usefulness to explain some particular motivations and consequences of Brazil's foreign policy under Bolsonaro, it falls outside of this article's scope to assess Bolsonaro's government from these alternative theoretical and epistemological perspectives.

governments, among others (True, Jones, and Baumgartner 2007; Baumgartner and Jones 2009). As for foreign policymaking, it is worth noting that the executive branch will invariably have an edge over these disputes since they have (1) more accurate information available and (2) an even more prominent role in elaborating and implementing foreign policy as compared to other state branches (Milner 1997). While it is true that presidents can set agendas and control bureaucracies, this feature becomes protruding in the domain of foreign policy since, in a considerable range of situations, that will be implemented by a specialized bureaucracy—the diplomatic corps (Amorim Neto and Malamud 2019).

Often, however, does not mean always. The “post-diplomatic foreign policy” that arises from this highly politicized atmosphere includes allies to the president. At the same time, it involves people who do not agree with the leaders’ ideas and might exercise pressure against them. It follows that, although far-right leaders can be elected promising policy discontinuation, they need first to win disputes inside domestic venues in order to implement their policies—the number of venues is given by each country’s political regime.³ Then, if the increasing politicization of foreign policy brings a number of actors contrary to the president, it tends to become harder for the leader to win these disputes.

Also, as foreign policy is mostly implemented outside state borders, international interactions should be considered in this equation. In a globalized world, putting into practice ambitious foreign policy objectives, such as those defended by far-right parties and cadres, invariably depends on other actors. Although each state is sovereign, advancing a global religious-conservative alliance, or undermining international institutions, to cite two far-rightist policy goals, will reclaim a combination of factors. In the opposite direction, international actors can act together to impose hindrances on far-right leaders’ policies, especially if they are seen as compromising others’ foreign policies, not to mention previously set agreements.

Disputing at Domestic Venues: Brazilian Foreign Policymaking under Bolsonaro

President Bolsonaro’s coming to power in 2019 has potentially led to managerial confusion, decision-making unpredictability, and diplomatic impasse, as the Brazilian foreign ministry was arguably rendered “useless” at policymaking (Alencastro 2019). The prime role of Itamaraty (short for the foreign ministry) in Brazil has been transformed—from one of being the traditional gatekeeper and virtual monopolist of international representation to another of becoming the main intra-governmental articulator of multiple interests and stakeholders. The democratization of foreign policy, so to speak, correlates with the new underpinnings of modern capitalism. For no longer being organized in estates or castes, the new dynamics of social classes have started to interfere in the making of diplomacy. Brazil’s once aristocratic diplomatic corps, which used to operate within state apparatuses, currently engage in social struggles and partisan competition. Much unlike what would happen in the past, it is now reasonable to conceive of the roles played by businesspersons, unions, press outlets, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and churches in the setting of Brazil’s foreign policy agendas. As government is concerned, novelties such as transparency and access to public information,

wider press freedom, the fragmentation of international relations across the territory, and the nomination of international representatives at the level of federated states and municipalities are trending over the last three decades (Faria, Lopes, and Casarões 2013; Milani, Pinheiro, and De Lima 2017). Still, as we will discuss over the following sections, it has been under Bolsonaro that these new actors started colliding in a way that brings Brazilian foreign policy to a standstill.

At the same time, as one can expect from a modern liberal democracy, the executive branch in Brazil is checked and balanced out by both the legislative and the judiciary branches. For having a two-chamber national Congress, Brazilian foreign policy affairs, namely international treaties and the nomination of ambassadors to missions abroad, will fall within the responsibility of the Senate, the upper house of Congress.⁴ Still, during the years under Bolsonaro, also the Chamber of Deputies showed higher interest in foreign policy debates. Another veto point for Bolsonaro’s far-right populist foreign policy has been Brazil’s Supreme Court, which legally reviews Brazil’s foreign policy in light of the 1988 Federal Constitution (Brazil 1988; Belém Lopes and Valente 2020).

Besides these two venues—Congress and the Supreme Court—there are at least five other habitual sources of inputs, resistance, and containment to Bolsonaro’s radical turn in foreign policy: *subnational federated entities*, particularly state and municipal governments, which have gained leeway to conduct their own foreign engagements in the last couple of years, especially on topics related to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic; *Itamaraty*, the two-century old Brazilian foreign ministry, once a very independent foreign policymaking body in the country, nowadays being constantly defied and besieged, if not belittled by Bolsonaro; *the armed forces*, an actor of utmost relevance in the history of Brazilian politics that consistently backed Bolsonaro’s populist foreign policy, but also put brakes to, or helped to moderate, some of his most ambitious international plans; *political parties*, which greatly expanded their international relations programs, having turned into important reservoirs of ideas and space for contestation of Bolsonaro’s anti-institutional drives; and *civil society actors*, both supportive and critical of Bolsonaro’s international stance, which have organized themselves for the pursuit of particular goals, and helped to define the contents of Brazil’s foreign policy as of today. By discussing Brazil’s contemporary foreign policymaking system,⁵ we dig deeper so as to show why this resulting Brazilian foreign policy under Bolsonaro might not have represented true and impacting change at all.⁶

⁴Brazil’s lower house in Congress is also entitled to review international treaties.

⁵Please see figure 1.

⁶There is nothing properly new in the idea of mapping foreign policy cycles, and identifying all those institutional as well as noninstitutional players that operate inside these cycles. After all, foreign policymaking, and public policymaking in general, is inherently asymmetrical and multicausal. These attempts to think of foreign policymaking as an organic process, even when a constellation of very diverse players joins it, date back at least to David Easton’s pioneer work on systems theory (Easton 1953). In the realm of Brazilian foreign policy analysis, authors as important as de Souza (2009) and Amorim Neto (2011) have also provided their own renditions for contemporary Brazil’s foreign policymaking, encompassing formal/institutional veto players (Congress and the Supreme Court), state agencies, and societal actors. Although taking note of such valuable efforts, this paper aims to go beyond, updating their foreign policy descriptions and maps while recognizing the emergence of Brazil’s “post-diplomatic foreign policy” modality (Belém Lopes 2020). So, in this article we have attributed special emphasis to roles played by state branches other than the federal executive one, to subnational units, and to political parties (which are not exactly mere civil society actors, as they enjoy the monopoly of political representation

³David Easton’s classic work *The Political System* (Easton 1953) conceived the political system as integrating all activities through which social policy is formulated and executed—that is, the political system is the policymaking process.

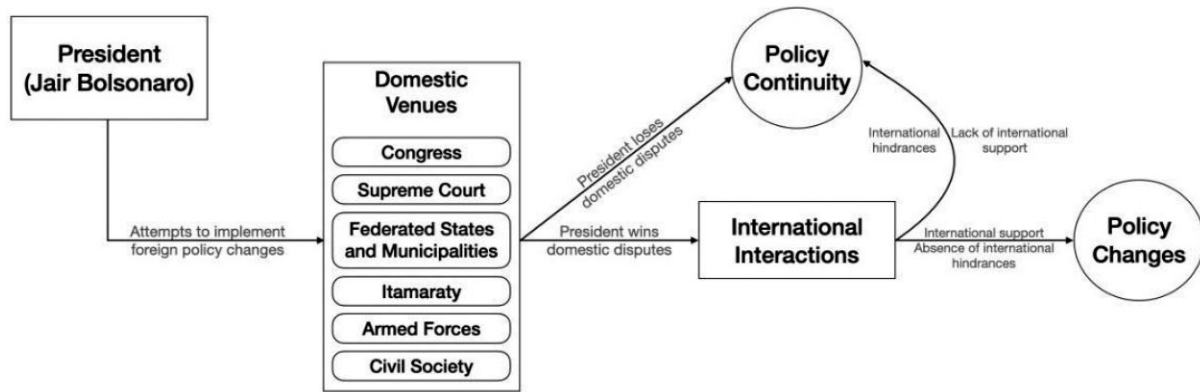


Figure 1. Implementing foreign policy changes in a pluralist polity.

Source: The authors.

Congress

One of the changes at the level of foreign policymaking in Bolsonaro's Brazil relates to the growing importance the Federal Senate has acquired over the years,⁷ particularly when Senator Kátia Abreu, a former Minister of Agriculture in Brazil, took up the presidency of the Foreign Affairs Committee in February 2021.⁸ Before this, Senator Abreu had already been responsible, in a way, for the rejection of Mr. Fabio Marzano, foreign minister Ernesto Araújo's protégé, and Bolsonaro's appointee to lead the Brazilian delegation to Geneva, as she engaged in verbal confrontation with the ambassador-to-be, and announced that she would not vote for his approval, which triggered other colleagues to reassess the matter and vote against the nomination. In March 2021, after a heated exchange of tweets over Brazil–China relations, Abreu and Araújo have directly clashed. Abreu, who is seen as an advocate of the Brazilian agribusiness, stood for China—a country that recurrently received hostile treatment on the part of Araújo—thus urging Araújo's dismissal from the leadership of Itamaraty. As the majority of the Senate took sides with her, Bolsonaro could do little to resist it. Araújo quit his job on March 29, 2021.

The Senate has also fulfilled its mandate in foreign policymaking through indirect means. Three exemplary cases involve congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro (the son of president Bolsonaro who was meant to be the ambassador of Brazil to the United States), Marcelo Crivella (a former mayor of Rio de Janeiro city who was considered for the Embassy of Brazil in South Africa), and Marcos Degaut (an official at the Ministry of Defense who was formally nominated to lead the Brazilian embassy to the United Arab Emirates [UAE]). The mere shadow of a senatorial rejection made Jair Bolsonaro think twice, and ultimately give up these appoint-

ments.⁹ This precocious withdrawal of three ambassadorial candidacies would arguably not have happened in times when the Brazilian Congress was less attentive to the ordinary handling of foreign affairs.

When it comes to the Chamber of Deputies, Rodrigo Maia, speaker of the House from 2016 to 2021, has exercised vocal opposition to foreign policy moves by Jair Bolsonaro. His top concerns were the environment, US–Brazil and China–Brazil bilateral relations, and the posture of Bolsonaro during the pandemic—topics about which he would publicly criticize the government whenever given a chance (Valor Econômico 2019; Agência Câmara de Notícias 2021).

He was also waging a political crusade against congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro—who occupied the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies' Foreign Affairs Committee from 2019 to 2020. It is worth mentioning that Jair Bolsonaro has never enjoyed official majoritarian support in Congress—especially at the upper house, where opposition parties, from the right to the left wing, are well entrenched.

Supreme Court

Mostly reactive and discrete in foreign policymaking, the Brazilian Supreme Court gained salience in the Bolsonaro years—simply because the tenets of the country's international stance were seen as jeopardized.¹⁰ This argument can

within Brazil's electoral system). We also claim that Brazil's armed forces and foreign ministry have historically behaved in such ways that one social interpreter finds good reasons to treat them as semiautonomous state bureaucracies, not as mere rule-taking agencies. Finally, civil society's influence is duly mentioned and tentatively incorporated—even if our approach is majorly institutional in nature.

⁷However, as former Senator Cristovam Buarque claims, "The Brazilian Senate remains quite parochial in international relations. Just a few rare congressmen in Brazil speak other language apart from Portuguese. Almost none speaks more than two idioms. It's a pity." (Interview with Cristovam Buarque, Zoom session, on May 22, 2022.)

⁸When democratic controls are regarded, the prerogatives of the legislative branch include, but are not limited to, contract design, staff recruitment (the process through which some civil servants are "confirmed" after the presidential appointment), summoning of public audiences, and information requests (see Santos and Belém Lopes 2023 for more).

⁹The three withdrawals were not identical. Eduardo Bolsonaro never really received a presidential nomination, although his *agrément* would have been conceded by the US government, according to official sources. See "Bolsonaro confirma aval dos EUA à indicação de Eduardo como embaixador," *Reuters*, August 9, 2019, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/politica-bolsonaro-eduardo-agre-ment-idLTAKCN1UZ1FX>. In the case of Crivella, who did not get a formal nomination either, there was an even more serious impediment: South Africa denied him an *agrément*. Even if Bolsonaro had managed to win every domestic battle to nominate him, the president would still end up losing this war. See "Bolsonaro desiste de ter Crivella como embaixador na África do Sul," *Nexo Jornal*, November 29, 2021, available at <https://www.nexojornal.com.br/extra/2021/11/29/Bolsonaro-desiste-de-ter-Crivella-como-embaixador-na-%C3%81frica-do-Sul>. The situation of Degaut was the most dramatic, as Bolsonaro even sent the presidential nomination to the Brazilian Senate, but retracted from it after facing resistance to his nominee. See "Bolsonaro withdraws nomination for Brazil's ambassador to UAE," *The Brazilian Report*, August 10, 2022, available at <https://brazilian.report/liveblog/2022/08/10/bolsonaro-ambassador-uae/>.

¹⁰According to the literature, the judiciary branch tends to confront a president only when their foreign policy does not conform to the higher law, mostly in cases involving civil rights. Otherwise, one can expect inertial abdication and refusal to engage in substantive debate, as the judiciary will more often than not abide by the executive's decisions (King and Meernik 1999).

be illustrated by individual opinions and actions of three current members of the court—Gilmar Mendes, Ricardo Lewandowski, and Luís Roberto Barroso.

Justice Mendes has manifested his dissatisfaction with the way the executive branch in Brazil conducted the country during the sanitary crisis started in 2020, raising public awareness to the risk of Bolsonaro having incurred genocide and crimes against humanity. Although it was not within his authority to denounce the president to an international court, Mendes' opinions were taken as meaningful ones, given his ascendancy over his peers and political figures in Brazil, not to mention the capacity to bring harm to Bolsonaro's image abroad. Justice Lewandowski, while less straightforwardly than Mendes, has also expressed concerns with the general lines of Bolsonaro's foreign policy in an op-ed at *Folha de S.Paulo* in December 2021. Lewandowski built his argument upon the foundations provided by Article 4 of the Federal Constitution, which expressly states the normative principles around which foreign policy must be formulated. He affirmed that the court would keep a watchful eye on Brazilian foreign policy contents that could go against the country's constitutional provisions for international affairs.

On a practical level, Justice Barroso went as far as to overrule a decision taken by the executive branch to expel the entire Venezuelan diplomatic delegation from Brazil amid the COVID pandemic. In recognition of the president's ultimate constitutional competency to decide whether diplomatic accreditation should be granted or not, Barroso found this particular decision about Venezuelan diplomats not to meet constitutional grounds for going against the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, one legal text to which Brazil adheres, and for challenging the fundamental rights enshrined in the Federal Constitution, as the lives of thirty-four Venezuelan diplomats and their relatives would be unnecessarily put into risk.¹¹ Barroso has also served as rapporteur on a case taken to the Supreme Court (*ADPF 708*), whose outcome was the recognition of supranational status to environmental norms by which Brazil is constitutionally bound. This decision has erected a wall against Bolsonaro's attempts to conduct his foreign policy in disalignment with global environmental standards and Brazil's international obligations in this field (*Supremo Tribunal Federal 2022*).

Federated States and Municipalities

When the COVID-19 pandemic was formally declared by the World Health Organization in 2020, the Brazilian federation found herself at a crossroads. While the central-level administration openly refused to fight the novel coronavirus *per* the mainstream sanitary playbook, which involved restrictions on civil freedoms and reliance on collective coordination to contain a quick spread of the disease, adopting instead a Trump-style approach, Brazilian subnational governments all across the territory reclaimed a right to impose sanitary measures on their own. The Supreme Court thus

¹¹In an interview given to one of the authors, Justice Barroso affirmed: "I would claim that this decision was driven by public health concerns rather than foreign policy. There was an ongoing epidemic, and fear [of contamination] was widespread. There was no reasonable justification for that expulsion, and cognizant of the lack of flights to Caracas at the time, I found it absurd. Although it was a decision taken by the Foreign Ministry, it had sanitary implications. Sending families back home in the middle of a pandemic, with no available escape routes, with closed borders and lockdowns, was unjustifiable (. . .) It was not foreign policy, but the impediment of an unnecessary evil. In matters of foreign affairs, the Supreme Court is usually self-restrained." (Interview with Luís Roberto Barroso, Zoom session, on August 10, 2022.)

authorized in April 2020 that every federated entity in Brazil (5,570 municipalities, 26 state-level governments, and the federal district) should be entitled to individually elaborate and apply their protocols to fight the pandemic.

This decision also proved to be consequential for foreign affairs, especially at a time when the world was running out of personal protective equipment, respirators for medical purposes, and ICU beds.¹² The first subnational leader who tried a direct connection with foreign suppliers, so as to bypass Brazilian central-level authorities, was Flávio Dino, the governor of Maranhão federal state. Through an ingenious operation brokered by Ethiopia, Dino invented a formula to bring from China those respirators and face coverings that were lacking in his state. When vaccine rollout started around the world and Brazil was lagging behind, another governor—João Doria, from São Paulo federal state—came up with an agreement for the local production of China's COVID-19 vaccine doses. Despite all resistance faced at the central level, nothing stopped Doria from becoming the first mandated authority in Brazil to vaccinate the population under his responsibility, not to mention, at last, the movement led by mayors from more than one thousand Brazilian municipalities to collectively procure vaccines from Russia.¹³ Bottom line: As Bolsonaro refused to play a leading role in this sanitary crisis, federated entities have widened up the scope of their international competencies, transforming the nature of Brazil's federative compact as an unanticipated effect.¹⁴

Itamaraty

Itamaraty was submitted to a continuous stress test during Bolsonaro's term. The major reason was the appointment for the ministry lead position of two career diplomats who did not enjoy much of a professional reputation before coming to office. Ernesto Araújo and Carlos França, however having been forged by the Brazilian diplomatic academy, were not obvious choices to occupy the chair that once belonged to big names such as João Augusto de Araújo Castro, Antonio Azeredo da Silveira, and Celso Amorim. In making this anti-institutional gamble, Bolsonaro had possibly in mind a plan to infiltrate his own yes-men in an otherwise conservative and rupture-averse ministry and to bend the bureaucracy that has traditionally steered Brazil's foreign policy formulation. Bolsonaro's bets were partially frustrated, but this does not mean that Itamaraty could escape institutional debilitation.

From a budgetary perspective, Bolsonaro did not bring much harm to the foreign ministry. If one takes the share

¹²Ambassador Irene Vida Gala, who is the deputy head of the Brazilian Foreign Ministry office in São Paulo, comments on it: "Although there were these international engagements involving vaccine procurement, both in northeastern Brazil and in São Paulo, paradiplomacy still remains very punctual in Brazil, mostly limited to commerce and investment. The state of São Paulo has a lot of potentials to explore. [The extroversion of federated states and municipalities] does not go against the federative compact; rather, it is the maximum instantiation of it." (Interview with Irene Vida Gala, Zoom session, on July 11, 2022.)

¹³For a fuller assessment of Brazil's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in the first year, please see Belém Lopes, D. 2021. "The place of Brazil at the vaccine line." 2021: *The Year of Vaccines* [ORF series], New Delhi, India, March 11, 2021.

¹⁴It is still worth recalling that, after publicly raising questions over there being vested interests of Germany and Norway in the Amazon forest, Bolsonaro has extinguished a committee created to oversee and advise on the funding provided by foreign partners for activities meant to protect the Amazon. Nonetheless, subnational leaders from the Amazon region have mobilized resources and founded the *Fundo da Amazônia Oriental*, an alternative collegiate body entrusted with the mission of managing funds received from abroad, escaping political controls exerted by the central-level administration (*Agência Pará 2019*).

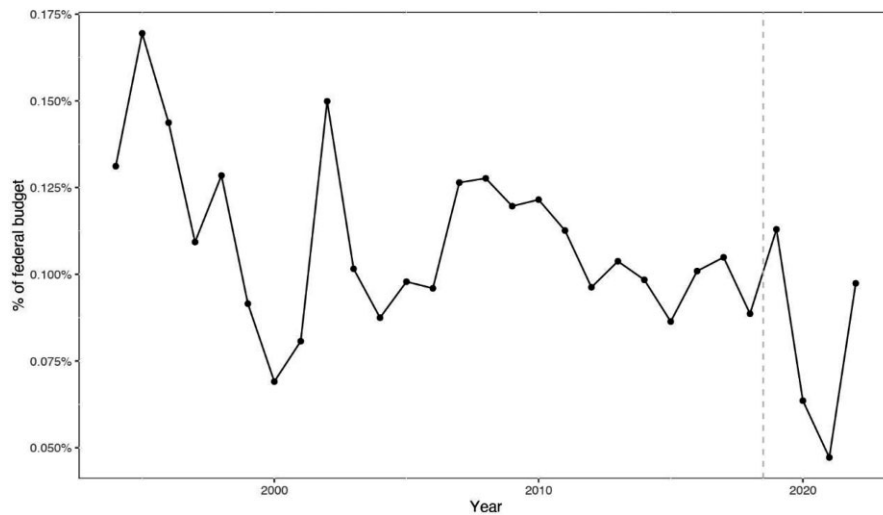


Figure 2. Itamaraty's budget as a share of the Brazilian federal budget (1994–2022).
Source: Own elaboration. Based on official data from the Brazilian government.

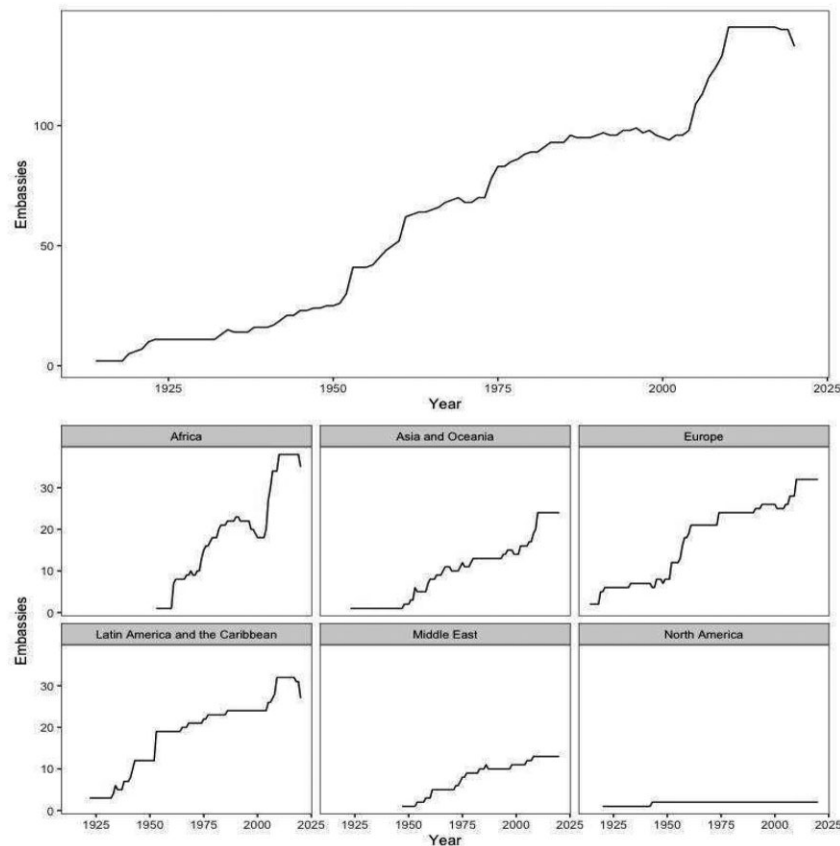


Figure 3. Number of Brazilian embassies in the world (1925–2021).
Source: Own elaboration. Based on official data from the Brazilian government.

of Itamaraty's participation in the federal budget as a proxy indicator for "portfolio prestige," it is on average at the same level as in previous administrations (see [figure 2](#)).¹⁵ The same reasoning applies to human resources management. Annual public recruitment of new diplomats has been maintained despite fiscal pressures. The massive closure of embassies and the Brazilian withdrawal from international

bodies, an objective announced during Bolsonaro's presidential campaign, never really came true (see [figure 3](#)).¹⁶

The problem actually lies elsewhere: this government has taken a toll on Itamaraty's ability to resist the proliferation of agents now entitled to represent the country abroad. Since Bolsonaro took office in 2019, noncareer diplomats have been considered for ambassadorships to an extent that

¹⁵ As the fiscal years of 2020 and 2021 were highly compromised by the pandemic context, we have considered 2019 and 2022 as reference points.

¹⁶ Brazil has suspended its participation in CELAC (The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) in 2020, but did not officially leave the grouping up to the moment.

would not happen in Brazil since the professionalization of the country's foreign service (Poder360 2019). Several preliminary attempts have been made so far—Bolsonaro (the son) for the embassy in Washington, Crivella for Pretoria, Degaut for Abu Dhabi—but only two succeeded: the nominations of army general Gerson Menandro for Tel Aviv and former Federal Court of Accounts minister Raimundo Silva for Lisbon. While senior active-duty and retired ambassadors have been committed to keeping these positions an informal prerogative of high-rank career diplomats,¹⁷ Bolsonaro concomitantly invests in alternatives, such as the recent creation of the ministry of finance office in the United States (Correio Braziliense 2022), to allegedly appoint his allies without having them scrutinized by the Senate.¹⁸

Armed Forces

The armed forces have been a constant presence at critical junctures in Brazilian history. From the coup d'état that put an end to Brazil's monarchy and launched a republican experiment in 1889 to current-date events, military officers are key to understanding how the political foundations of the country were laid out. On top of that, Jair Bolsonaro's victory in 2018 has meant, for all those who support militarism, a social invitation for the military to come out of barracks and go praetorian. The retired army captain, who got elected by popular vote, has never hesitated to conflate the positions upheld by the armed forces with the ones of his own government—in a clear attempt to “borrow” prestige from the military.

This pattern also applies to foreign policymaking. Bolsonaro's reliance on the military for international engagements is showcased by the appointment of an army general to lead the embassy in Israel—a most sensitive one, given Bolsonaro's electoral roadmap. This nomination of a non-career diplomat for an ambassadorship embodies the tactics being employed by the Brazilian incumbent to “buy” political support inside one state bureaucracy (the armed forces) while undermining the bureaucratic cohesion of another (the foreign ministry). It also happened to be the case with the Secretariat for Strategic Affairs (SAE), currently led by Flávio Rocha, a navy admiral considered by many to be Bolsonaro's top advisor on foreign affairs. The war in Ukraine in 2022 has provided fertile ground for this hypothesis to get tested, as the military—namely Gen. Heleno, Gen. Braga Netto, and Gen. Ramos, not to mention Adm. Rocha—took over as crisis cabinet members (Agência O Globo 2022). For the time being, a veto player to Bolsonaro's policy preferences has been Hamilton Mourão, Brazil's vice president and a dissenting voice with regard to foreign affairs. As for being a retired army general, Mourão also enjoys some leadership among the military, and publicly stood against the Brazilian chief of state on a few occasions, as when Bolsonaro announced his plan to mimic Trump and move the embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

¹⁷ It is under appreciation in Congress one bill to amend the law (PEC 034-2021) in order to facilitate the nomination of congressmen to lead Brazilian diplomatic missions abroad. If it is approved, senators and deputies would no longer have to renounce their electoral mandates before taking up an ambassadorial position.

¹⁸ An alternative explanation for this move would be the need to accommodate personnel who were displaced due to Bolsonaro's ministerial reform, which merged three ministries (Economic Planning, Development, and Finance) into one, not to mention an alleged drive toward bureaucratic decentralization, one of Bolsonaro's talking points. Either way, these changes yield Itamaraty's loss of relevance in Brazil's foreign policy system.

Political Parties

Given Bolsonaro's feeble connections to political parties during his time as a professional politician,¹⁹ it is fair to contend that, while not having a partisan stronghold, he became an easy target to every other party with an interest in claiming the presidency of Brazil. After all, in a country where partisan affiliation is compulsory to any one who is running for a mandate in legislative and executive branches, parties have gradually become institutional venues for foreign policymaking. To make sense of this connection, it is useful to come back to Bolsonaro's predecessor in the presidency, Mr. Michel Temer. Under President Temer, there was the consecutive nomination of two foreign ministers with partisan backgrounds. One, José Serra, a former candidate to the presidency of Brazil in 2002 and 2010, who holds a senatorial mandate from 2015 to 2023, seized the headship of Itamaraty for 9 months (from 2016 to 2017). Aloysio Nunes Ferreira, a former speaker of the Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee, took over right away (from 2017 to 2019). Previously, Celso Lafer twice (under Presidents Fernando Collor de Mello and Fernando Henrique Cardoso) and Cardoso himself (under President Itamar Franco), two other political appointees, have served as foreign ministers. The four of them belonged to Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB), the Brazilian political party with the highest contingent of cadres sitting in the foreign ministry.²⁰

As official data show, Bolsonaro's coming to power did not trigger a surge in affiliation of diplomatic personnel to Partido Social Liberal (PSL), his party at the time he won the presidency. In the years 2018 (during the electoral campaign) and 2019–2020 (first half of his term), there were only two Brazilian diplomats (out of approximately 2,000 active-duty and retired ones²¹) who joined Bolsonaro's party (see figure 4). PSL's international officer Filipe Martins, while having led the transitional foreign affairs team before Bolsonaro took power, has apparently lost ground and become displaced in the current administration.²² Evidence indicates that political parties have not been helpful levers for Bolsonaro to implement his foreign policy agenda.²³

¹⁹ The Brazilian incumbent has been affiliated to nine parties since he started his career back in 1989.

²⁰ According to data retrieved from the Brazilian Superior Electoral Court in 2020, there are 102 Brazilian diplomats, current or retired, who are or were affiliated to political parties. PSDB has in its membership approximately 30 percent of this contingent, followed by Novo and Workers' Party (PT), each accounting for a 10 percent share (Santos and Belém Lopes 2021).

²¹ According to official figures, 1,990 career diplomats have already been admitted to Brazil's diplomatic academy (Rio Branco Institute) since 1945.

²² Just to draw a quick comparison between Bolsonaro and two of his homologues in Brazil, the PT has relied on advice on foreign affairs by Marco Aurélio Garcia, a former national president of the party, from the time Lula da Silva took office as president in 2003 until Rousseff's departure from the office in 2016. At the very moment these lines are being written, Brazil transitions from Bolsonaro to Lula da Silva's presidency and, as Lula's inauguration is due January 1, 2023, his transition team for foreign affairs has already been announced. Unsurprisingly, three out of seven members belong to PT, while two of them have already had a leading position at PT's international relations secretariat (Mônica Valente and Romênio Pereira). See “Veja quem são as lideranças do PT no grupo de Relações Exteriores” at <https://pt.org.br/transicao-veja-quem-sao-as-liderancas-do-pt-no-grupo-de-relacoes-exteriores/> (PT's official website, accessed November 21, 2022).

²³ There is one important remark to make at this stage. For congressman Rodrigo Maia, Eduardo Bolsonaro (who belonged to PSL from 2018 to 2022) took up the presidency of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies' foreign affairs committee in order to promote his father's populist agenda at the international level: “PSL was Brazil's biggest party at the time [2019]. Parties with a larger number of representatives in Congress are entitled to choose which committees they aspire to lead. They have chosen this particular legislative committee [foreign affairs] to lead. There was no way to prevent it.” (Interview with Rodrigo Maia, Zoom session, on August 15, 2022.)

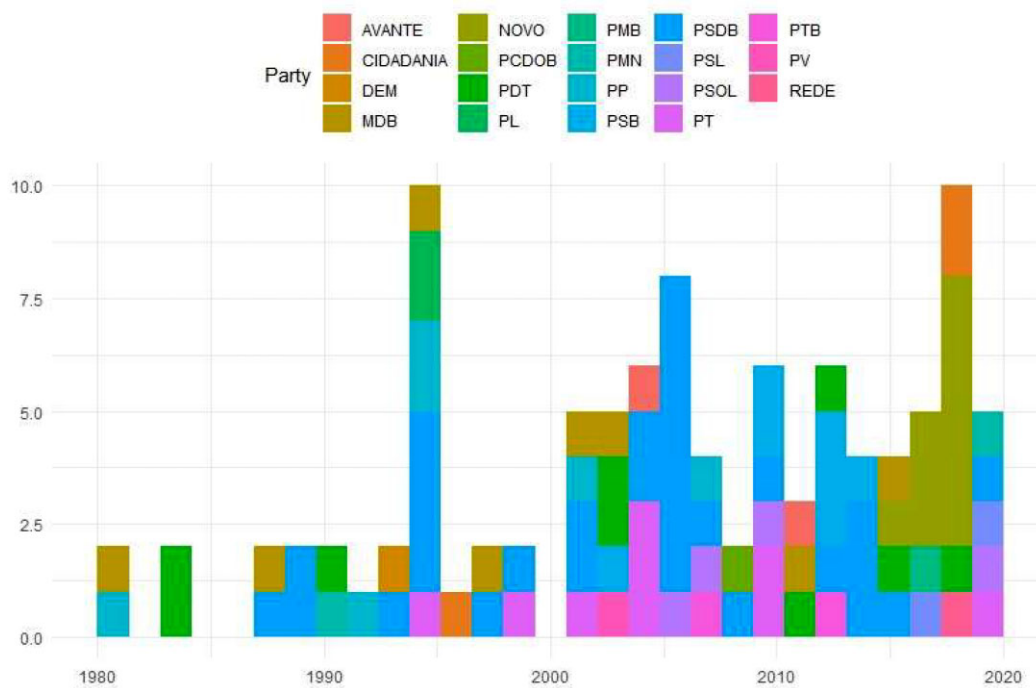


Figure 4. Affiliation of Brazilian diplomats to political parties (1980–2020).

Source: Santos and Belém Lopes (2021). Based on data from Brazil's Higher Electoral Court (TSE).

Civil Society

Civil society is not properly a venue, and societal actors have long featured in Brazil's foreign policy landscape, but new interest groups have gained influence under Bolsonaro. The nexus between foreign policy and religion served as an authoritative argument for churches and religious leaders, mostly evangelicals, to start voicing out their policy preferences. With Araújo at the ministry, Brazil clearly weaponized Bolsonaro's religious motto to pave the way for otherwise inexplicable alliances, be they with Christian countries in Eastern Europe or Muslim nations in the Persian Gulf. Churches are said to have played a central role in Bolsonaro's 2018 electoral triumph, so they were given a platform to have their ideas globally spread. The attempt to nominate an evangelical bishop for the embassy in Pretoria should be read against this backdrop; the active engagement in international affairs of Bolsonaro's minister of human rights, herself also an evangelical leader, hints at the importance attributed by religious stakeholders to controlling sources of influence and symbolic power at the international level.²⁴

The arms industry has also acquired leverage under Bolsonaro. This fact belongs to a broader context: The Brazilian president was elected under the promise that, should he win, access to guns and bullets in the country would be eased. His son Eduardo Bolsonaro is an open preacher of The National Rifle Association (NRA)-style armamentism in Brazil, getting personally involved in campaigns for the popularization of shooting clubs and sport hunting (Agência Pública 2021). The number of guns in Brazil multiplied by

²⁴As a matter of fact, this is a longer-term process, whose footprints take back to Lula da Silva's presidential terms. Back then, evangelicals first benefited from measures that would expand their international role, such as the concession of diplomatic passports to pastors and bishops (Folha de São Paulo 2019).

at least three times in 2021, in comparison with official figures for 2018 (Veja 2022). Business connections are tentacular: Taurus, Brazil's top private company in the business, is a constant interlocutor of Brazilian diplomats and the military (O Globo 2022); Imbel, the Brazilian public company for war materials, which is managed by the army, and Embraer, the airplane builder, a transnational private enterprise previously run by the Brazilian air force, have exported their products more than ever before, reaching an all-time record in 2021 (Valor Econômico 2021); the current secretary for defense products at the Ministry of Defense was nominated by Bolsonaro for the embassy to the UAE, under the claim that he has been an efficient facilitator of arms deals with UAE's Edge Group (UOL 2022). All roads now lead to Brazil's pro-gun foreign policy.

On the other hand, there is also a variety of civil society players resisting Bolsonaro's foreign policy. Environmentalists, academics, human rights activists, NGOs, think-tankers, etc., have been important in countering this new Brazilian stance, either for providing strategic information to Congress members or for actively calling the judiciary branch to monitor and punish some of these moves, or connecting with peers out of Brazil and exerting international pressure. Businesspersons, especially those connected to export-led industries, have pressurized Bolsonaro to abandon his antienvironmentalist rhetoric, as it would do harm to their private economic interests. At last, press was also a major stakeholder in this process, as it raised awareness—home and abroad—to Bolsonaro's maneuvers.

Disputing at International Arenas: Brazilian Foreign Policies under Bolsonaro

Modern nations have constituted their own foreign services, as they need personnel posted abroad to interact with

foreign actors and execute commands issued by an incumbent chief of state. Along the same lines, it does not suffice for a far-right populist leader to win disputes at domestic venues; they must win external disputes too. Otherwise, foreign policy changes will simply not happen. These external games will be played either bilaterally or multilaterally, within the limits of international institutions or not, in a country's own region or beyond. Either way, international arenas are the very last frontier for a populist far-right president to instantiate transformative vows. For an emerging middle power like Brazil, the argument goes, it is not trivial to afford a sharp policy shift after all—to the extent that it might challenge a long-established rules-based order (Escudé 1992; Belém Lopes, Casarões, and Gama 2020). Needless to say at this stage that Bolsonaro is seen as a risk by a considerable range of global players, thus triggering reactions around the planet over a span of thematic domains. This section is devoted to assessing Bolsonaro's foreign policy outcomes from 2019, focusing on the policies he promised to change, and identifying cases where he succeeded in bringing up transformation to Brazil's international relations, and those where he utterly failed.

More Change than Continuity

The most explicit foreign policy departure from Brazil's historical positions was the adoption of a morally conservative and religious stance on its international interactions (Belém Lopes and Carvalho 2020). As we mentioned before, while environmental and economic issues took the stage in domestic venues, this conservative turnaround received less opposition from domestic actors. It provided a path for foreign minister Araújo to claim that the newborn Brazilian government should represent Christian values from the people—his argument goes—that elected Bolsonaro for this very purpose (Belém Lopes 2019). Bolsonaro also faced little constraint at the international level to implement this morally driven policy. More than some not-so-democratic Islamic states that have been defending conservative values, the Brazilian president found friends in Hungary, Poland, Czechia, and the United States. Together, they have articulated the “Alliance for the Families,” which consisted of a grouping to defend Christian fundamentalist values and to move against women's and LGBT rights (Chade 2019). Conversely, it also moved Brazil closer to Arab monarchies. For a country that had traditionally adopted a liberal attitude toward gender issues, this was a shift of considerable magnitude.

Bolsonaro approached Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu too. Before 2019, Brazil maintained cordial but distant relations with the Middle Eastern nation, whereas historically favoring the creation of a Palestinian state. It was only in 2010 that Lula became the first president to visit Israel since the Brazilian redemocratization. Bolsonaro, however, has been using the Jewish state to tokenize his attachment to conservative and religious values even before being elected. In 2016, he headed for the Jordan river to be baptized in its waters by an evangelical pastor. During his electoral campaign in 2018, Bolsonaro promised to move the embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a gesture that would approximate him to Netanyahu. After taking office, in 2019, he visited Israel again, and literally declared that he “loved” the country (Deutsche Welle 2019).

In addition to that, the Brazilian president partnered with the former US leader Donald Trump, giving birth to blind alignment in foreign affairs. More than developing personal ties with his homologue, Bolsonaro emulated Trump's be-

havior on several issues, such as criticizing the global liberal order, implementing a morally conservative agenda, and adopting a belligerent rhetoric with regard to Venezuela.²⁵ Bolsonaro also relinquished the status of “developing country” enjoyed by Brazil at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as a means to attain America's backing to eventually join the OECD as a member.

This combination of conservatism, moralism, alignment to Trump, and massive Christian propaganda led to a foreign policy discursive shift in Brazil. Brazil started to vote against traditional pro-human rights positions at the Geneva-based United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), and refused to join other liberally minded human rights initiatives (UOL 2021). At the same time, another component of its religious foreign policy just emerged: the country systematically supported Israel in resolutions related to the Palestinian conflict, shifting its historical position of supporting a Palestinian state. More than being perceived through qualitative examples, these changes become clearer if one looks at quantitative data for voting patterns at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the UNHRC.

Figure 5 shows a voting gap between Brazil and the United States in resolutions debated at the UNGA since the 1980s. It also shows that foreign policy realignments would gradually happen in past times. However, after Bolsonaro took office in Brazil (see the dashed gray line), there was a sudden shift in this voting agreement ratio.

A better understanding of this figure happens if we recall presidential dyads from both countries: while Michel Temer, a center-right president, was still in office in 2018, 2019 was Bolsonaro's first year in the presidency. In both cases, conservative Republican Donald Trump was America's president. This policy reversal could also be detected at the UNHRC, in a way that Brazil started abstaining from, or voting against resolutions it used to be favorable to, such as those related to the role of human rights in Palestine and Venezuela, economic development, and the world order. It is correct to say, therefore, that a sharp change took place on some agenda topics, as it is true to note that Bolsonaro found low resistance in domestic and international arenas, contributing to the ultimate implementation of his unconventional foreign policies. In the few cases where some resistance emerged, though, the Brazilian incumbent gave a step back.²⁶

More Continuity than Change

Bolsonaro also promised big changes in other areas, such as adopting an anti-globalist and anti-communist agenda, implementing liberally oriented economic policies, and transforming regional integration into a more trade-oriented project. The outcome, however, is much less than a policy reversal. Bolsonaro's foreign policy delivered, at the most, incremental change to previously well-established practices in these fields.

In one of the most ambitious points of his agenda, during the electoral campaign in 2018, Bolsonaro promised

²⁵ It took Jair Bolsonaro 38 days to greet President Joseph Biden after his counterpart got elected in the United States, as the Brazilian chief of state decided to take sides with Trump's attitude of not to concede his loss. As Bolsonaro was also beaten by Lula da Silva in Brazil's 2022 presidential election, he would still refuse to admit his electoral defeat 3 weeks past election day. The same tactics have been employed all the way.

²⁶ One notorious example: for fearing the risk that Arab states could stop importing Brazilian products, Bolsonaro decided not to change the embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

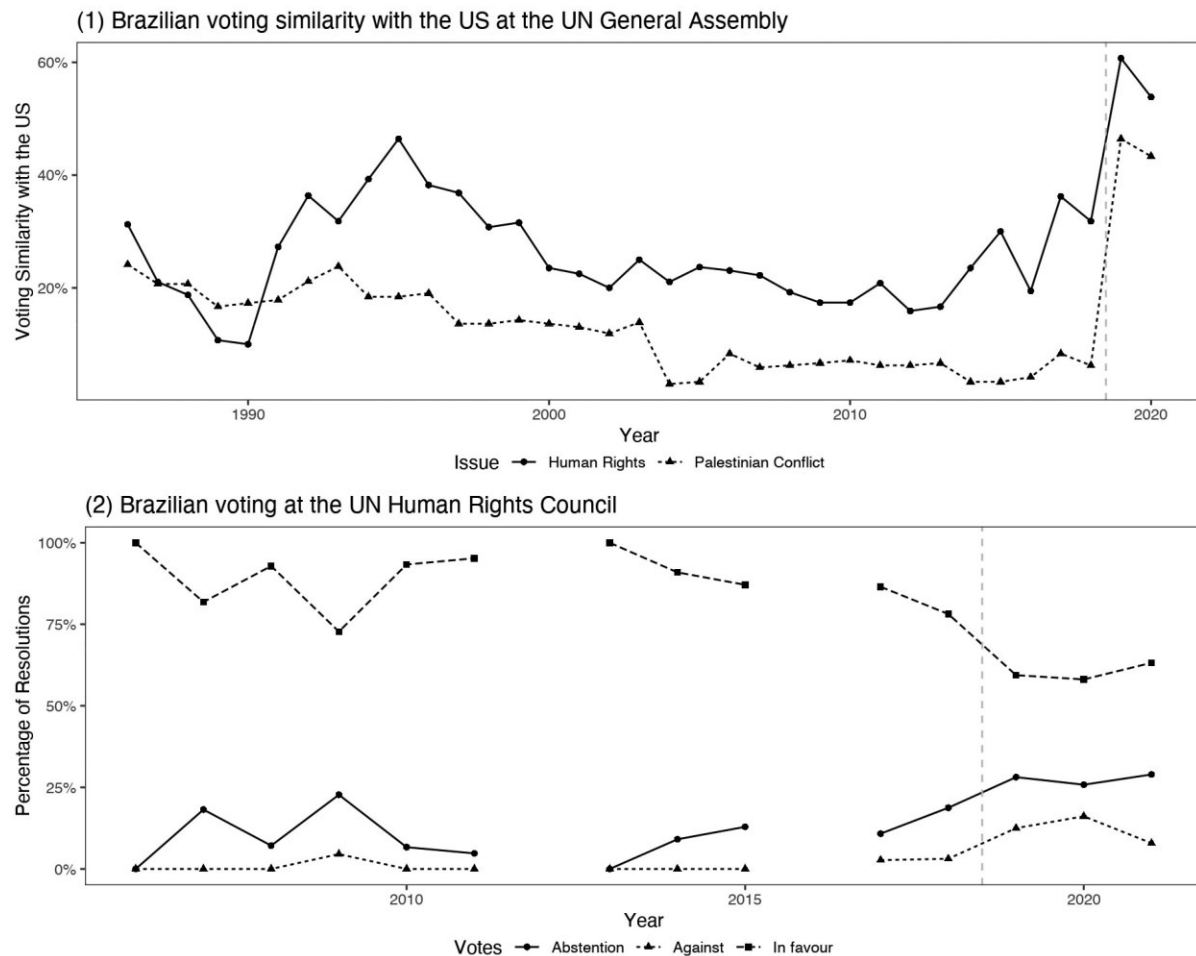


Figure 5. Brazilian voting behavior at the UNGA and the UNHRC.

Source: The authors (based on Voeten et al. 2009).

that Brazil would leave the United Nations. According to him, the international organization was “a reunion of communists, of people who have no commitment with South America” (G1 2018). When he came to power, however, it was different. Brazil kept its membership, as it was elected for the UNHRC in 2019 and for the UN Security Council in 2021. Under Bolsonaro’s rule, Brazil did not technically leave any international organization; it just formalized its withdrawal from the Union of South American Nations (Unasur)—a process launched by president Temer, who suspended Brazil’s membership in 2018.

Even when we look at other regional organizations, such as the Southern Common Market, which Bolsonaro used to see as an instrument at the service of the PT to keep Brazil imprisoned to its own region, nearly nothing happened to modify old practices. Brazil’s accession to Prosur—the regional body meant to replace Unasur and promote liberal habits in the continent—did not bear fruit (Financial Times 2019).

One proxy indicator for this anchorage in the same old patterns is the maintenance of Brazil’s diplomatic postings at global and regional organizations (see figure 6). Although we do not see an emphasis on regional bodies in this current administration, there was by and large a continuity in practices started during Temer’s term. On top of that, the Brazilian incumbent tirelessly announces his intention to become a member of another international organization: the OECD. The interest in adhering to OECD dates back to

Rousseff’s time in office, but intensified during the Temer presidency, and seems to be advancing during Bolsonaro’s mandate.

Therefore, it is hard to identify any major rupture at the multilateral level. As a consequence, it follows that Bolsonaro’s anti-globalist rhetoric did not convert into effective action. Rather, the shift in Brazil’s multilateral foreign policy was prompted by the country’s increasing isolation due to Bolsonaro’s poor diplomatic performance.

Another key claim of Bolsonaro’s foreign policy was to supposedly move the country away from socialist governments. His most immediate targets were Cuba and Venezuela, countries with which Brazil maintained close political and economic ties in the past. While Brazil started distancing itself from these countries during Temer’s administration, it still kept protocolar relations with their representatives. In 2018, though, after president-elect Bolsonaro’s fierce criticism and threats to Cuba, Havana decided to send back home more than eight thousand Cuban medical doctors who worked in Brazil. While keeping tepid relations with Cuba, Bolsonaro adopted a warlike tone toward Venezuela. He joined the United States and other Latin American states in the so-called Lima Group in public criticizing Nicolás Maduro’s government, and broke diplomatic relations with Caracas, indicating that Brazil would recognize Mr. Juan Guaidó as Venezuela’s chief of state. Despite the fiery rhetoric, this never really led to concrete actions aiming at the removal of Maduro from the

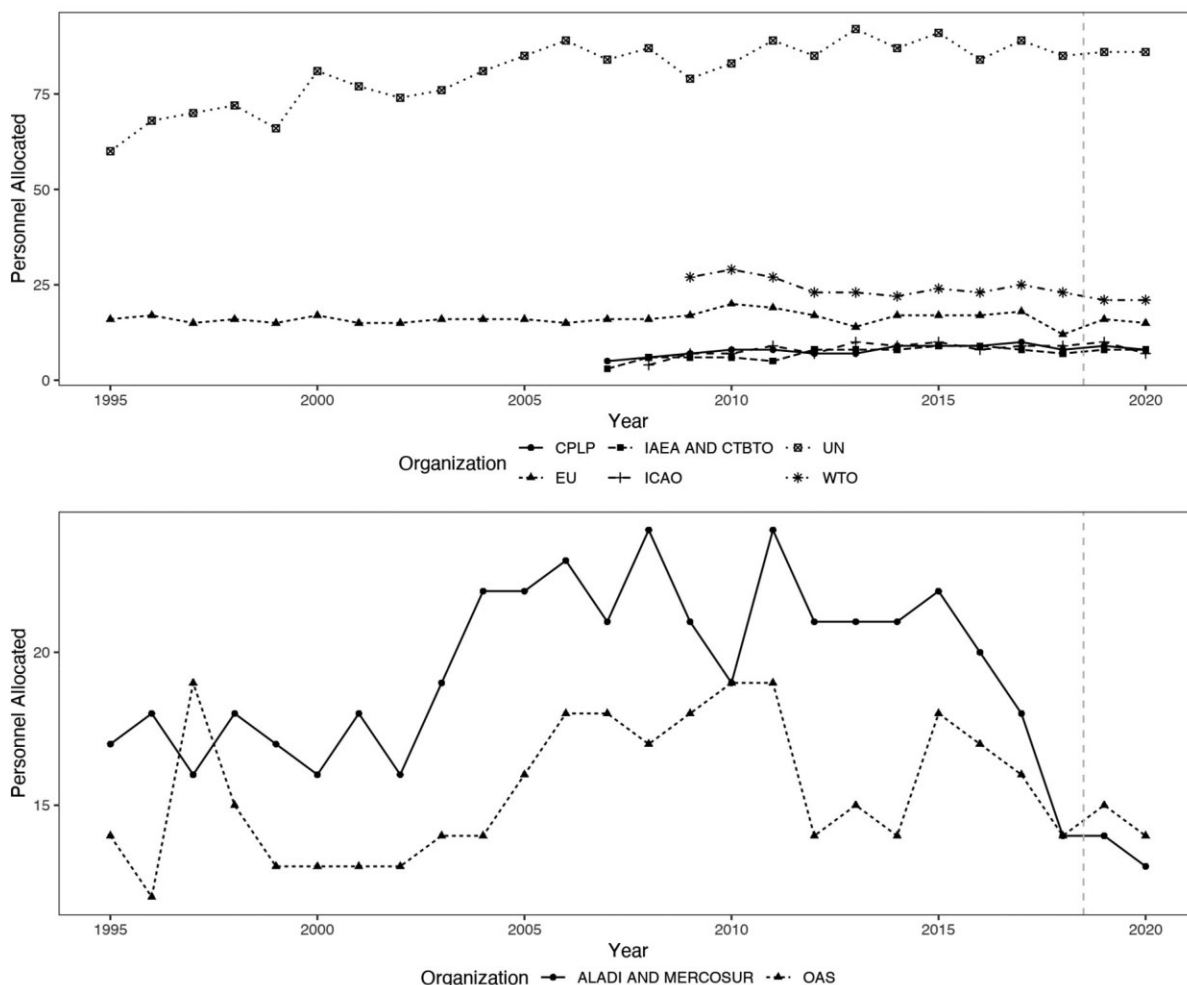


Figure 6. Diplomatic postings at global and regional bodies.
Source: Elaborated by the authors, based on official data from the Brazilian Foreign Ministry.

Miraflores Palace, such as the imposition of economic sanctions and/or embargoes.

Bolsonaro's fight against communism reached the Brazilian top economic partner: the People's Republic of China (PRC). In 2018, together with an anti-Chinese rhetoric, Brazil's then presidential candidate visited Taiwan, in a gesture that was taken as offensive by Beijing, which manifested its discontentment through diplomatic channels. After Bolsonaro's coming to office in 2019, his cabinet ministers never hesitated to criticize the PRC, and Brazilian politicians have appeased more than once, in order to keep trade relations between the two countries on track. As a result, although Chinese–Brazilian relations might taste sourer today than they were a few years back, there was no movement from Brasília to sever ties with Beijing. On the contrary, China remained Brazil's largest trading partner, as it further expanded its economic presence in Latin America amid the pandemic.²⁷

As for the environment, Bolsonaro championed alarmist anti-globalist rhetoric in his first days in office, but failed again in breaking up with the rest of the world, as he kept complying with international environmental norms. Even

if Brazil's environment minister Ricardo Salles was internationally perceived to be an anti-environment villain, the country's official positions in international forums did not defy any established consensus. The country kept voting for all resolutions concerning sustainable development and the need to conserve natural resources. Although Bolsonaro promised big moves on this agenda, such as an aggressive commercial exploration of the Amazon rainforest, Brazil could not even afford a withdrawal from the UN Paris Agreement. It is indeed true that changes have happened in the domestic front. However, on the international stage, Brazil is still part of the global environmental regime, and even promised, during the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26), to reduce emissions and deforestation.²⁸

Final Remarks

In many different aspects, Jair Bolsonaro's presidency was one of a kind. His far-right populist discourse provided shelter to a sizeable portion of the Brazilian electorate who was unhappy with traditional politicians before him, and could

²⁷ See "China: os 3 pilares da expansão do país na América Latina em 2 anos de pandemia de covid-19," *BBC News Mundo*, available at <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-59946976>, accessed November 22, 2022.

²⁸ One critical driver to restrain Bolsonaro's anti-environmental attitude might have been the threat voiced out by a number of European leaders to vote against European Union–Mercosur trade agreement if Brazil pulled out of the UN Paris Agreement.

finally find in a retired army captain their true representative. *Bolsonarismo*, although not a majoritarian societal phenomenon, seems robust enough to outlive its leader and, like Trumpism, remain as a strand of political orientation. Brazilians will certainly have to deal with the legacies of this experiment for years to come. When foreign policy is concerned, though, our assessment is considerably distinct. If there is one thing that makes Bolsonaro an exotic animal, it is not the *actual* foreign policy that he carried out. Even when he announced an intention to pass policymaking reforms or to implement political contents that would have altered the course of Brazil's foreign affairs, domestic and international obstacles proved to be unsurmountable. As we have tried to show along this article, the president of Brazil just rarely prevailed at domestic venues where foreign policy is formulated. Likewise, Bolsonaro recurrently failed in implementing policies abroad, particularly when he met resistance from influential international agents.

A few hypotheses concerning the odds of a far-right populist foreign policy in a pluralist society like Brazil's are worth recalling. First, even if the chief of state/government enjoys a broad popular mandate, they are not in a position to promote policies that contradict democratic constituencies. Second, pluralist societies presuppose intricate social bargains before any policy reversal can be conceived. Without this underlying previous agreement, there will likely be no policy change. Third, when internal disputes are "won" by the president, then there is a need to confirm the feasibility of such policy at the international stage. Not every political content proposed by a sovereign nation will be considered "suitable" by other states. Fourth, there are occasions when the president will, deliberately or not, leave particular subjects in the hands of the diplomatic corps. This tacit delegation often signals that those issues might not be top priority for a leader—thus, they are not likely to be altered.²⁹

This framework can illuminate a vast array of situations in foreign policymaking, be they in Brazil or elsewhere, but certainly fails to grasp every single variable that matters. Theoretical models are reductionist by definition, and always leave gray zones; it is nothing different with our construct to explain the foreign policy of far-right populist leaders in pluralist societies. One could cite the roles assigned to the ministries of agriculture and finance under Bolsonaro, for instance, as two cases falling within this "heuristic penumbra": Ms. Tereza Cristina and Mr. Paulo Guedes were definitely two of the most influential names in Bolsonaro's ministerial cabinet, and have oftentimes reached out to international players and audiences; still, their relevance in the great scheme of Brazilian foreign policymaking is limited, and hardly comparable to that of the agencies and actors scrutinized in this article. Our framework also falls short of exhaustively mapping transborder movements, increasingly important in today's world, as it relies on a clear-cut conceptual divide between "national" and "international" phenomena.³⁰ Finally, we cannot take stock of every attempt by Bolsonaro to redesign foreign policy institutions. They certainly

²⁹ See Bolsonaro's ambiguity toward the war in Ukraine. At first, he announced in Moscow, a few days before the Russian invasion, that he was in solidarity with Russia. Then, as the war unleashed criticism and polls indicated Putin's loss of appeal, the Brazilian incumbent happened to modulate the country's position and embrace "neutrality" in war, voting for the condemnation of Russia's war of aggression at the UNGA and the UNSC. At the end, the official position upheld by Brazil was in line with the country's traditional diplomatic repertoire. In consistency with our framework, when a topic becomes electorally unrewarding and/or thorny, Bolsonaro leaves it in the hands of diplomats.

³⁰ An argument that correctly accounts for the importance of transborder movements in foreign policymaking was dubbed "the boomerang effect," that is, the dynamic through which transborder activists put pressure over their own

were numerous, and sometimes combined with Bolsonaro's agenda-setting efforts, not always made within strictly formal paths.

Foreign policy has been seen in Brazil, for a good while, as something unimportant for the sake of electoral politics. Old-time politician Ulysses Guimarães, a hero of the country's redemocratization, used to affirm that "the foreign ministry does not give votes." In disagreement, we would go as far as to claim that, if Bolsonaro has any merit at all, it is straightly related to his ability to politicize foreign affairs, exploiting it against a new electoral light. Even before his coming to power, Bolsonaro's far-right populism brought the international to the forefront, as when he visited Taiwan and Israel, or when he uttered like a mantra that Brazil should not become a new Cuba or Venezuela. During 4 years in office, Bolsonaro proudly broke Brazil's diplomatic tradition not to take sides with presidential candidates in foreign elections. Diplomacy for him was always a matter of catering to his constituencies and leveraging his own popularity. In line with this electoral logic applied to foreign affairs, Bolsonaro never attributed political salience to topics that were not fungible in terms of votes, leaving them in the hands of career diplomats. He never seemed to be truly concerned with policy outcomes.

Consistently enough, when it comes to Bolsonaro's actual foreign policy, very little has been achieved during the current presidential term. His whimsical handling of Brazil's international affairs was repeatedly restrained and countered by both the legislative and the judiciary branches, not to mention other opposing parties. Global and regional actors have sometimes set the bar too high for Bolsonaro to think of any disruptive move. More often than not, Brazilian diplomats have voted in the same way that the country has been doing for decades. When foreign policy shifts did happen, they were rather topical than structural, more rhetorical than factual, and did not provoke any important social mobilization. Furthermore, the lion's share of this foreign policy change, if and when it took place, predated Bolsonaro's presidency, or was underway when he came to office.³¹ All in all, nothing could be more distant from empirical reality than the account that Bolsonaro bred a new variety of foreign policy in contemporary Brazil. His contribution to the family of far-right populist policies is a paper tiger—as it was much more vocal than substantial—and might be fully reverted soon, as Brazil's next presidential leader gets ready for inauguration.

Interviews

Interview with Cristovam Buarque, Zoom session, on May 22, 2022.

Interview with Irene Vida Gala, Zoom session, on July 11, 2022.

Interview with Luís Roberto Barroso, Zoom session, on August 10, 2022.

Interview with Rodrigo Maia, Zoom session, on August 15, 2022.

governments, which might eventually try to persuade foreign governments into another course of action.

³¹ An example is Brazil's retraction from Africa. Whereas this process followed its course under Bolsonaro, it would be inaccurate to associate it with the country's incumbent leader from 2019 to 2022. Since the end of Rousseff's presidency, the country has heavily disinvested in technical cooperation and foreign aid to Africa. Temer just gave a step ahead and closed embassies in African countries. The same reasoning applies to Brazil's retreat from being a major contributor to UN peacekeeping operations.

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