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South America at the core of Brazilian foreign policy during Bolsonaro's administration (2019-2022)

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Abstract

The arrival of Jair Bolsonaro to the Brazilian presidency brought many changes to foreign policy. Based on new ideas in a new foreign policymaking format, several patterns of international behavior were questioned and replaced by new guidelines and actions that created friction with international partners. Brazil's behavior towards South America was one of the areas most impacted by this shift. This paper reflects upon Bolsonaro's foreign policy for the region, influenced by these changes and marked by disinterest on policymakers' part, highlighting how ideational factors underpinned behaviors, actors, and actions.

Keywords: Brazilian foreign policy; changes and foreign policy; actor and foreign policymaking; South America.

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Introduction

Breaking with a tradition of continuity, Jair Bolsonaro's foreign policy (2019-ongoing) has introduced new ideas, a new road map of the world, and new partnerships, putting at stake the standards that have guided Brazil's international presence for an extended period. Unlike other presidential candidates, Bolsonaro's foreign policy occupied a relevant place in his electoral campaign, in many cases seeking to meet the demands of specific political or social groups¹ – many of them not belonging to the country's traditional elites - and minimizing the decision-making centrality of Itamaraty.

The formulation and implementation of foreign policy reflected the increasing foreign policymaking fragmentation, alongside eventual divergences of interests between actors with

¹ Examples of such groups are evangelicals, gun collectors, militaries.

ideological views and others that defended segmented pragmatic interests. In Bolsonaro's foreign relations, there were changes in the definition of allies and adversaries, impacting bilateral and multilateral relations. Within a foreign policy framework, Brazil's behavior towards South America was one of the areas that most strongly suffered the impact of this change. This fact is not surprising "since there exists within the country and its neighbors, a greater variety of interests, mismatched perceptions, segments with specific connections, political identities/divergences, and inter-societal contacts" (Saraiva 2020, 22).

The research questions that guided this article were: how did ideas from Jair Bolsonaro's government change Brazilian foreign policy towards South America? Moreover, what were its main traits? While the paper's timeframe was set on Bolsonaro's mandate, its primary focus was on Ernesto Araújo's period as a minister (2019-April/2021) since it was under his direction that foreign policy had undergone substantial changes. Moreover, the piece briefly mentions the replacement of Araújo by Carlos França in the Ministry.

There is still no consolidated literature on this topic. Nevertheless, Barros and Gonçalves's (2021) work is one significant exception. On Brazilian foreign policy in general, one may find relevant works such as papers by Casarões (2020; 2021), Caballero and Crescentino (2020), Casarões and Saraiva (2021), Casarões and Farias (2021), Saraiva and Albuquerque (2022), and Pinheiro and Santos (2022).

The research hypothesis underlying this paper is that Bolsonaro's foreign policy towards South America represented a significant change compared to the pattern set by previous governments. Furthermore, the Bolsonaro government's performance in the region was strongly affected by this change in orientation regarding foreign policy. Finally, ideational factors and foreign policymakers' new profile influenced this change in orientation.

The theoretical question to explain Bolsonaro's foreign policy toward South America interrogates how and why a foreign policy can experience significant changes. Here it is argued that the answer is in the field of ideas (Goldstein and Keohane 2003) and that actors participating in the policymaking process (Rodrigues et al., 2019) guide such policy. This questioning reflects on (i) the interaction between democracy, with the effect of political alternation, and foreign policy in a scenario where different worldviews coexist; (ii) the politicization of foreign policy through differences and debates; and (iii) how to organize foreign policymaking. Changes in the cognitive map and in formulating foreign policy would have affected Brazil's external behavior towards South America. The research methodology question is how to identify changes in Brazil's behavior for the region via an examination of ideas guiding the government's foreign policy, generally and more specifically for South America, and of the involvement of actors that formulated and implemented such policy. Tracing the location of these actions and what resulted from them is also a means to identify what changed.

In order to answer all these questions, this piece will put through an interpretative case study on Bolsonaro's foreign policy towards South America. In Lijphart's (1971) model, this analysis is theoretically-based but with a primary focus on the case study's object. The main level of analysis

is that of the individual and secondarily that of the state (Breuning 2007). As it is an ongoing topic, the choice was to adopt primary sources such as press and official documents with speeches from the president and government officials.

This article aims to demonstrate that Bolsonaro's foreign policy towards South America and its integration and cooperation initiatives experienced a change from the previous policy pattern. It is divided into four sections, in addition to this introduction and final remarks. The first section deals with brief theoretical-conceptual reflections useful for answering the research question. The second section points out the main characteristics of Brazilian foreign policy towards South America in governments preceding Bolsonaro, starting from 2003. The third section is oriented toward change factors, examining the ideas that guided Bolsonaro's foreign policy and the fragmentation of formulation and implementation processes. Finally, the fourth and final section presents traits and actions marking Brazilian regional foreign policy during Bolsonaro's presidency.

Changes and Foreign Policy: theoretical-conceptual issues

How and why did Jair Bolsonaro's foreign policy towards South America and integration or cooperation initiatives such as MERCOSUR and UNASUR experience a change from the previous policy pattern? This section provides a brief conceptual contribution on what changes in foreign policy mean in light of the transformations introduced by Bolsonaro's administration ideas guiding policy and policymaking.

The most frequent way Brazilian literature presents changes in foreign policy is by measuring its intensity based on a typology by Charles Hermann (1990). This typology begins with adjustment, passing through program or strategy changes, changes of objective to, finally, lead to changes in the country's international orientation. Ultimately, that would mean a new foreign policy direction based on new standards. Hermann suggests leader-driven, bureaucratic advocacy, domestic restructuring, and external shock as variables that might drive changes. However, sudden changes in the international orientation of foreign policies are rare due to political costs, leading to Welch's (2005) proposal of a way of anticipating changes in foreign policy posture due to the three most frequent causes: when in less bureaucratized and authoritarian states (not Brazil's case); when the chosen policy repeatedly fails, leading to its reassessment by policymakers; or when the risk of loss is latent, leading the government to perceive change as means of avoiding costs.

To explain decision-making processes, Margareth Hermann (2001) highlights the strong position of the last decision unit since formulation processes can include several actors. The author divides decisions around three ultimate decision units: the predominant leader, the single group, and the coalition of multiple autonomous actors. In practice, "reality shows that these three decision units can coexist, especially in cases of fragmentation of the decision-making process, which can cause erratic decisions and a lack of coherence" (Saraiva and Albuquerque 2022, 31). In pluralist democratic regimes, the narrative of external identity that triumphs over others guides the foreign

policy direction and is usually closer to the society in question (Merke 2008, 44). This identity gives meaning to external actions and is part of a continuum of change or continuity over time.

Constructivist theories also focus on ideational factors, composed of ideas, perceptions, and values of an inter-subjective nature. According to Flockhart (2016, 85), it is essential to emphasize shared knowledge about rules, symbols, and language, “which all shape how we interpret the world and the actions of others.” Other currents highlight the role of the leader in these changes. Abstracting from Axelrod (1976), Saraiva and Albuquerque (2021, 31) state that “individuals and their cognitive maps, especially in cases of predominant leaders, can accelerate or prevent changes in foreign policy”. Gustavsson (1999) points out that they can influence the political agenda and manipulate decision-making to maintain their preferences. More focused on the Brazilian and Latin American cases, Cason and Power (2009) emphasize the centrality of Brazilian presidents when formulating foreign policy directions. Thus, changing the president tends to bring about changes in foreign policy.

In the same vein, Goldstein and Keohane (1993) state that “ideas matter” for foreign policy formulation and implementation. From this perspective, ideas interact with interests and underlie worldviews, principles, and road maps from a particular group or institution linked to the country’s foreign policy. Breuning (2013) presents foreign policy as a result of political bargaining between actors involved in foreign policymaking. Finally, Rodrigues et al. (2019) show how a political party coming to power can adopt an ideological or pragmatic position leading to changes in the country’s external projection.

Depending on the weight of the formulation process and their ability to influence government decisions, other actors in the domestic dimension may play a relevant role. For example, after the not-very-harmonious transition from Dilma Rousseff’s presidency to Michel Temer’s, changes in foreign policy have not lived up to expectations due to the resistance of the diplomatic corps. However, the rise of a president supported by a new government coalition and his willingness to change foreign policy impacted Brazil’s international participation.

Regarding the dichotomy between ideology and pragmatism, one might find answers in Gardini (2011, 17). In his contribution, he sets that ideological foreign policies emphasize a set of ideas and worldviews, focused on doctrines and principles and prioritizing the compatibility of alternatives to these over their practical consequences. On the other hand, pragmatic foreign policies are based upon the usefulness and practicality of their ideas, in which the weight of the consequences of each action outweighs the appreciation for one principle or another. Very often, the two phenomena are complementary.

In the relationship between democracy and foreign policy, in a seminal article, Lima (2000) raised the debate on the binomial of democratization and foreign policy. In her views, as foreign policy issues began to stand out in the public policy agenda and became an object of interest to various segments of civil society, the concentration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on policymaking started to be questioned. The democratic regime brought public actions to the universe of politics, presupposing divergences, preferences, and ideologies.

Presidential changes and South America

Among the factors leading to changes in foreign policy orientations, ideas play a fundamental role in basing foreign policy formulation and the reorganization of policymaking. Since the 1990s, Brazilian diplomacy has revolved around two axes of predominant ideas alternating within the diplomacy framework: the Institutionalists and the Autonomists (Saraiva, 2010). Despite the differences between the groups, the country's international performance showed relative continuity in its objectives and strategies. In both currents, there was a common perception of the preference for the search for multilateral solutions, the relevance of international organizations, the defense of the peaceful settlement of disputes and non-intervention, and the strong appreciation of the efficiency and the tradition of Brazilian diplomacy (Saraiva, 2010)

Institutionalists, on the one hand, advocated for controlled liberalization of the economy and maintained ties to the PSDB political party. They defended Brazil's support for international regimes of the liberal order in force, and they perceived the rules of international politics as a structure that could benefit the country's economic development. The government of Michel Temer (2016-2018), which preceded Bolsonaro, had Institutionalists in the central positions of Itamaraty. The Autonomists, in turn, defended the idea of Brazil siding with other countries of the South to balance the power of the consolidated Western powers, which would serve as a basis for Brazil's international performance on the global stage. This perspective suggested adapting the rules and norms of international institutions in favor of Brazil. Autonomists held high-level positions in the Ministry during Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) administrations.

Brazil's foreign policy toward South America has experienced many changes since the country's democratization. However, to better understand how Bolsonaro managed to alter the Brazilian pattern in foreign policy, it might be helpful to depart analyses from Lula da Silva's foreign policy toward South America as a comparison. The option to do so is because, during Lula's government, Brazil achieved a policy of proximity with the region and assumed a leadership role. From the first term of Dilma Rousseff onwards, this scenario shifted, and a decline began.

Lula's foreign policy prioritized the construction of governance in South America, where Brazil would have a decisive role in the integration and regionalization process. This leadership did not seek the creation of new supranational governance structures but rather aimed at cooperation, regional governance, and regionalization to defend the country's autonomy in foreign actions. Its behavior was one of gradual acceptance of acting as a paymaster, partially assuming the costs of regional cooperation, and introducing a network of cooperation with neighboring countries in the fields of technical assistance and financing of infrastructure works with resources from the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES).

This approach to leadership in South America received political support from different groups during Lula's government. It was firstly defended by public and private actors that advocated developmentalism and saw the development of regional infrastructure as an essential instrument

for Brazilian development. It was also encouraged by the Autonomist group in Itamaraty (who saw the region as a potential power bloc) and a pro-integration epistemic community that included political actors from the Workers' Party (PT) and academics who advocated regional integration. President Lula's politics articulated these views (Saraiva 2016).

In Dilma Rousseff's government, however, despite the announcement of maintaining Lula's foreign policy guidelines, the behavior towards South America did not continue. The country was under the impact of an international economic crisis in addition to domestic economic and political crises, articulated with management problems and new dynamics in foreign policymaking. Itamaraty's Autonomists, defenders of a foreign policy with progressive gains through a constant increase in Brazil's participation in debates on different topics of global politics, were losing ground. Moreover, the relationship between the president and Itamaraty deteriorated during the term.

Brazil lost activism in global politics and the regional sphere, with its movements taking on a reactive character. In the passage to Rousseff's second term, the politicization of foreign policy and the legal proceedings against leaders of large infrastructure companies, which had been an essential foreign policy instrument in South America, were obstacles to Brazilian behavior. Despite the limitations of foreign policy for the region, opposition leaders accused Rousseff's foreign policy of being "ideological" or "partisan", pointing to South America as one of the main areas of misunderstanding on the part of the government. With the crisis, the pillars of positioning for South America were abandoned. The actors in favor of developmentalism in the region focused on internal problems, a political crisis took the PT, and Itamaraty progressively lost its role as an agenda-setter in the decision-making process, especially regarding South America. The crisis increasingly attracted the attention of the government and political actors.

The change of government and the option for a minister from the political sphere impacted Brazilian behavior toward the region. As it was a topic that extensively mobilized the political debate, José Serra reinforced the criticism of Rousseff's policy, thus seeking to satisfy the domestic dimension. Above all, South America was the focus of foreign policy in a political crisis. The minister's replacement brought foreign policy closer to diplomats' expectations, whilst the behavior towards South America persisted. Furthermore, among the regional challenges, the Venezuelan crisis was the one that raised more mobilization.

The results of the change in orientation distanced Brazil from neighboring countries and South American regionalism. Venezuela was initially removed from MERCOSUR and then suspended from the bloc for breaking the democratic order. At the end of 2017, due to comments on domestic politics, the Brazilian ambassador had to leave, and the two countries have been without ambassadors since then. Alongside that, Brazil contributed to the formation of the Lima Group (Barros and Gonçalves 2021). Brazil's problems with Venezuela had an impact on UNASUR. The advance of conservative governments on the continent hampered the functioning of the post-liberal regional organization, and the institution gradually abandoned its activities. In 2018, along with five other countries, Brazil suspended its participation and contribution to the organization. South American

regionalism experienced a disintegration; in practice, the post-liberal regionalism model was discontinued. Brazil drastically reduced investments in the region, which had long-term impacts.

About MERCOSUR, negotiations to sign the trade agreement with the European Union advanced, and the bloc's focus shifted to trade issues. However, the members initiated institutional reforms weakening the bloc's institutional resilience and bureaucracy, which acted as consensus builders (Granja Hernández 2022). Despite the liberal alternative of the two governments, Brazilian relations with Argentina were cordial but not precisely a partnership. The government of Mauricio Macri had a liberal profile, in contrast to the Brazilian government, which, despite having adopted several liberalizing measures, did not have liberalism as a purpose. On the contrary, "he used liberalism only as a means to stay in power" (Saraiva 2018, 254 – author translation).

Between 2003 and 2018, Brazil's foreign policy towards the region went from an active and agenda-setting policy that favored the construction of regional governance to reduced activism and decline. UNASUR, built in the 2000s, was abandoned by Brazil in 2018. Bolsonaro's government has already encountered a scenario of decomposition of regionalism marked by the rise of liberal and conservative governments.

Factors of change: Bolsonaro's ideas and foreign policymaking

In the diplomacy framework, Bolsonaro's foreign policy followed neither the Institutional nor the Autonomist group. In rupture with previous groups, he had ideas such as anti-globalism and conservatism, breaking with the prevalence of pragmatism and the concern with maintaining a cooperative image of Brazil. Casarões and Saraiva (2021) point to anti-globalism, anti-communism, and religious nationalism as the ideological cement for the Bolsonarist foreign policy.

However, this rupture and new ideas did not stem solely from the preferences of one leader but had links with deeper trends of a structural nature (Caballero and Crescentino 2020, 14). The international scenario when Bolsonaro came to power was fragmented, and multilateral institutions faced challenges posed by the rise and actions of the nationalist far-right, highlighting the presidency of Donald Trump in the United States. This far-right has adopted an anti-globalist, nationalist, and sovereigntist profile as its lemma (Sanahuja and López Burián 2020).

With the research focus on the actors involved in foreign policymaking, it is essential to highlight the foreign minister profile. Once elected in 2018, Bolsonaro nominated Ernesto Araújo for the post, a diplomat with no experience running an embassy and close to the third president's son and federal congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro (Senra 2019). Both were followers of philosopher Olavo de Carvalho, a writer with strong ties to the North American extreme right, who died in 2022. Once chosen as a minister, Araújo began to defend nationalism and the Christian faith in opposition to the supposed positions of the international bureaucracy's elite.

Religious nationalism, according to Casarões (2020), is a trait defended by current conservative forces. It means conditioning the individual's complete belonging to a particular society to the

option for a particular religion or belief. In foreign policy, it imprisons its agenda from moral precepts, condemning opposing worldviews and basing itself on a logic of confrontation. The narrative of conservatism was supported by the defense of values such as family and life since her conception, thus serving conservative Christian leaders that supported Bolsonaro's candidacy (Belém Lopes and Carvalho 2020). Ernesto Araújo, in partnership with Eduardo Bolsonaro, sought to shape the Liberal-Conservative Alliance in opposition to leftist movements. Conservatism also echoes the Bolsonarist view of the West, which is set in a traditional West from the past that is no longer predominant today.

Anti-communism also plays a vital role in Bolsonaro's narrative, serving as a resource to keep militancy mobilized and pleasing the interests of specific domestic groups (Casarões e Saraiva 2021).² The crusade against global "cultural Marxism" and leftist governments seeks to connect militancy with conservative, religious, and authoritarian ideologies. In the government's interpretation, anti-communism would serve as a basis for choosing partners and "enemies", such as "the Bolivarianism of the Americas" (Bilenky 2018).

Nevertheless, anti-globalism is the mainstay of the ideas guiding Bolsonaro's administration's foreign policy. Araújo (2017) describes Western civilization as a set of traditional ideas that could disappear, surrounded by the bureaucracy of multilateral institutions that he calls "globalism". This bureaucracy would allegedly correspond to an international elite contrary to national values, which would control the trajectory of globalization. Thus, "globalism" would be an obstacle to the exercise of state sovereignty. Departed from "cultural Marxism", this elite would supposedly seek to destroy the concepts of the nation and the Christian faith (Oliveira 2019). According to the minister's public speeches and blog posts,³ there would be a struggle between faith and the absence of it, and it was up to Brazil to adopt a foreign policy to recover its Western destiny. He defended the need for Brazil to be part of the fight against "globalism" to defend traditional "western values" (Araújo 2019). "Anticlimatism" is also a feature of the narrative. He denounced the belief that some countries and foreign leaders would make threats about climate change to achieve political goals and undermine the sovereignty of states like Brazil (Orte 2019). Climatism would be particularly harmful to Brazil as it has a large part of the Amazon rainforest in its territory.

Therefore, unlike the Institutionalists and the Autonomists currents, Bolsonaro's foreign policy sees the international order as a phenomenon contrary to Brazilian autonomy. As a result, there was a change in Brazil's international participation pattern – or a change in international orientation, in Hermann's (1990) typology – with a reorientation of foreign policy and a break with diplomatic traditions. While the Institutionalists defended participation in the dominant normative frameworks and the Autonomists sought to change aspects of this framework without essentially

² In a speech at the United Nations General Assembly, Jair Bolsonaro stated: "Foro de São Paulo is a criminal organization created in 1990 by Fidel Castro, Lula, and Hugo Chávez to spread and implement socialism in Latin America, still alive, and that had to be fought" (Folha de S. Paulo 2019).

³ *Metapolítica 17: contra o globalismo*. <https://www.metapoliticabrasil.com/>

questioning it, the Bolsonarist cognitive map adopted an aggressive and reactive rhetorical strategy. It contested the essence of multilateralism and the standards that guided Brazil's international presence, proposing new ways of seeing the world. This strategy, however, did not translate into state action capabilities.

Bolsonaro combined the ideas guiding his thinking with changes in the diplomatic corps, identified by him as having little affection for national interests and propagating “globalism” in the domestic political arena (Casarões and Saraiva 2021). His initiatives opened spaces for the performance of non-diplomats in the Ministry and promoted or removed diplomats in an unexpected pattern. Itamaraty's dismantling and the weakening of its bureaucracy were necessary for the government to move forward with changes in foreign policy and its decision-making process, contributing to its fragmentation and the breakdown of the Ministry's state capabilities. His modified rules regarding hierarchy paved the way for a reform of Itamaraty, allowing mid-career diplomats to rise to key positions, leaving more experienced diplomats aside (Casarões and Saraiva 2021). The administration modified secretariats by prioritizing bilateral relations and reduced the centrality of multilateral issues in the organizational chart. The ambassadors of important embassies were also changed, leaving out diplomats that adhered to the traditional values of the corporation. Araújo, until then with few followers, tried to empty the former axes of ideas and reconfigure the Ministry with new professionals through changes in the competition for the Rio Branco Institute and in its curriculum of disciplines (Casarões and Saraiva 2021, 8). These measures eroded the institutional foundations of the Ministry, as “the state capabilities materialized in professional and material resources that Brazil had to carry out its foreign policy was dismantled by the state apparatus itself” (Pinheiro and Santos 2022, 7, author translation).

With the Ministry undergoing deconstruction, foreign policymaking became more subject to competition between bureaucracies, personalities, and autonomous groups with influence over the president (Saraiva and Albuquerque 2021). Itamaraty ceased to exercise its central role of channeling segmented interests in the field of foreign policy, opening spaces for groups supporting the president to seek to influence the diplomatic agenda and instrumentalize international issues in the domestic arena. Internal and external borders became even more porous, with foreign policy being part of a strategy to mobilize Bolsonaro's militancy through anti-globalist discourse and a culture war.

The initial coalition supporting Bolsonaro was different from any previous one. Bolsonaro's tenure reflected a shift in domestic political forces. The government brought together different sectors with different views, many with no previous experience in the Executive, seeking to influence foreign policy agenda. The main groups that initially made up the government's base were:

- (i) evangelicals, who legitimize a foreign policy that defends the traditional family and against “gender ideology”, influencing Brazil's votes in forums such as the United Nations Human Rights Council and the rapprochement with Israel; (ii) squatters,

prospectors and loggers, who have political weight and connections in Congress and hinder Brazil's performance in negotiations on climate issues; (iii) anti-globalists and denialists, responsible for the rapprochement with the Trump administration and other far-right governments, and who express their repudiation of multilateral organizations; (iv) agribusiness that advocates good relations with the Arab countries and China, represented in the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply; (v) and the (self-styled) liberals, represented in the Ministry of Economy and who advocate the negotiation of free trade agreements, especially through MERCOSUR, as well as entry into the OECD (Saraiva and Albuquerque 2021, 38-39).

According to Belém Lopes and Carvalho (2020 – author translation), the “international participation of Brazil is, today, a by-product of the electoral convenience of Jair Bolsonaro”. Therefore, the demands of these actors in the government's support base, and the government's perspective of meeting their demands, conditioned external actions. Furthermore, their articulation was unstable and only concerned the presidential figure and expectations of the new administration.

Thus, the government has relied on contradictions. It defended economic liberalization (although with many drawbacks); it had an undemocratic profile and was in constant conflict with the institutions in force; it used intense violence in oratory, especially on social networks; and it propagated a conservative and revanchist mentality. Foreign policy and policymaking reflected these group divisions (Saraiva and Albuquerque 2021). According to Hagan (1994), this scenario would correspond to a fragmented state, which would be fertile ground for radical changes in foreign policy orientation.

The fragmentation in policymaking contributed to the constant tension between the defense of ideas and their practical results. There were constant conciliation and confrontation between conservative ideas and Bolsonaro's populist narrative in opposition to different groups from the governing base that sought sectoral gains in foreign policy actions. That meant the interaction between an ideological dimension of foreign policy with a pragmatic dimension, according to Gardini's (2011) typology. Given the plurality of actors with bargaining power and the ability to exert influence, the conduct of foreign policy provoked disagreements, reactions, and accommodations at the domestic level. Reactions were shared and of different intensities, which contributed to more extraordinary politicization of foreign policy.

Moreover, in areas where the president can reap electoral benefits, the ideological dimension of foreign policy can prevail (Casarões and Saraiva 2021). The noise and contradictions in the conduct of foreign policy with fragmented policymaking affected the country's international status. The family nucleus, especially the role played by deputy Eduardo Bolsonaro, should also be highlighted. An anti-globalist, he was the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, traveled as a government representative despite not being a formal member, and made comments on social networks on topics of external scope (Casarões 2021). The Legislature, for its part, sought to play a balancing role by way of Rodrigo Maia, the first

president of the Chamber. Above all others, Maia contradicted the bellicose rhetoric of Jair and Eduardo Bolsonaro concerning foreign issues.

With a chancellor from a group with no followers in the Ministry and facing attempts to dismantle its rules and traditions, Itamaraty ceased to occupy a central role in foreign policymaking, such as placing itself as a fundamental actor in Brazil's interaction with the outside. The involvement of different actors with foreign issues was even more segmented with internal divergences or even foreign policy paralysis due to the lack of management of the country's international behavior and the status of diplomacy's state capacities.

However, the Legislature came to play a crucial role in the dismissal of Ernesto Araújo from office. The pandemic has opened channels for the participation of new actors. It exacerbated attempts to engage Congress and state governments to get inputs into the fight against COVID-19. The election of Joe Biden in the US has left Bolsonaro's foreign policy without a guarantor in international negotiations. The pressures were felt.

In April 2021, after much pressure from the Legislature, there was a change of minister. Ernesto Araújo gave way to Carlos França. A career ambassador as well, França brought the diplomatic discourse closer to the Itamaraty's tradition, reducing friction with traditional partners while seeking to recover the centrality of Itamaraty by making Brazil's external behavior more predictable. This attempt to correct directions and "return to normality" emptied the weight of anti-globalism and conservatism in official discourses but failed to bring foreign policy into Itamaraty's previous parameters. Instead, it became ambiguous and unfocused. Moreover, diplomacy sought to separate itself from presidential statements, bringing to the fore a fragmentation of foreign policy discourse and a duality between the Ministry and the presidency of the republic that impacted foreign policy actions.⁴

In any case, anti-globalism, anti-climatism, anti-communism, conservatism, and religious nationalism in the dimension of ideas, and the fragmentation of the decision-making process with the loss of centrality of Itamaraty, led to a foreign policy's reformulation. They were the hallmark of Bolsonaro's foreign policy, marked by the rupture with Brazilian diplomacy's traditional behavior.

Brazil and South America: how ideas from Bolsonaro's government impacted Brazilian behavior towards the region

The rise of new ideas, and the fragmentation of foreign policymaking, directly impacted Brazilian foreign policy at the time. Changes in Brazilian foreign policy actions impacted bilateral, regional, and multilateral dimensions. Brazil's partnerships were modified, guided by a preference for relations with governments (or leaders) rather than states. Decisions for approaching or distancing Brazil

⁴ There were mismatches such as Bolsonaro's neutrality toward the invasion of Ukraine, against the first condemnatory votes cast by Brazil at the United Nations, or Bolsonaro's disinterest and distancing towards South America contrasting with França's words of welcome in his inauguration speech (as indicated in the next section).

from other countries became based on shifts in governments; that is, the Brazilian government began to favor partnerships with countries governed by the extreme right. Bolsonaro identified Hungary, Poland, Israel, and Donald Trump's United States as the main partners in the first two years (Casarões 2020).

Despite the signing of the trade agreement between MERCOSUR and the European Union, relations with European countries deteriorated due to the Brazilian government's incentives to destroy the Amazon. Because of this, translation, ratification, and other legal dynamics of the trade agreement are still lacking in its validity.

What role did South America play in the fragmentation of foreign policymaking and the influence of new groups in foreign policy? Among the groups supporting the president, no actors were interested in the region. Only the denialists, very fond of anti-communism, focused on the attacks on Venezuela and, due to their leaders, a very timid approach to Chile and Colombia. When Bolsonaro took office, he insisted on uninviting presidents Nicolás Maduro and Miguel Díaz-Canel. In 2019, Brazil voted in the United Nations General Assembly for the first time against a Resolution condemning the US embargo on Cuba. Criticism of PT's previous foreign policy, accused of being "ideological", and of the São Paulo Forum, was constant in the speeches of both the president and minister Araújo.⁵

In regional terms, Bolsonaro's government found a new cycle favorable to its ideas, which did not mean greater involvement with regional governance. On the contrary, the Brazilian government despised regional organizations. In April 2019, the Brazilian government denounced the UNASUR treaty, and in January 2021, Brazil withdrew from CELAC, staying out of the Latin American concertation initiative.⁶ According to Araújo (Valete 2020), "CELAC did not have results in defense of democracy or any other area. On the contrary, it gave a stage to non-democratic regimes such as those in Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua" (author translation).

Due to Bolsonaro's sympathy for Iván Duque and Sebastián Piñera's governments and its identification as preferential allies, Brazil initially joined PROSUR (Forum for the Progress and Development of South America), a Chilean-Colombian project to replace UNASUR. However, PROSUR never came to occupy a relevant role in the Brazilian government. With the pandemic, in 2020, President Piñera convened three virtual meetings for debates on possible cooperation, which did not have the presence of Bolsonaro (Barros et al. 2021).

Concerning Venezuela, Brazil continued participating in the Lima Group, and together with it, Brazil recognized Juan Guaidó as interim president of the country in Bolsonaro's second month of mandate. Nevertheless, this stance generated veiled criticism within the government apparatus. If the president and minister Araújo expressed support for stricter ideas against Venezuela, including military actions (Brasil abrirá centro de armazenamento de ajuda para

⁵ The accusation of ideological foreign policy is wrongly used as a foreign policy marked by leftist ideology. The far-right ideology, powerful in Bolsonaro's foreign policy, is not remembered by its detractors.

⁶ Data on the country's foreign actions were sourced from government archives: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/> and <https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/arquivos/>.

Venezuela na fronteira, diz opositor.” 2019), the military in government imposed strict limits, especially Vice-President Hamilton Mourão, who was present at a Lima Group meeting (Torrado 2019). At least, the government rejected any idea of using military forces of any sort, and militaries recognized the existence of a conversation channel between the two countries’ Armed Forces existing since previous governments (Figueiredo 2019). With the formal recognition of Guaidó, diplomatic relations with Caracas were interrupted, and Brazil was left without representation in the country.

In November 2019, Brazil hosted a meeting of the Lima Group shortly before the coup d’état that removed Evo Morales from the presidency of Bolivia. As a result, the Brazilian government recommended new elections ahead of the OAS audit and invited the self-proclaimed President Jeanine Añez to attend the 2020 MERCOSUR Summit in Brazil. Subsequently, Bolsonaro did not attend the inauguration of Luís Arce. He also did not attend the inaugurations of presidents Alberto Fernández, Pedro Castillo, Gabriel Boric, and Gustavo Petro.

A common trait of his populist policy (internal and external), President Bolsonaro broke with the tradition of Brazilian diplomacy to avoid commenting on the internal affairs of other states (Casarões and Farias 2021). Instead, the president addresses the domestic affairs of other nations on social media weekly, without any commitment to his position as president and often with aggressive statements, a recurrence that caused problems with allied governments. For instance, the Brazilian government defended the military dictatorships that took place in the past in Argentina and Chile, provoking negative responses.⁷

Faced with presidential campaigns in other countries, Bolsonaro criticized Alberto Fernández, Pedro Castillo, Gabriel Boric, and Gustavo Petro. On the contrary, within the framework of the extreme right, Bolsonaro has relations with the Chilean opponent José Antonio Kast. He admitted proximity to Bolsonaro in his election campaign (“Nas relações exteriores é preciso ter mais cuidado”, diz Boric após Bolsonaro destacar abstenção na eleição chilena.” 2021). Lacalle Pou, in his electoral campaign, received support from Bolsonaro but quickly refused support (“Candidato de centro-direita à presidência do Uruguai rejeita apoio de Bolsonaro.” 2019). However, Bolsonaro participated in the inauguration of the Uruguayan president, who later visited Brasília. With Iván Duque, the interaction was closer.

Concerning the Amazon Forest, Bolsonaro’s interactions with other presidents were not harmonious. International pressures against the destruction of the forest were intense, and the neighboring countries organized a meeting to debate the preservation of the environment, although with little success. In this same subject, Bolsonaro repeatedly denied the veracity of satellite data (Uribe 2020).

In the economic dimension of trade exchange, Brazilian exports to countries in the region also suffered setbacks. The reprimarization of economies with a proportional increase in commodities exports – which do not have South American countries as relevant markets – influenced this

⁷ See interview in La Nación (“Jair Bolsonaro: la Argentina y Brasil no pueden volver a la corrupción del pasado.” 2019).

index. While 2018's Brazilian exports to South America occupied 15% of the country's total, they reached 12% in 2021, with lower values even in absolute terms.⁸

Finally, it is worth highlighting Brazil's interaction with MERCOSUR and, bilaterally, with its partners. In the bloc's case, despite several comments made by minister Paulo Guedes during the electoral campaign against the bloc's multilateral agreements with external partners and the Common External Tariff (CET), there were no significant changes in comparison with Michel Temer's period. As Brazil is the country that most benefits from CET to export manufactured products in which it does not have a comparative advantage in the international market, attempts by the Brazilian government to modify the bloc's rules faced opposition from economic actors in the field of industry (Figueiredo and Oliveira 2021). According to entrepreneurs, ending CET would take many years of benefits from Brazilian industries. On the other hand, at the beginning of Bolsonaro's term, the government of Mauricio Macri had a liberal profile and sought to establish trade agreements following such a stance. Hence, after his mandate started, minister Paulo Guedes changed his discourse regarding the bloc, postponing a decision around CET dismissal. Furthermore, the Association Agreement with the European Union was signed.

In 2021, the Brazilian government reinforced pressure to lower the CET, aligned with the Uruguayan president. It suggested reducing it by 20%, divided into two steps of 10% during the year. The Argentine government, concerned with the defense of Argentine industries, hampered negotiations, with debates continuing throughout the year. Finally, at the end of 2021, the Argentine government agreed to reduce the CET by 10%, covering 87.5% of the tariff universe (Figueiredo 2021b). Lacalle Pou, considering the reduction limited, insisted that member countries can negotiate free trade agreements with third parties individually and went so far as not to sign the final declaration of the end-2021 bloc summit. In this case, the Brazilian National Confederation of Industry showed its fear and pointed out the damage that the end of the CET would bring to the Brazilian economy. At the same time, França limited itself to saying it was a timely statement (Figueiredo and Oliveira 2021).

About institutional capacities, Bolsonaro followed Temer's initiative on MERCOSUR institutional dismantling, seeking the supposed efficiency of human and financial resources that had budgetary impacts. As a result, the members decided to deepen the restructuring of the bloc's institutions, and Ad Hoc groups were dismantled (Granja Hernández, 2022).

As for Paraguay, the country had problems with Brazil. For ulterior motives and the Brazilian government's pressures, Paraguayan President Abdo Benítez signed an agreement to sell surplus energy from Itaipu to Brazil. The treaty was unfavorable to Paraguay. Upon learning of the Agreement, Paraguayan political actors threatened the president with impeachment. As a result, the Brazilian government canceled the Agreement (Bilenky 2019).

Regarding relations with Argentina, since the 1980s, the two countries have not been as far apart as they currently are. The strategic partnership that favored stability in the region gave

⁸ Source: Ministério da Indústria, Comércio Exterior e Serviços. <http://comexstat.mdic.gov.br/pt/home>.

way to distance and, eventually, offenses on the part of the Brazilian government. In his first year in office, Bolsonaro's relations with Mauricio Macri were ambiguous. Although Mauricio Macri had a liberal preference, that did not mean conservatism in customs or support for military dictatorships. Unlike other presidential inaugurations, which Argentine presidents used to attend, Macri did not attend Bolsonaro's inauguration.

However, the accusations began after the primary in Argentina (PASO), when Alberto Fernández appeared as the preferred candidate. Bolsonaro and his family criticized Fernández, identified him as a leftist, and campaigned for Macri (Sperb and Uribe 2019). He also played a political game with the inauguration of the Argentine president and sent the vice president in his place. Until mid-2022, he never met President Fernández in person. If Bolsonaro's Brazil turned its back on regionalism, Fernández's Argentina sought articulations with Mexico to boost CELAC. After the change of minister in Brazil in 2021, relations became less harmful, giving way to relative basic cordiality, not proximity.

The rise of Carlos França to the Ministry seemed to open a new stage, albeit with subtle inflections. França showed a willingness to restore relations with partners in the region. In his inaugural speech, he said he would initiate "a constructive stage of integration with our neighbors" (França 2021, author translation). The Itamaraty began to work to restore Brazil's relations with the region, improving its language and showing a willingness to negotiate with Venezuela. Interaction with Argentina became more harmonious than in Araújo's period, but Bolsonaro did not attend the July 2022 MERCOSUR summit. In 2021, the Colombian president visited Brazil and, in an interview, highlighted the importance of not isolating Brazil (Figueiredo 2021a). In 2022, Bolsonaro was in Guyana with Irfaan Ali.

However, França found himself limited by President Bolsonaro's preferences (Oliveira 2021). In any case, the problems that emerged, such as the renegotiation of the Itaipu Treaty, the reduction of MERCOSUR tariffs, the relationship with progressive governments in neighboring countries, and physical integration, will be left for the next presidency. Nevertheless, if there are changes in actors and foreign policymaking, there will undoubtedly be an inflection in foreign policy toward the South.

Final remarks

Bolsonaro's foreign policy towards South America can be framed in Hermann's model (1990) as an instance of change of orientation due to the identification of errors in previous behaviors by the new foreign policymakers (Welsh 2005). The decision units were from multiple autonomous authors, in the standards of Hermann (2001). As variables that drive change pointed out by Hermann (1990), leader-driven and domestic restructuring were vital. The role of the leader was fundamental for the change, reinforcing the idea of presidentialization of foreign policy (Cason and Power 2009), the role of the leader (Gustavsson 1999) as well as the bargaining between

different actors that made up the president support base (Breuning 2013). The changes in foreign policy took place in a fragmented state setting, conducive to change (Hagan 1994).

Furthermore, the Bolsonaro government defended a new narrative about the country's external identity. According to Guimarães (2020), Brazil assumed an ambivalent stance regarding its identity with the region, between belonging to the West or Latin America; with Bolsonaro, Brazil would have tried to rebuild its identity with the West and questioned its insertion in the region.

Furthermore, South America is no longer a priority area in Brazil's foreign policy, just as the country has stopped seeking to exercise any leadership in the region. Introducing new actors in policymaking was fundamental for these changes in Brazilian behavior towards its neighbors; in its supporting coalition, no actors were interested in the region. The new dynamics of policymaking fragmentation reduced the possibility of traditional diplomacy, of a more technical nature, to assert its vision.

In the field of ideas (Goldstein and Keohane 1993), anti-globalism, anti-climatism, anti-communism, and sovereigntist nationalism have closed avenues for regional interaction. The extreme right oriented its interests toward partners that follow the same doctrine.⁹ Furthermore, the election of presidents from the left has isolated the country even more. Bolsonaro prefers relations with leaders, not states, and avoids contact with leaders with a progressive profile.

The changes in Brazilian foreign policy during Bolsonaro's administration were strongly present in its relations with South American countries. Changes in domestic policy must lead to changes in foreign policy, and, as with other transitions, South America is the first to feel it.

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⁹ This article suggests a reflection on the difficulties of coexistence between extreme right and regionalism, which remains an indication for future research.

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