

## Foreign policy and transnational partisanship in Brazil

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**Abstract:** There has been a noticeable increase in the intensity with which parties and politicians align with ideological allies across borders. In Brazil, the transnational organization of political movements challenges long-standing assumptions about the relationship between foreign policy and domestic politics. Traditionally, Brazilian foreign policy has been considered the domain of government officials, formulated within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidential Palace. However, what we are witnessing today is different: political movements and parties on both the left and the right are crossing national boundaries. This article analyzes the Brazilian case to understand how transnational politico-ideological strategies function. Our hypothesis is that, while out of power, both the Workers' Party (PT) and Bolsonarismo established transnational connections for two main reasons: (1) to continue the agendas pursued by their respective governments and (2) to consolidate both support and narratives that could facilitate their return to the presidency. To examine this, we apply J.S. Mill's methods of agreement and difference to assess the development and evolution of the transnational alliances built by the PT between 2003-2016 (as the incumbent) and 2016-2022 (in opposition), and by Bolsonarismo between 2018-2022 (as the incumbent) and 2023-2024 (in opposition). Our empirical findings highlight that transnationalism has been a crucial factor in these movements' political success during the periods under investigation.

**Keywords:** foreign policy; political parties; transnationalism; Brazil.

### ESP Política exterior y partidismo transnacional en Brasil

**Resumen:** Ha habido un aumento notable en la intensidad con la que los partidos y políticos se alinean con aliados ideológicos más allá de las fronteras nacionales. En Brasil, la organización transnacional de los movimientos políticos desafía suposiciones de larga data sobre la relación entre la política exterior y la política interna. Tradicionalmente, la política exterior brasileña ha sido considerada un dominio exclusivo de los funcionarios gubernamentales, formulada dentro del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y el Palacio Presidencial. Sin embargo, lo que estamos presenciando hoy es diferente: los movimientos políticos y los partidos, tanto de izquierda como de derecha, están cruzando las fronteras nacionales. Este artículo analiza el caso brasileño para comprender cómo funcionan las estrategias político-ideológicas transnacionales. Nuestra hipótesis es que, mientras estuvieron fuera del poder, tanto el Partido de los Trabajadores (PT) como el bolsonarismo establecieron conexiones transnacionales por dos razones principales: (1) para continuar con las agendas impulsadas por sus respectivos gobiernos y (2) para consolidar tanto el apoyo como las narrativas que podrían facilitar su retorno a la presidencia. Para examinar este fenómeno, aplicamos los métodos de acuerdo y diferencia de J. S. Mill para evaluar el desarrollo y la evolución de las alianzas transnacionales construidas por el PT entre 2003-2016 (como gobierno) y 2016-2022 (en la oposición), y por el bolsonarismo entre 2018-2022 (como gobierno) y 2023-2024 (en la oposición). Nuestros hallazgos destacan que el transnacionalismo ha sido un factor crucial en el éxito político de estos movimientos durante los períodos analizados.

**Palabras clave:** política exterior; partidos; transnacionalismo; Brasil.

**Summary:** 1. Introduction. 2. Public opinion, electoral politics, and foreign policy. 3. Foreign policy, partisanship, and elections in Brazil. 4. Foreign policy and political opposition in Brazil. 5. Conclusion. 6. Bibliography.

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## 1. Introduction

When Donald Trump was declared elected in the early hours of November 6, 2024, many Brazilians had reasons to celebrate. Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro's son, Eduardo, was invited to Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence to follow the US election results. Wearing the unmistakable MAGA hat that became a symbol of Trump's campaign, Eduardo posted on his social media that "a lot of good things would happen to Brazil". He believed that Trump's return to the White House would pave the way for Bolsonaro's election in 2026. More than just an emulation of the US political trajectory, the *Bolsonarista* movement believes that their close ties to Trump and other far-right leaders worldwide will help Brazil's former president to overturn his ineligibility status so that he can rise to power once again. International alliances are no longer a matter of governments, but of political groups that want to make their causes genuinely global, appealing, and legitimate.

There is a visible increase in the intensity with which parties and politicians have aligned with ideological allies across borders. Although transnational political party movements have always existed,<sup>1</sup> they have gained momentum at a time in history when narratives about the current crisis of democracy are organized globally. On the left, identity groups show solidarity with each other, based on common causes and demands. On the right, far-right agendas and strategies gain followers as they circulate in multiple languages on social media.

In Brazil's case, the transnational organization of political movements challenges well-established truths about the nexus between foreign policy and domestic politics. Brazilian foreign policy has traditionally been considered a matter of statespersons, being formulated in the halls of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidential palace. Public opinion mattered little to foreign affairs and, even when it did, the narratives were largely controlled by the administration. Over the last couple of decades, we have observed an increasing politicization of international issues as part of a battle between government and opposition. Yet the political disputes over foreign policy took place in the institutional realm of Congress and sub-national entities, being occasionally captured –and weaponized– by the media as part of the public conversation.

What we witness today in Brazil is something different: political movements and parties, left and right, are crossing national boundaries in order to form global networks. In this article, we analyze the Brazilian case to understand how transnational politico-ideological strategies function. We hypothesize that, during their time out of power, both the Workers' Party (PT) and *Bolsonarismo* mobilized transnational ties for two primary purposes: (1) to sustain the policies and initiatives implemented by their respective administrations and (2) to strengthen their base of support and shape narratives that could facilitate their eventual return to the presidency. This article combines J. S. Mill's methods of agreement and difference to assess how these alliances evolved in distinct phases: the PT's tenure from 2003 to 2016 and its opposition period from 2016 to 2022, as well as *Bolsonarismo*'s rule from 2018 to 2022 and its opposition status from 2023 to 2024. Regarding the empirical strategy, both official documentary sources and mainstream journalistic accounts are extensively utilized to provide factual elements that construct the narrative arc. Our work underscores that transnationalism has played a significant role in the trajectories of such movements throughout the examined periods.

## 2. Public opinion, electoral politics, and foreign policy

Our first task is to understand why some Brazilian parties have shown a growing interest, and spent considerable time and energy, in international issues. This is counterintuitive, as the specialized literature suggests there is a low correlation between foreign policy performance, public opinion, and electoral choices. One of the earliest attempts at theorizing this relationship was made by Almond (1956), who claimed that foreign policy was distant from the lives of ordinary citizens, which explained the low levels of participation and democratic control in international affairs. Dahl and Tufte (1973) corroborate with this view, arguing that, in complex and diverse societies, it has become practically unfeasible for individuals to participate in deliberating political matters, as this would require an enormous investment of time for each citizen to familiarize themselves with the vast and sophisticated governmental institutions and issues at stake. Fiorina (1981) added an empirical layer to this line of argument by looking at the post-war electoral cycles in the United States. He concluded that it was difficult for voters to perceive continuity between a government's foreign policy decisions and their practical outcomes, even in times of major global events with direct US involvement –from the Korean War to the Vietnam War, from the Cuban Missile Crisis to the oil shocks of the 1970s.

The disconnect between foreign policy, elections, and public opinion was even more salient in Brazil's case. Scholars have long noted a considerable detachment of the Brazilian public from international affairs thanks to the role played by the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (also referred to as Itamaraty) in keeping

<sup>1</sup> Transnational partisanship refers to the phenomenon where political actors (such as parties, politicians, or citizens) develop and express ideological alignments, affiliations, or solidarities that transcend national borders. This concept involves the formation of partisan bonds or political cooperation between actors from different countries, often based on shared ideological positions, policy goals, or opposition to common adversaries. Please cf. Chrysogelos (2015).

foreign policy in the hands of a small, select, and elitist diplomatic bureaucracy—and away from public scrutiny (Cheibub, 1985; Cason and Power, 2009; Faria *et al.*, 2013). As a result, parties would naturally refrain from even addressing foreign policy issues in the Congressional arena. In the mid-1980s, a prominent Brazilian congressman, Ulysses Guimarães, mockingly remarked that “Itamaraty only gets votes in Burundi” (quoted in Belém-Lopes and Faria, 2014: 139). Similar perspectives have been reinforced by other congresspeople over time. In a 2009 op-ed, house representative Fernando Gabeira wrote that “foreign policy in Brazil neither gains or loses a single vote” (quoted in Belém-Lopes and Faria, 2014: 140). In 2023, in an interview to the authors, senator Cristovam Buarque claimed that “The Brazilian Senate remains quite parochial in international relations. Just a few rare congressmen in Brazil speak other languages apart from Portuguese. It’s a pity” (Buarque, 2023).

Recent studies have added nuance to the notion that foreign policy and public interest are worlds apart by factoring in new elements of political participation in democratic societies. Dahl (2001) proposes an enhanced version of Almond’s (1956) hypothesis: while he notes that foreign policy generally elicits less public engagement than other public policies in democratic states, he acknowledges that ordinary citizens may occasionally play an active role in producing foreign policy. Along similar lines, Sobel’s (2001: 234) observes that “the major effects of public opinion are typically in the form of constraints [on the decision-maker], rather than in the form of policy proposals”. Finally, Jacobs and Page (2005: 117) indicate that there is evidence in the literature suggesting that foreign policy in a democratic state tends to shift in the direction desired by public opinion (as measured in polls). However, through primary data analysis, the same authors underline that empirical evidence is actually ambivalent and inconclusive regarding this supposed relationship. The question remains as to what circumstances could spur public interest, leading them to participate, albeit irregularly, in shaping foreign policy decisions.

Building on this new set of studies to look at the Brazilian case, Diniz and Ribeiro (2008) investigated why legislators choose to not engage with foreign policy issues. They go beyond the anecdotal evidence and address the internal dynamics of congressional work. Their findings suggest that, although foreign policy is not a priority in Congress, particularly thanks to the massive amount of presidential decrees and ordinary bills that swamp the legislative agenda, there is nothing in Brazil’s institutional design that prevents lawmakers from dealing with foreign policy. Therefore, Congress will engage with international issues whenever there might be societal resonance. This trend became more evident as foreign policy in Brazil grew in political relevance—either because they mobilized relevant economic and societal actors or because they became an indissociable part of presidential agendas (Cason and Power, 2009).

Some events related to Brazil’s international relations have intensely stirred national public opinion and were subsequently incorporated into certain congressmen’s agendas: the dispute between Brazilian company Embraer and Canadian company Bombardier, taken to the World Trade Organization in 1999; the deployment of Brazilian troops to Haiti in 2004, and subsequent renewals of the mandate for the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), led by Brazil; Venezuela’s accession as a full member of Mercosur, announced in 2005 and formalized in 2012; the military occupation of Petrobras’ headquarters in Bolivia in 2006; the shelter provided to the deposed president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, at the Brazilian embassy in Tegucigalpa in 2009; Bolivian senator Roger Molina’s escape to Brazil in 2013; Bolsonaro’s handling of the Covid pandemic between 2020 and 2022; the quarreling between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva with regard to the conflict in Gaza in 2024, among others.

Therefore, it is reasonable to admit the following correlation: the prominence of a specific Brazilian foreign policy issue will determine the mobilization of the public and, by extension, the engagement of their institutional representatives. However, predicting in advance which type of issue might arouse public interest remains a major challenge. Nor is it easy to explain the complex equation that results in societal judgment that a specific issue in Brazilian foreign policy is (or is not) politically relevant. To fill this gap, in the next section we will look at how presidents and administrations addressed foreign policy in contemporary Brazil—and how they have shaped the patterns of government support and opposition along foreign policy lines.

### 3. Foreign policy, partisanship, and elections in Brazil

#### 3.1. The early ‘Nova República’ days (1980s-2002)

Brazil’s return to democracy in 1985, which inaugurated a period often referred to as Nova República (or the “new republic”), did not change the fundamental patterns of foreign policymaking inherited from the military regime. Under the civilian rule of José Sarney, the country’s international agenda remained in the hands of the Executive branch, particularly Itamaraty’s (Cervo and Bueno, 2002). Concern with the outside world only became evident and started to feature, albeit in a secondary way, in the 1989 elections—the first direct presidential race in almost 30 years. As the Cold War was ending, many of the candidates decided to campaign across borders to showcase their global connections. That was the case of left-wing Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and right-wing Fernando Collor de Mello, who spent several days abroad in the middle of the campaign. Their itineraries reflected ideological choices: while Lula da Silva met with Socialist politicians in Italy and France, as well as labor union leaders in the US, Collor visited British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Spanish President Felipe González to show them his ambitious economic and environmental plans. Thanks to the large Catholic electorate in Brazil, both Collor and Lula (as well as three other candidates) made a mandatory stop at the Vatican, later releasing photos with Pope John Paul II (Casarões, 2022).

In other words, some degree of external support seemed to be an electoral asset valued unanimously by candidates in the first competitive presidential race after a decades-long military regime that had focused so much on building an isolationist nationalism (Fonseca Jr., 1998). In 1989, two major foreign policy issues with an international nature were on the table: Brazil's monumental foreign debt and the destruction of the Amazon's biodiversity –seen by a myriad of social actors as a fatal blow to global environmental heritage. In hindsight, Casarões (2022) contends that then-presidential candidate Collor de Mello clearly benefited from this movement toward externalizing the political agenda, linking the notion of “national autonomy” to a “modernization” rhetoric, in tune with the latest trends and practices of developed countries.

After Collor de Mello's constitutional ousting in 1992, followed by the brief and diplomatically introverted presidency of Itamar Franco (1992-1994), new elections were held in 1994, amid monetary stabilization and discussions about the broad structural reforms of the Brazilian state. The winner in the first round was Fernando Henrique Cardoso from the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), an academic and politician with extensive international experience –and who had just held the positions of Foreign Minister and Minister of Finance in the Franco administration. As macroeconomic issues dominated the presidential debate, it could be argued that foreign policy was sidelined. Cardoso, who would also be re-elected in the first round in 1998, was able to nurture over the years the persona of a well-connected and esteemed diplomat within high circles of power. Whether accurate or not, this image was undoubtedly instrumental in his victories over his challenger Lula da Silva from the PT –whose ability to represent Brazil in international forums still raised doubts among the more conservative segments of the electorate (Belém-Lopes and Faria, 2014).

### 3.2. The PT's presidential terms (2003-2016)

Based on Lula da Silva's alleged difficulty in embodying the figure of head of state, José Serra, the PSDB's presidential candidate in 2002, sought to undermine his opponent by branding him as a simpleton, thus unfit for presidential diplomacy. The *Grande Aliança* (Great Alliance) coalition's advertisement pieces (led by PSDB and PMDB, the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party) presented Serra as a public manager recognized by the international community, highlighting his achievements as Health Minister in the previous administration and showcasing President Cardoso's “prestige diplomacy.” The entrenched fear that Lula, once president, would break with the International Monetary Fund and default on Brazil's foreign debt gradually dissipated as debates were aired on television networks. The so-called “Letter to the Brazilian People” would become the culmination of the PT's damage-control strategy to seek conciliation with the financial market and national businesses, which would soon gain significant influence in his government. Interestingly, one of the opposition's primary targets was the incumbent administration's presidential diplomacy. In 2002, Lula claimed that, if elected, he would dedicate most of his time to traveling within Brazil, criticizing Cardoso's alleged obsession with international trips. Apparently, this was merely campaign rhetoric, as time would reveal (Belém-Lopes and Faria, 2014).

Running for re-election in 2006, Lula da Silva faced his main challenger, Geraldo Alckmin, from the PSDB. By then accustomed to the office's ceremonial nature and the routine of presidential diplomacy, Lula did not shy away from addressing foreign policy throughout his campaign. In what may have been an unprecedented move in the history of television campaign broadcasts, the *Com a Força do Povo* (With the People's Strength) coalition (PT and allied parties) devoted a TV show on September 7, 2006, to discussing Brazil's positioning in the world. On the iconic Independence Day, Lula's strategists deemed it wise to invest in foreign policy, naturally seeking the electoral dividends it could yield. It is also noteworthy that during TV debates, diplomacy topics were raised, particularly concerning Bolivia and the maneuver to nationalize a Petrobras facility in La Paz in May 2006, followed by the renegotiation of Bolivian natural gas prices paid by Brazil. However, none of this altered the electoral outcome. Lula was re-elected in the runoff with a comfortable 20-point lead over his opponent (Belém-Lopes, 2013).

In the 2010 presidential election, challenger José Serra (PSDB) quickly pointed to the close relations between the incumbent administration and the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as well as Brasília's tolerance of human rights violations in Havana and Caracas. Serra's vice-presidential candidate, Congressman Índio da Costa, also raised concerns about South American drug traffickers operating across Brazil's national borders. With Lula da Silva's support, Dilma Rousseff, his former chief of staff and a PT member, won the election. Many analysts believed that foreign policy in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was a source of national pride, and that the opposition erred in emphasizing the issue. Unintentionally, they either drew even more attention to one of Lula's accomplishments (Coimbra, 2010) or wasted campaign resources on issues unlikely to sway voters (Gaspari, 2010). Lula, for his part, tirelessly promoted what he saw as the main achievements of his eight years in office –reducing inequality and poverty in Brazil and the new and unprecedented international prestige gained through an “active and assertive” foreign policy. Thus, it seems plausible to suggest that in the 2010 presidential race, foreign policy was almost omnipresent, even though it was not discussed beyond stereotypes and clichés.

After being elected in 2010, President Dilma Rousseff preserved the main directions of her predecessor's foreign policy, although she discontinued the emphasis on presidential diplomacy. When she was vying for a second term in 2014, foreign policy was no longer seen as an asset and, as we argue, became just another area of public policy. Of the more than eleven hours of televised debates between presidential candidates (8 debates, 4 before the first round and another 4 before the runoff), only 10 minutes (about 1.5% of total



time) were dedicated to Brazil's diplomacy and international relations (Belém-Lopes and Faria, 2014). Yet the presidential challenger from PSDB, Minas Gerais Senator Aécio Neves, dedicated three paragraphs to foreign policy in his presidential platform. He underlined his commitment to a "prosperity diplomacy" focused on trade alliances with the United States, Europe, and Asia, along with a return to the pragmatic tradition of Brazil's Foreign Ministry. At the end of the day, PSDB's 2014 foreign policy platform, whose supporters took pride of being free from ideology and partisanship by reclaiming Itamaraty's centrality, was nothing more than trade policy through diplomatic means (Belém-Lopes and Faria, 2014).

The aftermath of Rousseff's impeachment trial in mid-2016 has shown the persistent power of political parties in shaping foreign policy. As vice-president Michel Temer took office, the diplomatic pendulum swung back to the PSDB. Former São Paulo Senator José Serra, PSDB's presidential candidate in 2002 and 2010, led the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for nine months between 2016 and 2017. Aloysio Nunes Ferreira, former chairman of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, succeeded him from 2017 to 2018 (Belém-Lopes *et al.*, 2022). By the end of Temer's presidential term, in 2018, Brazil basically had two major foreign policy alternatives: one provided by the PT, with a focus on Brazil's emerging power role, South-South cooperation, and Latin American integration, and the other provided by the PSDB, centered on Brazil's economic integration in the global value chains, global trade, and relations with the OECD countries. Both were woven together by Itamaraty's long-standing foreign policy principles and underlying diplomatic strategies.

### 3.3. Bolsonaro's presidential term (2019-2022)

Despite foreign policy's growing relevance in the Brazilian electoral context, the salience of international issues reached to a new level in the 2018 presidential race. Jair Bolsonaro, a retired Army captain and long-time backbencher in Congress, presented himself as a political alternative coming from the far right. He entered the race not only as a staunch opponent of the PT, but also as a vocal critic of the political establishment. During the campaign, Bolsonaro forged his political persona based on international references: he embraced Israel as a model of militarized society and as a beacon of the Judeo-Christian civilization and later emulated Donald Trump in his populist discourse and anti-China positions. Bolsonaro's trips to Israel, the US and Taiwan between 2016 and 2018 were part of a successful strategy of identity-building. Foreign policy was also mobilized as part of the far right's attacks on the PT and the establishment. Bolsonaro played out a scare tactic against the PT by arguing that Brazil could become "a new Venezuela" in case the left won the elections. On top of that, he also dismissed several consensual strategies of Brazilian diplomacy, from the two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the multilateral approach to human rights, global health, or the environment, claiming they belonged to a "globalist" agenda that ran counter to Brazil's national interests (Casarões, 2021).

Another relevant aspect of Bolsonaro's foreign policy strategy during the 2018 elections –and even after taking office– refers to the absence of a strong partisan background. Bolsonaro himself had belonged to eight different parties as congressman before joining the Social-Liberal Party (PSL in the Portuguese acronym) to run for president. Since political parties have increasingly become institutional channels for shaping foreign policy, Bolsonaro's weak party links have led to a two-pronged and rather inefficient international strategy over the years of his administration. One of its elements was the "business as usual" approach to foreign trade, focused on maintaining constructive economic ties with Brazil's traditional export destinations, such as China and the Arab world. It was led by Finance Minister Paulo Guedes and Agriculture Minister Tereza Cristina, with the occasional support of the military. The political side of the strategy, which reflected Bolsonaro's culture war efforts, was conducted by the administration's foreign policy "troika", composed by Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo, an inexperienced career diplomat with ties to Bolsonaro's ideological mentor, Olavo de Carvalho; the President's International Advisor Filipe Martins, who was one of Carvalho's hand-picked appointments; and Eduardo Bolsonaro, the president's third son and a two-time lawmaker. Ministers like Damare Alves (Human Rights) and Ricardo Salles (Environment) were also members of Bolsonaro's ideological inner circle (Casarões, 2021; Belém-Lopes *et al.*, 2022).

Evidence suggests that political parties were not effective instruments for Bolsonaro to advance his foreign policy agenda. Moreover, Bolsonaro's rise to power did not lead to a significant increase in diplomatic personnel joining the Social Liberal Party (PSL), his party at the time of his presidential victory. Between 2018 and 2020, only two Brazilian diplomats out of approximately 2,000 (both active and retired) joined Bolsonaro's political party. However, Bolsonaro's electoral power, which led his party to secure the second largest number of seats in the House (52 out of 513) in 2018, ensured the PSL the right to choose which legislative committees to preside over. As Eduardo Bolsonaro became the Head of the Foreign Relations Committee in 2019, the Bolsonaro administration managed to carry out its culture-war infused agenda through increasing coordination between the Executive and Legislative branches (Belém-Lopes *et al.*, 2022). It has also allowed the *Bolsonarista* movement to develop a second-track foreign policy strategy, as we will explore in the next section.

## 4. Foreign policy and political opposition in Brazil

Drawing on Brazil's recent history, we are led to the conclusion that foreign policy has moved from a top-down consensus, largely produced by Itamaraty and by successive administrations, towards a battleground between government and opposition. This trajectory is consistent with the experiences of other democracies from across the globe, as foreign policy issues become more salient and contentious among the broader public. Yet one aspect of the international-domestic nexus that remains underexplored is how parties

mobilize foreign policy outside of the institutional realm, not necessarily to oppose the incumbent administration, but to shape public narratives according to their own interests. In this section, we will explore the cases of the Workers' Party and *Bolsonarismo* in recent years. As we will show, both political forces have mobilized transnational alliances across borders to defend their agendas at home, building legitimacy from the outside-in. Their main goal was to lay the groundwork for their return to power: the PT succeeded with Lula's win for a third term in 2022, and the *Bolsonarista* movement is moving towards the same end with an eye on the 2026 national elections in Brazil.

#### 4.1. PT under the Temer administration: narratives of contestation (2016-2018)

Since it was established in the late 1970s, one of the most defining features of the Workers' Party has been its capacity to engage in international politics and to mobilize partisan and grassroots networks of legitimacy and political action. For years, the PT openly advocated for the causes of the Palestinian people and of other oppressed peoples around the world, and also engaged in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. In 1990, Lula and the PT spearheaded the establishment of the São Paulo Forum, which gathered left-wing and social democratic parties from Latin America after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Their idea was not just to reorganize the left's agenda but also to coordinate opposition to the rising neoliberal administrations across the continent. The Forum offered the PT a permanent platform for dialogue with other leftist forces (Jakobsen, 2021). As of the early 2000s, as many such parties and leaders won national elections as part of Latin America's "pink tide", relations between countries governed by the left became stronger and more institutionalized. The PT governed Brazil for 13 years, under the Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and Rousseff (2011-2016) administrations. During this time, PT's foreign policy agenda merged with Itamaraty's own traditions, strategies, and priorities (Almeida, 2004).

However, Rousseff's impeachment proceedings, which started in late 2015, pushed PT in a different direction. To prevent Rousseff from being ousted by framing her trial as an attack against Brazilian democracy and the rule of law, the party broke free from institutional constraints and began shaping a partisan narrative across borders. As Congress deliberated over Rousseff's fate, the PT adopted a two-pronged transnational strategy. On the one hand, it mobilized artists, scholars, activists, and social movements from around the world. Open letters and manifestos denouncing the coup underway in Brazil were published in foreign newspapers and adopted at academic conferences in the US and Europe. The Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), an influential Buenos Aires-based think tank, released four books over 2016 with short articles and documents against Brazil's "parliamentary coup" to raise regional awareness to the PT's political troubles (Casarões *et al.*, 2024).

On the other hand, the PT also reached out to some traditional international allies, such as political parties, labor unions, and relevant global bureaucracies and bureaucrats. Several politicians and party leaders in the US and Europe expressed their solidarity with Rousseff by deeming her removal illegal and illegitimate (Jakobsen, 2021). Labor union leaders openly protested not only Rousseff's impeachment, but her successor Michel Temer's policies. The presidents of Bolivia, Venezuela, and Ecuador issued statements denouncing a "mediatic-judicial coup" in Brazil. Moreover, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, OAS Secretary-General Luis Almagro, UNASUR Secretary-General Ernesto Samper, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) voiced concerns over the state of Brazilian democracy (Casarões *et al.*, 2024).

Whereas the PT's transnational mobilization did not prevent Rousseff from being impeached in August 2016, the party at least managed to consolidate a global narrative that Brazilian democracy was at risk —and that the party was the victim of a parliamentary coup in two stages. The first stage was to remove Rousseff from office and the second was to prevent Lula da Silva from running again for president. That perception was reinforced as the legal siege on Lula intensified. In June 2017, he was sentenced to over 9 years in jail as part of the Car Wash graft probe (Casarões *et al.*, 2024). But as the 2018 national elections approached, the party had to amass international support to overturn Lula's conviction. In December 2017, the party launched a global manifesto called "Election without Lula is Fraud", undersigned by former Latin American presidents, international scholars, artists, and activists. When Lula was imprisoned in April 2018, the PT promoted the massive "Free Lula" campaign, which attracted several world leaders and activists, from Pope Francis to former Uruguayan president José Mujica, some of whom would even pay visits to Brazil's former president in prison through that year (Jakobsen, 2021).

It was an uphill battle for the PT, as the perspectives of having Lula as presidential candidate became bleaker after many judicial setbacks. In August 2018, just two months before national elections in Brazil, Lula published an op-ed in the New York Times: "My imprisonment was the latest phase in a slow-motion coup designed to (...) prevent the Workers' Party from again being elected to the presidency. With all the polls showing that I would easily win this October's elections, Brazil's extreme right wing is seeking to knock me out of the race" (Silva, 2018). The PT's plan was to raise global awareness to what it believed to be a violation of Lula's political rights. The response came a few days later, when the UN Human Rights Committee demanded Brazil to take all necessary measures to ensure that Lula could exercise his political rights and run for office "until his appeals in courts have been completed in fair judicial proceedings". The party believed that the UN request would force Brazilian authorities to let Lula run. They did not —as a result, Jair Bolsonaro won the presidential race over Lula's replacement, former São Paulo mayor Fernando Haddad, and paved the way for the rise of the far right in Brazil (Casarões *et al.*, 2024).

#### 4.2. PT under the Bolsonaro administration: rebuilding Lula's global prestige (2019-2022)

Bolsonaro took office in January 2019 and quickly moved to undermine Brazilian policy-making structures. Major changes in education, healthcare, and human rights policies triggered a swift response from the Brazilian civil society, whose strategy also relied on transnational networking. Nevertheless, for most of Bolsonaro's first year in office, the PT's priorities revolved around setting Lula free from prison—which would only happen in November 2019, following an unprecedented Supreme Court ruling (Casarões *et al.*, 2024). Lula's incarceration did not prevent him and other members of the PT, such as former president Dilma Rousseff and former presidential candidate Fernando Haddad from joining other Latin American left-wing parties to establish the Puebla Group in July 2019. Their idea was to revitalize the left in the region and enable them to face the challenge posed by the rise of the far right (Pardo, 2019).

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in early 2020, the PT turned again to its international alliances. Given Bolsonaro's attempts at downplaying the disease's deadliness, peddling conspiracy theories and disinformation on vaccines and social distancing measures and sabotaging health experts and authorities (Casarões and Magalhães 2021; Ventura, Aith and Reis 2021), the PT started to denounce the Brazilian president as a threat to global health. As the Brazilian health catastrophe unfolded, with hundreds of thousands of Brazilians dying from COVID-19, activists and politicians presented petitions to the ICC to investigate Bolsonaro's government for crimes against humanity, making "Genocidal Bolsonaro" one of the most powerful slogans of the PT and left-wing activists in Brazil and abroad over the next couple of years (Casarões *et al.*, 2024). At the same time, the party was at the forefront of an innovative para-diplomatic initiative, the Northeast Consortium. It was established in early 2019 and brought together the governors of 9 northeastern states, four of whom were PT's. The Consortium rose to prominence during the health crisis, as it attempted to negotiate vaccines and medical supplies directly with China and other countries, going against the federal administration's herd immunity policies (Ferreira and Dias, 2024).

As the 2022 national elections approached, PT's international mobilization took a different turn. Since Bolsonaro did not want to lose the presidential race, he ramped up his attacks on the Supreme Court and on the integrity of the electoral process. The prospect of an insurrection along the lines of the Capitol riots of January 6, 2021 or even of a coup d'état began to be considered seriously among scholars and politicians in Brazil, who believed the very survival of Brazil's democratic regime was in jeopardy. In this regard, Lula seemed to be the party's only hope to return to office in Brazil and to prevent the collapse of Brazil's faltering democracy. After Lula's convictions were annulled by the Supreme Court in March 2021, the former president was back in the electoral game (Casarões *et al.*, 2024).

The PT's strategy turned to reconstructing Lula's domestic and international credibility. In September 2021, under PT's initiative, over 150 parliamentarians, ministers, and ex-presidents from 26 countries expressed concerns over Bolsonaro's plans for an insurrection in an open Progressive International letter that was published in several media outlets around the world. In November that year, Lula was given an unprecedented head-of-state reception by French president Macron and by Germany's chancellor-elect Olaf Scholz and spoke before the European Parliament. As a member of the Puebla Group, the left-wing leader was also hosted by the presidents of Argentina, in December 2021, and Mexico, in March 2022. Lula's diplomatic activism and growing popularity was in stark contrast to Bolsonaro's international isolation and even earned him a cover in Time magazine (Casarões *et al.*, 2024).

However, it was also important to call the world's attention to Bolsonaro's attempts to undermine the electoral process, which were largely inspired by Trump's 2020 "Stop the Steal" disinformation campaign. In May 2022, a group of 80 jurists and legal researchers with close ties to the PT petitioned to the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers to monitor and report on attacks on Brazilian courts. Over the month prior to the first round of the presidential elections, mainstream international media and academic journals published editorials against Bolsonaro and in defense of Lula. Following meetings between Brazilian civil society organizations and Democratic representatives in the Capitol Hill and the White House brokered by the US-based think tank Washington Brazil Office (WBO), the US Senate approved a resolution by consensus which urged the Brazilian government to ensure that the October 2022 elections were conducted in a free, fair, credible, transparent, and peaceful manner. In case Bolsonaro tried to tamper with elections, the US must reconsider its relations with Brazil and suspend cooperation programs, including in the military area (Casarões *et al.*, 2024).

#### 4.3. The Bolsonarista movement under Bolsonaro: securing conservative values (2018-2022)

Bolsonaro's strategy did not play out primarily through official channels; it was an expression of the Bolsonaro administration's nature as a government-movement (Couto, 2021) and hinged upon building a transnational network of like-minded political groups from many parts of the world. Here, personal ties nurtured by members of Bolsonaro's inner circle, most notably congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro, have played an important role in shaping a parallel foreign policy track that gave the *Bolsonarista* movement significant leeway to address culture-war related issues that were either too costly to deal with through institutional channels or that prepared the ground for further government activities.

Between 2018 and 2022, Bolsonaro's unofficial foreign policy networks were aimed at building cooperation ties across the hemisphere and the Ibero-American world. In early 2018, prior to the national elections in Brazil, Bolsonaro's party (the Social-Liberal Party, PSL) announced it would host the first edition of the Conservative Summit of the Americas in Foz do Iguaçu, in the tri-border area between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay. The event, which was envisioned as a far-right response to the São Paulo Forum, was originally



scheduled for late June but ended up taking place in November that year, after Bolsonaro's election. The idea was to bring Latin American political movements together to fight "Communism" in Cuba and Venezuela, as well as to denounce the alleged connections between left-wing parties and organized criminal groups, such as Colombia's Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) (Hoeveler, 2020).

Among the speakers at the Conservative Summit were Chilean politician José Antonio Kast, Colombian Senator María Fernanda Cabal, Paraguayan Senator Fidel Zavala, Cuban philosopher Orlando Gutiérrez, and Venezuelan activist Roderick Navarro. On the Brazilian side, Bolsonaro's intellectual guru Olavo de Carvalho took the limelight. In his speech, he called upon the far right across the region to persecute the left, doing with them "what the Spaniards did to the Aztecs who lived across Spanish America" (quoted in Benites, 2018). He was seconded by Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro and other up-and-coming Bolsonaristas, such as Congressman-elect Luiz Philippe de Orleães e Bragança and the controversial Weintraub brothers, who would eventually join the administration. Then-president-elect Jair Bolsonaro also made a short speech that was broadcast live to the participants. In the final document of the Summit (the Foz Charter) the signatories underlined their commitment to "the strengthening of the national unity, the defense of the family, the institutionalization of economic liberalism, and the values of Western culture" (Hoeveler, 2020: 79).

The Conservative Summit was just the stepping stone for other initiatives that blossomed between 2019 and 2020. On the regional level, Eduardo Bolsonaro was one of the articulators of the *Foro por la Democracia* (also known as the Foro de Santiago), which gathered 43 Latin American right-wing political parties and think tanks in the Chilean capital in March 2019. The Foro was organized by the Chilean governing coalition Chile Vamos and was held just days before the presidential summit that launched South America's conservative-driven integration initiative, the Forum for South American Progress (Prosur). On the Ibero-American level, in September 2020 several far-right leaders from Europe and Latin America launched the Foro de Madrid, which was conceived as a counterpoint to the left-wing Foro de São Paulo. It was proposed by Spain's Vox leader Santiago Abascal and had Eduardo Bolsonaro as one of the group's founding members. Although both Foro de Santiago and Foro de Madrid claim to defend democracy, freedoms, and the rule of law, their main actual concern is to fight "Communism" in the region (González *et al.*, 2021).

The Bolsonarista movement also wanted to nurture closer ties with the US far-right, represented by Trumpism. In November 2018, soon after Bolsonaro got elected, his son Eduardo and Filipe Martins took a trip to Washington to meet with White House officials and Republican congresspeople and launch a new partnership between Brazil and the US. They also attended Steve Bannon's birthday dinner (Zaremba, 2018). In February 2019, Bannon picked Eduardo Bolsonaro as the South American leader of his Brussels-based organization The Movement, as part of the group's "pursuit of a populist nationalist agenda for prosperity and sovereignty for citizens throughout the world" (quoted in Mills, 2019). A few months later, Eduardo put together the first Brazilian edition of the US-based Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC). The event was part of CPAC's own efforts to make its franchise international: in 2019 alone, conferences were held in Brazil, Australia, Ireland, Japan, and South Korea (Murdoch, 2019).

CPAC was founded in 1973 by the American Conservative Union and has evolved to become the meeting ground for conservative and libertarian politicians, ideologues, think tanks, and media personalities (Cole, 2024). Although CPAC is not explicitly a far-right conference, it was progressively captured by radical groups after Trump got elected. 2019 was a landmark for CPAC not only because it went global, but because it mobilized a base that revered the president and his ideology (Coaston, 2019). While at the 2019 US Conference Trump was the main attraction, at the Brazilian offshoot of CPAC it was Eduardo Bolsonaro who was cheered as the rising star of conservatism in Brazil. In his keynote speech, he declared: "This is not the reversed image of the São Paulo Forum (...). This is an event to tell the world who we are and what it means to be a conservative" (quoted in Ferreira, 2019).

More importantly, besides being a conservative gathering, CPAC Brazil was a conference made by and for the Bolsonaro movement. Among the speakers at the 2019 Summit were four of Bolsonaro's ministers (Damascos Alves, Ernesto Araújo, Abraham Weintraub, Onyx Lorenzoni) and many pro-Bolsonaro congresspeople and media pundits closely linked to Olavo de Carvalho (Ferreira, 2019; Galhardo, 2019). The next summit, which had Donald Trump Jr. as the keynote speaker, took place in September 2021 and was also a full-fledged celebration of Bolsonaro and his administration. Marked by the vilification of Bolsonaro's nemesis, Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, the event was also regarded as a warm-up session for Bolsonaro's Independence Day parade, in which he openly lambasted the Court and said he would not accept defeat in the upcoming national elections (Motoryn, 2021). Attacks on the Supreme Court were also the common thread behind the speeches at the July 2022 CPAC Brazil conference (Caetano, 2022).

As the 2022 elections were coming up, despite Brazil's increasing diplomatic isolation, Bolsonaro's personal ties with far-right leaders from across the world paid off. A week before the first round, Bolsonaro posted several videos of endorsement on social media. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Portugal's Chega deputy André Ventura, Spain's Vox leader Santiago Abascal, Chile's presidential hopeful José Antonio Kast and Argentina's then-presidential hopeful Javier Milei were among those who openly supported Bolsonaro. Former president Trump also publicly endorsed Bolsonaro against "far-left lunatic Lula" (Mello, 2022).

#### **4.4. The Bolsonarista movement after Bolsonaro: narratives of persecution (2023-2024)**

Soon after the results of the 2022 national elections came in, it became clear that Bolsonaro would not concede his defeat in the ballots. Consistent with his campaign rhetoric, which was largely based on the idea that elections in Brazil were rigged, Bolsonaro kept silent over the results, sending a clear message to his voters that they should fight to prevent Lula from taking office. For months, Bolsonaro's supporters camped outside



of military headquarters across the country, expecting the president would find a way to remain in power. However, a few days before inauguration, Bolsonaro left Brazil and took refuge in Orlando, Florida, signaling he would not even pass the sash to his successor. On January 8, 2023, just a week after Lula had been sworn in, thousands of rioters broke into the buildings of the Presidential Palace, Congress, and the Supreme Court. The Brasília riots followed a very similar script to the Capitol insurrection on January 6, 2021. Unsurprisingly, Steve Bannon celebrated the pro-Bolsonaro mob as the “Brazilian spring”, posting a video of the destruction in the Brazilian capital on social media claiming that Lula had stolen the elections (Scofield, 2023a).

The Lula administration's response was swift: the Armed Forces and the Federal Police were dispatched to disband the camps and over 1,400 people were arrested in the days that followed the riots on the Supreme Court's orders. On January 11, 60 Brazilian and US congresspeople published a joint statement repudiating the insurrection and accusing Trump and his closest aides of encouraging Bolsonaro to challenge the election's results in Brazil (Carlucci, 2023). House democrats also sent a letter to the White House urging the Biden administration to launch an investigation on the Brazilian insurrection and to prevent Bolsonaro from using US territory as a safe haven to plan a coup against democracy in Brazil (Sanches, 2023).

Yet these requests did not stop Bolsonaro from touring across US cities to talk about the future of Brazil. Most events took place in churches and schools from the Brazilian diaspora and were sponsored by Florida-based pro-Bolsonaro association Yes Brazil USA (Scofield, 2023b). CPAC also invited Bolsonaro to their March 2023 conference in Washington, which had former president Trump and Steve Bannon as major speakers. In his speech, Bolsonaro said his mission as president “was not over” and bragged about being one of the last world leaders to recognize Biden's victory in the 2020 elections. Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro also participated in a discussion on the “Communist threat in the Americas” (Corrêa and Kufner, 2023). Some months before, the lawmaker had made an appearance at the first CPAC Mexico Summit, spreading conspiracies about Brazil's electoral integrity (O'Boyle, 2022).

In June 2023, a few months after returning from the US, Bolsonaro was convicted by the Supreme Electoral Court for abuse of power during the presidential campaign and was subsequently barred from running for office for eight years. Domestically, the court ruling wore down the pro-Bolsonaro movement. Bolsonaro and his son Eduardo were absent from the 2023 CPAC Brazil Summit, which was held in late September amid discussions of who could replace the former president as the right-wing candidate in the 2026 elections. Internationally, however, the Brazilian far-right adopted a two-pronged strategy. Some lawmakers, such as Senator Flávio Bolsonaro and representative Bia Kicis, traveled to Europe to speak at events sponsored by Yes Brazil USA and a Luso-Brazilian Catholic Think Tank, Veritas Liberat (Scofield, 2023b). Other members of Bolsonaro's inner circle turned to the Argentinian presidential race, led by the far-right candidate Javier Milei. Right after Milei's victory in late November 2023, Eduardo Bolsonaro mediated a call between the Argentinian president-elect and Donald Trump, promising they would fight to prevent the triumph of Socialism across the Americas (Megale, 2023).

As the US geared up for another electoral season, Eduardo Bolsonaro and other pro-Bolsonaro congresspeople began working closely with their Republican counterparts. It was a win-win alliance: on the Trumpist side, Brazil served as the gloomy example of what the US could become if Biden got reelected. Bolsonaristas, in turn, could count on Republican support to create a narrative of persecution that helped them overturn Bolsonaro's ineligibility status. Between November 2023 and May 2024, Congressman Bolsonaro led three delegations of Brazilian lawmakers to Washington—and another one to the European Parliament, upon invitation from far-right Vox congressman Hermann Tertsch (Scofield, 2024). They denounced the Lula administration, in collusion with the Supreme Court, for promoting censorship, violating human rights, and persecuting opponents in Brazil.

In early April 2024, a new chapter opened up in the far-right's hemispheric strategy, following US-based journalist Michael Schellenberger's publication of “Twitter Files Brazil”. He exposed several email exchanges between Twitter employees in which they complained about orders by Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes demanding the platform to exclude content from pro-Bolsonaro accounts. X's owner Elon Musk took up the feud and started to make public attacks against Moraes and Lula on social media, accusing them of turning Brazil into a totalitarian regime. A couple of days after Schellenberger's revelations, Musk posted: “How did Alexandre de Moraes become the dictator of Brazil? He has Lula on a leash” (@elonmusk, April 8, 2024). Several Bolsonaro supporters thanked Musk for his stance against the Brazilian authorities. In response, Justice Moraes included Musk in the Supreme Court probe that investigated digital militias that threatened Brazil's democracy (Souza and Grecchi, 2024).

Another episode of altercations between Musk and Moraes started in August 2024, when X ceased its operations in Brazil over allegations that the Brazilian Justice was once again trying to censor Bolsonaro supporters in the platform. Moraes had just increased the fines against X in case the company kept disregarding judicial decisions. In the days that followed, Musk posted memes criticizing Moraes and called upon his Brazilian followers to join the 2024 Independence Day protests led by Bolsonaro, whose main motto was to impeach Moraes (Souza and Grecchi, 2024). The alliance between Musk and Bolsonaristas also had echoes in the US. In September, Florida Congresswoman Maria Elvira Salazar introduced a bill (H.R. 9605) that proposed canceling the visas of foreign authorities who had threatened the freedom of speech of US citizens, citing Moraes's measures against X as an example. New Jersey congressman Chris Smith introduced another bill (H.R. 9850) prohibiting the use of US public funds to sponsor organizations that curtailed freedom of speech, citing Brazil's Electoral Court—that was chaired by Moraes in 2022—as a case in hand. Both Smith and Salazar had official meetings with Eduardo Bolsonaro and other Brazilian lawmakers before submitting their bills (Scofield, 2024).

Trump's landslide victory against vice-president Kamala Harris in the 2024 US elections will be a crucial test to the Brazilian far right's networking strategy. Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro and other members of Bolsonaro's party were invited to Trump's official residence at Mar-a-Lago to watch the counting of votes –and to celebrate his ally's triumph. Soon after the former president was declared elected, Bolsonaro gave interviews and made public statements on his hopes to return to power in Brazil in 2026 –with a little help from the White House (Mattoso and Bragon, 2024). On November 10, Jair Bolsonaro wrote a controversial op-ed in Brazil's leading newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* titled “[You must] accept democracy”. His message was clear: “Nothing can stop the conservative wave” (Bolsonaro, 2024).

Figure 1. Presents a summary of the strategies of both political movements in and out of power

	In power	Out of power
<b>PT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PT has built regional and global leftist alliances through organizations like UNASUR, CELAC, and the São Paulo Forum.</li> <li>- Lula da Silva's diplomacy turned Brazil into a major voice in South-South cooperation.</li> <li>- The PT government strategically used Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) financing to fund infrastructure projects abroad, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Africa.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PT played a key role in founding the Puebla Group (2019), a coalition of Latin American left-wing leaders aimed at countering the rise of the far right.</li> <li>- PT has leveraged transnational platforms to denounce Bolsonaro's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, petitioning the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate his administration.</li> <li>- PT-aligned groups have lobbied U.S. politicians and institutions, leading to a U.S. Senate resolution in 2022 urging fair elections in Brazil.</li> </ul>
<b>Bolsonarismo</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Bolsonarismo</i> actively built alliances with conservative and far-right movements across Latin America and Europe –e.g., Foro por la Democracia (Santiago) and Foro de Madrid.</li> <li>- Eduardo Bolsonaro played a key role in forging connections with Steve Bannon, Trump's allies, and U.S. Republican politicians.</li> <li>- Jair Bolsonaro secured public endorsements from global far-right leaders, including Trump, Orbán (Hungary), Abascal (Spain's Vox), Ventura (Portugal's Chega), Kast (Chile), and Milei (Argentina).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eduardo Bolsonaro has led multiple delegations to Washington and the European Parliament, lobbying against the Lula administration and Brazil's Supreme Court.</li> <li>- Eduardo Bolsonaro has also played a part in linking Javier Milei's campaign in Argentina to Trump and the global far-right.</li> <li>- Bolsonaro supporters have leveraged Elon Musk's influence to galvanize protests and frame Brazil as an example of a global battle for free speech and conservative values.</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration.

## 5. Conclusion

Brazil's current political scenario hints at a profound shift where foreign policy no longer operates solely as a government-driven agenda but as a strategic extension of domestic and transnational partisanship. This transformation reflects a larger global trend where ideological groups leverage transnational networks to reinforce their narratives, mobilize support, and even challenge established democratic norms. The cases of both the Workers' Party (PT) and the *Bolsonarista* movement underscore how international alliances have become essential to advancing their political objectives within Brazil. These alliances facilitate a dual-purpose strategy: first, maintaining continuity in political agendas even when out of power, and second, establishing a transnational legitimacy that fortifies their influence domestically.

For the PT, transnational mobilization has historically focused on solidarity with global leftist movements, advocating for issues like social justice and democratic governance, which were evident during Rousseff's impeachment and Lula's incarceration. The PT's international efforts to challenge these events as anti-democratic have not only garnered global support but also strengthened its domestic base by appealing to a shared global cause. This strategy of embedding Brazil's political struggles within broader international human rights and democratic narratives serves as a counterbalance to conservative domestic forces, allowing the PT to claim a moral high ground and gather momentum for re-election, as seen in Lula's eventual return to power in January 2023.

In contrast, the *Bolsonarista* movement's transnational strategy, largely inspired by right-wing populism and nationalism, has cultivated alliances with global conservative figures and movements, from Steve Bannon in the United States to Santiago Abascal's Vox party in Spain. These connections have enabled Bolsonaro and his supporters to frame their political struggle as part of a global “conservative revolution”, targeting issues such as family values, economic liberalism, and anti-globalism. Through events like CPAC Brazil and the Conservative Summit of the Americas, Bolsonaro's camp has successfully linked their domestic agenda with the global far-right's rhetoric, reinforcing their narrative of resistance against a “leftist threat” and positioning themselves as defenders of traditional values and national sovereignty. This alignment with the global far-right also allows Bolsonaro's movement to sidestep institutional constraints within Brazil by rallying international support and framing opposition to their agenda as an attack on their rights and values.

The implications of these trends are significant. Brazil's foreign policy, once regarded as an arena of consensus driven by diplomatic institutions, has transformed into a contentious battlefield where ideological groups vie for influence both domestically and abroad. This change introduces new elements: on the one hand, Brazil's engagement in global ideological networks could bolster its influence on the world stage by integrating its domestic political concerns into broader international debates. On the other, the politicization of foreign policy risks polarizing Brazil's diplomatic approach, potentially isolating it from multilateral cooperation and heightening domestic tensions. As foreign policy becomes an avenue for political mobilization, the traditional boundaries between national sovereignty and global influence are blurred, creating challenges for democratic governance and accountability.

As ideological groups continue to mobilize across borders, Brazil's democracy may face tests of resilience, particularly regarding the role of foreign actors in shaping public opinion and influencing election outcomes. The evolution of Brazil's foreign policy and its entanglement with party agendas will remain a critical indicator of the country's political direction, reflecting the broader struggles between globalized ideological forces and the quest for national cohesion. Ultimately, this article suggests that Brazil's path forward will be shaped not only by domestic political strategies but by its positioning within an interconnected and globally partisan landscape.

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