

# Dual Hegemony: Brazil Between the United States and China

*Luis L. Schenoni and Diego Leiva*

## INTRODUCTION

Brazilian diplomats rarely miss the occasion to mention that Brazil is the ninth largest economy and the fifth largest country in the world by population and territory, representing roughly half of South America's aforementioned realms. Yet, true as these statements might be, they disguise the fact that Brazil amounts to a mere three percent of the global economy, one-tenth of US GDP, and one twentieth of US military

---

L. L. Schenoni (✉)

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Konstanz University, Konstanz, Germany  
e-mail: [schenoni@uni-konstanz.de](mailto:schenoni@uni-konstanz.de)

D. Leiva

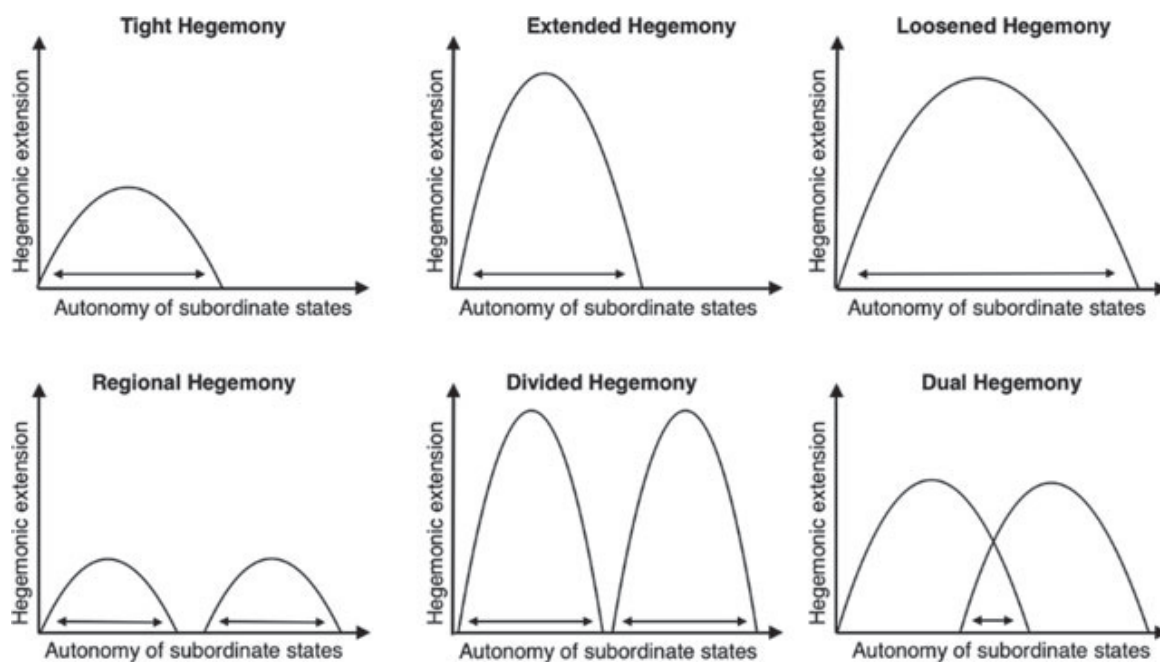
School of Government and International Relations, Griffith University, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

expenditures.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, despite voluminous works about its disruptive agency in world politics (Roett, 2011; Stuenkel & Taylor, 2015), Brazil has always been “too far from God and too close to the US” to achieve substantive autonomy, much less influence, in world politics. In the following pages, we propose that, for those same reasons, much of what was interpreted as evidence of Brazilian agency should be revised, in retrospect, as a rather passive accommodation to the pull of the new heavyweight in world politics; namely, China.

This chapter develops a theoretical construct and methodological strategy to describe and understand the travails of Brazilian foreign policy under this hegemonic transition, and the great disillusionment with its foreign policy performance. We propose that Brazil never successfully exited US hegemony, although it did drift away from Washington’s ideal point as it followed the allure of Beijing. While skillful Brazilian diplomacy was able to depict this as attributable to the nation’s own agency and cleverness, the drift was actually made possible by a shift in US attention toward the Middle East and Asia—which loosened its grip on Latin America—and the pull provided by a steadily rising China. Although initially framed as increasing Brazil’s autonomy, this process eventually trapped the country in a novel situation we call “dual hegemony,” which has notably reduced its margin of maneuver—i.e., its autonomy—in foreign policy.

Figure 12.1 summarizes our main theoretical insight and helps define what we understand by dual hegemony. The first row of subfigures illustrates the possible variation in autonomy that subordinate states can experience under a single hegemon. Tight hegemony exemplifies a situation where the (geographic) extension of hegemony is rather narrow and the autonomy of subordinated states is limited to a certain segment of possible foreign policies. Under an extended hegemony, the extension of hegemony might increase (including new subordinate states) while the margins of maneuver for them remain the same. Finally, we can think of a loosened hegemony, where the autonomy of subordinate states expands by virtue of the hegemon’s policies. We contend that something like this happened after the 9–11 terrorist attacks, and that US disregard for

<sup>1</sup> For a brief exposition of these contrasting views of Brazil in relation to the world, see the response of Ambassador Sergio Danese to Luis Schenoni’s article in *La Nación* (Danese, 2017; Schenoni, 2017a).



**Fig. 12.1** Implications of dual hegemony for subordinate state autonomy (*Source* Devised by the authors)

Latin America in the subsequent period allowed Brazilian foreign policy to expand toward areas previously vetoed by the US.

The more interesting and novel implications of our argument, however, appear in the second row of Fig. 12.1, where we theorize the implications that two parallel hegemonies might have on the foreign policy of subordinate states. Our literature review (Schenoni, 2019) suggests that, so far, hegemonic stability theorists and more novel debates about unipolarity, hierarchy, and other forms of stratification have tended to theorize what we call regional or divided hegemonies; that is, situations where single hegemonies have almost undisputed right to limit the space of maneuver of subordinate states under their exclusive sphere of influence. In situations like the Cold War, for example, there was little or no space for states to participate simultaneously in the US and the USSR spheres of influence—like the Cuban example illustrates neatly in Latin America. In those historical contexts, there was little reason for theorizing how hegemonies interact.

Yet, the current power transition between the US and China—or bipolarity, depending on the theoretical standpoint—poses a novel situation in which states can be simultaneously embedded within the hierarchical structures imposed by each of the hegemonies. As a result, subordinate

states that are trapped in this dual hegemony will lose considerable autonomy. This is exemplified by the last subfigure at the bottom right corner of Fig. 12.1, where the two hegemonies overlap, reducing the space of maneuver of subordinate states that are located in the intersection.

The theoretical framework presented here has previously been applied to other areas in political science. The boundaries to foreign policy autonomy that we propose might be conceptualized as veto points, for example, in a veto players framework (Tsebelis, 2002). In our application, however, this boils down to very simple set-theoretic implications. Whereas, during the Cold War, states had to choose between the USSR *or* the US—i.e., there was not an intersection—countries like Brazil that is now under dual hegemony would be trapped in a subset between the US *and* China, finding it impossible to move toward either the Chinese or the American ideal points.

Testing our theory requires a methodology of necessary and sufficient conditions that fit the implications of our set-theoretic framework (Mahoney & Vanderpoel, 2015). In particular, two clear observational expectations can be derived from our argument that Brazil has drifted toward, and eventually become trapped, in dual hegemony.

First, for Brazil to be in a situation of dual hegemony, it is *necessary* that US hegemony loosened, and that Brazil moved toward China, finally falling under its economic and institutional umbrella. This is logically true for the simple reason that dual hegemony (the intersection) is a subset of both American and Chinese hegemonies, and that participation in a superset presupposes participation in the subset. Our first hypothesis, therefore, is that increasing subordination to China, although not solely sufficient, was a necessary condition for that change to take place.

Second, being under dual hegemony should prove *sufficient* for Brazilian exclusion of sole US or sole Chinese hegemony—in the same way that, logically speaking, participation in a subset is sufficient for exclusion from another, non-intersecting subset. Since, both hegemons impose rigid bounds to the foreign policies of the subordinate states within their sphere of influence, dual hegemony should prove, in and of itself, a sufficient condition to constrain any move toward the Chinese or American foreign policy ideal points.

In the following sections, we present this argument in a sequential form. Section “[The Beginning of Dual Hegemony](#)” presents the movement of Brazil toward the margins of US hegemony and closer to China.

In section “[Consolidation of Dual Hegemony](#)”, we turn our attention to more recent times and how Brazil became constrained by dual hegemony. Here, our focus is on how the new situation of dual hegemony was sufficient to prevent Brazil from returning to a space of sole US hegemony.

## THE BEGINNING OF DUAL HEGEMONY

Brazilian foreign policy under the presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2003) and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2011) tends to be described as a successful quest for autonomy which entered a period of decline under Dilma Rousseff’s (2011–2016) government. Under these presidencies, Brazil played a significant role in negotiations at the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, as one of the most active developing countries pushing for institutional reform and a redistribution of quotas; especially under Lula, Brazil was also one of the most vocal members of the United Nations (UN) to advocate for the democratization of the UN and reform of the Security Council. Brazil became a member of several other global groupings as well: IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa) in 2003, BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) in 2009, and BRIC(S) (Brazil, Russia, India, and China; then joined by South Africa in 2010) in 2009—holding coordinating positions mostly on aid, finance, trade, and the environment.

Regionally, Brazil attempted to strengthen the political dimension of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur), and was one of the main driving forces behind the creation of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in 2008 and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in 2010. These regional organizations overlapped with other, overarching hemispheric institutions traditionally led by the US (Weiffen et al., 2013), creating a space for a relational autonomy (Russell & Tokatlian, 2003) carved partly out of Washington’s lack of interest in the region, and the alleged proactivity of Brazil.

Most scholars assign a predominant role to concrete domestic factors when explaining the aforementioned struggle for autonomy (Bernal Meza, 2010; Burges & Chagas, 2017; Schenoni, 2013; Vigevani & Cepaluni, 2007). Although we agree with the importance of these and other domestic factors in fostering Brazilian capacity for autonomy and leadership in the region, it has become increasingly clear in recent times

that tectonic changes in the international structure might have been a *necessary condition* for those domestic factors to play a role (see Ramanzini & Vigevani, 2010; Malamud & Alcañiz, 2017). While the US represented 20% of Brazil's exports and the origin of 23% of its imports in 1994, the hemispheric hegemon has come to represent 12% and 17%, respectively, in 2018 (WITS, 2020). Conversely, China now represents 26% of Brazilian exports and 20% of its imports, having amounted to a mere 1% of imports and 2% of exports back in 1994. Trade is, of course, just one dimension in which the power transition between the US and China affects Brazil, but it clearly lays out the impressive forces that contributed to pulling Brazilian foreign policy away from the US during the Cardoso and Lula presidencies—administrations that coincided with the period of a Chinese-led commodity boom.

In other words, we agree that Brazil became seemingly more autonomous during this period (this is observationally correct), but we disagree with those who see the cause of this as arising from within Brazil itself. We propose an alternative argument: that this apparent autonomy might have been the consequence of *necessary* structural changes pulling Brazil away from the US and toward China.

To more systematically test the necessity of US hegemonic loosening and Chinese hegemonic expansion in the creation of room of maneuver for Brazil, we analyze a series of events that are usually represented as examples of Brazil's successful autonomous foreign policy, but that we see as highlighting the predominant role played by underlying systemic variables. In this comparative exercise, we pick five foreign policy achievements that are often considered evidence of increased autonomy vis-à-vis the regional US hegemony and attributed to Brazilian diplomatic dexterity: the creation of UNASUR, the boycott of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the foundation of the BRIC group; the development of ties with China; and distancing from the US in multilateral institutions. Our goal here is to corroborate the fact that all of these achievements could not be explained without reference to the type of structural pull we associate with dual hegemony. This does not prove the *sufficiency* of structural factors per se, but will show their *necessity* for Brazilian agency to manifest.

### *The Creation of UNASUR*

The establishment of UNASUR in 2008 is often taken as a key example of Brazil's contestation of US hegemony. Since the 2000s, Brazil sought to turn South America into a cohesive region and creates a distinctive regional organization to legitimize its political authority (Spektor, 2016). Along with the political strengthening of Mercosur, Brazil needed an integration scheme that included all South American countries and left out important Latin American states that could compete for leadership, such as Mexico (Burgess, 2017). President Lula played a significant role in the creation of UNASUR, and the organization effectively became an active forum for the discussion of regime- and security-related crises in the region.

Yet, the creation and early success of UNASUR would have been impossible in a different structural context. The organization was but a part of a broader wave of regionalism in Latin America, enabled by relative decline of the US hegemony (Riggirozzi & Grugel, 2015). Structure can parsimoniously explain both the initial success of UNASUR and its more recent collapse (Mijares, 2020). It is interesting to note that the failures of UNASUR date back to the government of Dilma Rousseff, who tried a continuation of Lula's foreign policy, and yet was overwhelmed by radicalization in Venezuela, more Chinese and Russian involvement, and a sudden increase in US pressure—systemic factors that severely constrained the UNASUR project. The organization soon became seen as costly, useless, and providing cover for the Maduro regime. More recently, when Trump increased this pressure even more, Bolsonaro ditched UNASUR *it tout court*.

To sum up, while we acknowledge the possibility of Brazilian agency being an important causal factor leading to the creation of UNASUR—one of the main examples of Brazil's contestation of the US hegemony in this period—we argue that dual hegemony was a *necessary condition*. First, US “withdrawal,” one of the implications of our dual hegemony argument, was essential for Brazil to expand its leadership in the region. The other systemic factor was China's rising economic sway over Brazil and Latin America. To be sure, the projection of Brazil's soft power in the region (Malamud & Alcañiz, 2017) was buttressed by the unprecedented increase in Sino-Brazilian trade during the “commodities boom,” and was stifled when China's influence in Latin America became so important as to start contradicting Brazilian initiatives.

*The Boycott of the Free Trade Area of the Americas*

After the Cold War ended, the US envisioned the creation of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) encompassing the whole Western Hemisphere. Announced by President George H. W. Bush on June 27, 1990, the pressure exercised by Washington in this realm has long been considered a catalyst of Mercosur—regarded in Brazil as a compromise solution between full-blown hemispheric trade openness and single-country protectionism (Schenoni, 2017b). Over its lifespan, Mercosur evolved in peaceful coexistence with the US initiative renamed the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and relaunched in 1994 by President Clinton.

The discussions for an FTAA famously died at the IV Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, in 2005. These decade-long negotiations ended after the presidents of Brazil (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva), Venezuela (Hugo Chávez), and Argentina (Néstor Kirchner) managed to derail any potential agreement by using particularly harsh ideological discourses that made it impossible to continue the negotiations—while others, like those with the European Union, did continue. The narrative in the scholarship on Lula's foreign policy tends to describe the episode as a successful “jeitinho,” a sleight of hand in which Brazil was able to stall the debate indefinitely (Burges, 2017). However, this narrative tends to exaggerate Lula's role in the negotiation vis-à-vis the impact of systemic conditions. It has been previously noted that, even when Cardoso wanted to oppose the initiative during his government, Brazil lacked sufficient economic strength and credibility to do so (Burges, 2017). Conversely, Lula was in a good position to block the FTAA due to the strong China-driven economic growth that the region was experiencing.

Another structural factor behind the failure of the FTAA was the War on Terror and the US pivot to the Middle East and Central Asia—and away from Latin America. Although Clinton had exerted less pressure after his failure to renew fast-track authority in 1998 (Phillips, 2003), the prospects of a treaty became particularly dim after the invasion of Iraq. The favorability of President George W. Bush was so low in the region that it made it almost impossible for any Latin American country to support the initiative. Again, this view does not argue that agency was unimportant, but provides sufficient evidence to back the claim that structural changes were necessary to bury the FTAA.



### *The BRIC(S) Membership*

In the twenty first century, Brazil played an active international role, justified by the perception of multiple emerging poles. Many sources record the expansion of this “myth of multipolarity” (Schenoni et al., 2019) or “multipolar mirage” (Schenoni, 2021) at the elite level.<sup>2</sup> From all the different groupings of “emerging countries” in which Brazil participated (e.g., G20, IBSA, BASIC), BRIC(S) is the one that arguably has contributed most to the idea of impending multipolarity. It has provided a platform of negotiation for its members (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in multilateral arenas, and, more recently, offered funding for investment in the Global South through the New Development Bank. Being a member of BRIC(S) is commonly offered as another example of diplomatic dexterity in Brazil’s quest for autonomy during this period (Bernal Meza, 2010). Brazil has held important summits of the organization, and Lula certainly enhanced the international image of the grouping.

However, this kind of Brazil-centric narrative grossly overlooks the systemic conditions that made Brazil a potential member of the organization. BRIC began to form in the early 2000s as a reaction to US foreign policy (Abdenur, 2014), with Brazil playing a rather secondary role within it. Russia initiated the grouping’s institutionalization in 2006, and the New Development Bank was proposed by India. As mentioned before, Lula was instrumental to enhance the grouping international image, but the pace was set by Russia, India, and (fundamentally) China—countries that are also responsible for the political and economic gravitas of the group. By boosting BRICS, for example, China has deflated the IBSA forum (Abdenur, 2014), an organization in which Brazil could arguably play a greater role without being overshadowed by China or Russia. Similarly, by including Brazil in BRIC(S), China was able to disguise as an impending multipolarity what was sure to become a bipolar world. This

<sup>2</sup> The Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI) conducted surveys in 2001 and 2008 of members of the “Brazilian foreign policy community” (Souza 2008, p. 3), including diplomats, scholars, and opinion leaders. When asked if certain countries were going to increase their international influence in the next ten years, respondents’ confidence in BRICS increased 12% between 2001 and 2008, while confidence in established powers dropped by 28%. The final report concludes that “most of the interviewees believe [...] the new international order will tend to multipolarity ...” (Souza, 2008, p. 33). Several public opinion polls confirm that this myth managed to trickle down from the elites to the masses (Almeida et al., 2011, p. 32).

is broadly in line with the “cautious engagement” strategy that China has pursued toward the region in the medium to long term (Leiva, 2020).

### *The “Boom” of Sino-Brazilian Relations*

Of all the partnerships strengthened by Brazil’s quest for autonomy, the most important was the engagement with China. As mentioned before, China became the top trading partner of Brazil in the first decade of the 2000s, and Brasília became the second major recipient of Chinese loans (28.9 billion dollars by 2018), and the first destination of Chinese investment in the region, with 55% of all Chinese foreign direct investments (FDI) flowing to Latin America and the Caribbean (Economic Commission for Latin America & the Caribbean, 2018). Brazil was the first country to establish a strategic partnership with Beijing in 1993. However, the inflection point came during Lula da Silva’s government with the boom of bilateral trade. After two decades of intensifying their engagements—covering multiple areas such as health, agriculture, and satellite cooperation—Sino-Brazilian relations have become the most comprehensive of all Beijing’s engagements with Latin America (Borges, 2017).

The role of Lula da Silva tends to be underscored in the literature as an important explanatory factor behind this process (Cordeiro, 2015), with special emphasis on Lula’s official trip to China in 2004, which included an entourage of more than 430 officials and businessmen. In other words, one of the main narratives of this process holds that Brazil sought out China, and not the other way around. Symbolic as it was, the trip coincides with an inflection point in the amount of agreements signed, and led to the establishment of the China-Brazil High-Level Coordination and Cooperation Committee (COSBAN). In addition, this “aero-Lula” narrative overlooks the fact that China was strengthening its relations with most Latin American countries at the time, following the same pattern evidenced in the Brazilian case. In this sense, there was nothing unique in Lula’s visit to Beijing. For example, that very same year, Chile began the negotiations for what was to become the first Free Trade Agreement between China and a Latin American country.

Thus, the “boom” of Sino-Brazilian relations can be mostly explained by the “entrance” of China into the region. This can be seen in the fact that the prices of resources such as copper, crude oil, iron ore, soybeans, and fishmeal more than doubled between 2003 and 2013 (Wise & Chonn

Ching, 2018) as a result of China's continuing demand for these raw materials. Moreover, Beijing has been the main actor in all these relationships: setting their "pace," as well as their limits. The best example of this was the failed attempt to win China's backing for a Brazilian seat on the UN Security Council. Brazil made significant concessions in order to garner this support—the most relevant being the recognition of China as a "market economy" in 2004 (Almeida, 2010). With hindsight, it has become clear that China pressured Lula's government for that recognition; this putting the president in a complicated position due to the opposition of domestic industrialists to such a concession (Burgess, 2017). But despite all his efforts, Lula could not win Beijing's support because Brazil simply had nothing to leverage against China.

### *Decreasing Voting Convergence with the US at the UNGA*

A final example of Brazil's increasing contestation of the US that is usually mentioned in the literature is its decreasing voting convergence with Washington at the UN General Assembly (UNGA), and its increasing level of convergence with China. As in the case of the boom of Sino-Brazilian relations, the importance of Brazil's agency in the voting behavior at the UNGA has been inflated. Perhaps the clearest example of that tendency was a very influential book by Octavio Amorim Neto, which virtually introduced the indicator and methodology to the study of Brazilian foreign policy alignments. In *De Dutra a Lula*, Amorim Neto (2012) argued that the dealignment from the US in the UNGA was due to the rise of Brazil in terms of its national capabilities. However, this initial intuition was contested by Luis Schenoni (2012), who, replicating Amorim Neto's models, found that the same voting pattern applied to all Latin American countries, thus suggesting it was not the rise of Brazil, but the relative decline of the US that explained the trend. Subsequently, other works confirmed this (see Mourón & Urdinez, 2014).

Adding China into the mix, George Strüver (2015) demonstrated that, between 1995 and 2011, there was a "zero-sum game" in terms of South America's voting convergence vis-à-vis the United States and China, moving from convergence with Washington toward Beijing. Gustavo Flores-Macías and Sarah Kreps (2013) noticed the same phenomenon in the Human Rights multilateral regime and other fora, thus reinforcing the idea of the emerging dual hegemony and its "pulling" effects.

So, although not denying the relevance of Brazil's agency and the importance of presidential diplomacy, we see the cases reviewed in this section as suggesting that Brazil's diminished dependence on the US and its diversified foreign policy, mostly toward China, are, in large part, the result of an emerging dual hegemony. Indeed, this was a necessary condition or permissive cause that allowed Brazil's long-held ambitions to flourish. In the next section, we analyze the difficulties faced by Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro—two presidents who tried to enhance Brazil-US relations but were unable to restore full realignment since these same systemic factors had begun to act as constraints.

### CONSOLIDATION OF DUAL HEGEMONY

During the first term of Dilma Rousseff as President of Brazil (2011–2014), the effects of dual hegemony had fully materialized: Brazil had increased its autonomy vis-à-vis the US and created a whole set of new bonds with China. Yet, when economic and political crisis struck, and Rousseff tried to realign with the US, structural factors started to act less like necessary conditions or permissive cause for Brazilian agency, and more like constraints that prevented political realignments. This new situation consolidated after Xi Jinping took office in China (Leiva, 2017) and became more evident in Brazil during Rousseff's second term in office, when the need for economic reform faced rigid opposition from strong interest groups, many of whom had developed strong international ties with China.

While Brazil had surfed the wave toward dual hegemony in the previous decade, it now became clear that swimming against the tide would be impossible. Facing a worsening global economy, the increasing competition between Washington and Beijing, and the fact that China had consolidated its position, Brazil was unable to reorient its foreign policy back in the opposite direction. China's development of finance started to decline (Myers & Gallagher, 2020) and Sino-Brazilian trade slowed down, but relations remained strong and continued to deepen (Ray & Wang, 2019). Indeed, Brazilian dependence on Beijing had increased significantly, and contributed to external vulnerability and re-primarization.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Re-primarization refers to the process of shifting back from industrial to primary production (Ray, 2017).

The constraints imposed by China became evident when, on the other side of this dual hegemony, the US turned its attention back to the region. The election of Donald Trump to the US presidency has added more pressure to the mix, as Washington has begun to actively contest China's increasing presence in the region. Before Trump, this was not considered as a compelling danger for the US (Ellis, 2016), allowing both China's uncontested "entrance" and Latin America's "rapprochement" with Beijing. It has become obvious that the current systemic conditions for Latin American foreign policies are far less permissive than the ones in the period 2001–2016. The case of Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil represents a good test for Brazil's agency under less favorable systemic conditions, especially considering that his main foreign policy goals were clear: align with the United States, and diminish Brazil's dependence on China.

As in the previous section, we will focus on five cases in which we demonstrate that a condition of dual hegemony was sufficient to thwart Brazilian agency: the Brazilian travails to join the OECD, the tense Brazilian 5G network negotiations, the unwilling moderation of Bolsonaro's anti-China rhetoric, China's undesired role in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and Bolsonaro's frustrated quest to reduce dependency on China. These cases summarize some of the main foreign policy challenges of the Bolsonaro government and notably exemplify how the boundaries imposed by great powers can severely constraint Brazilian foreign policy.

### *US Support to Join OECD*

Brazil's intentions to join the OECD began under the short transitional presidency of Michel Temer (2016–2018), following Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016. The accession of Brazil to the OECD was pitched as an important diplomatic win for the country—being the only country in the world to participate in both BRICS and the OECD serving as a symbol of the country's pivotal role (Stuenkel, 2017). Brazil's accession request remained unaltered under Jair Bolsonaro's government, but in a letter to the OECD Secretary-General on August 28, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated that the US would back the candidatures of Argentina and Rumania, not Brazil. Some confusing diplomatic backpedaling ensued after the revelation of the letter, with President Trump asserting that Washington did indeed supported Brazil's candidacy. But the letter remained the official U.S. answer to a request made

by the OECD Secretary-General for members to begin the discussions with the prospective candidates (Adghirni & Sink, 2019).

China was seemingly, one key issue turning the tide against Brazil in the negotiations and, in favor of Argentina. The US had pressured Bolsonaro to cut ties with China—especially regarding the development of its 5G network—to little effect. Meanwhile, Argentina had shown more assertiveness in reviewing concessions previously made to the Chinese related to a satellite launching site in Patagonia. The change could therefore be interpreted as a way in which the Department of State sought to reward Argentina and punish Brazil.

Finally, in January 2020, the US reinstated its full support for a Brazilian candidacy. The support from Washington was celebrated by Jair Bolsonaro and his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ernesto Araújo as a big diplomatic “win.” They subsequently claimed that Brazil was “building a solid partnership with the United States” (Boadle, 2020). Yet, it is important to note that Brasília had almost no agency in the process. What seems to have determined the final US support for Brazil was the result of Argentine elections; in particular, the loss of Mauricio Macri in his re-election bid against the left-wing candidate Alberto Fernández.

### *China’s Development of the Brazilian 5G Network*

Since Donald Trump’s arrival in office, the United States has actively campaigned against China’s development of 5G networks in Latin America. US officials have warned Bolsonaro’s government of the security concerns regarding Huawei’s 5G (Rampton & Paraguassu, 2019). Moreover, the Trump administration has explicitly suggested that two of the few “successes” of Bolsonaro’s foreign policy toward Washington may be frustrated if he decides to allow Chinese companies to participate in the bid for Brazil’s 5G network: The agreement on the US use of the Alcântara base and the recently signed US-Brazil cooperation agreement to develop defense technology. The US government threatened Bolsonaro’s government with cancelling the first agreement if Huawei was not banned from the auction (Álvares, 2019), and US officials have already showed concerns that Huawei’s activity in Brazil may hinder the second (Paraguassu, 2020).

Despite the pressures from Washington, Brazil seems to have decided to allow Huawei to participate in the 5G auction. Bolsonaro’s decision, however, seems to have been a “concession” to Xi Jinping to amend

a diplomatic impasse (analyzed in the next section) caused by his son Eduardo Bolsonaro (Campos Mello, 2020). If that is the case, the negotiation around 5G becomes another example of the different “pulls” of the dual hegemony. It also reflects the significant influence that Beijing can exert on Brazil, even with a pro-US president.

### *Bolsonaro’s Anti-China Rhetoric*

Jair Bolsonaro’s presidential campaign was highly critical of China’s influence in Brazil; to the point of being considered Sinophobia (Campos Mello, 2020). On several occasions, the then-candidate Bolsonaro suggested that “China doesn’t want to buy in Brazil, it wants to buy Brazil” (Spektor, 2018). However, after several disappointments in his attempts to align with the United States (e.g., Washington did not lift the ban on Brazilian meat), President Bolsonaro had to face the reality of Brazil’s dependence on China and change his anti-China rhetoric.

The best expression of this shift was the BRICS summit in November 2019, in which Bolsonaro actively engaged with grouping’s leaders, which, as explained before, represent the “South.” Several agreements between Brazil and China were signed during the summit and Xi Jinping offered 100 billion dollars for infrastructure investment in Brazil (Campos Mello, 2019). Bolsonaro’s rhetoric made a 180-degree turn after these announcements, claiming that “China is becoming more and more part of Brazil’s future” (*South China Morning Post*, 2019).

The anti-China rhetoric re-emerged in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis, with one of Bolsonaro’s sons blaming the Chinese Communist Party for the outbreak via Twitter, and his Education Minister making racist comments on the same platform. The Chinese Ambassador to Brazil, Yang Wanming, responded in an unusual assertive manner, demanding official apologies (Phillips, 2020). The Brazilian association of exporters warned the government about the negative effects of this diplomatic crisis on the country’s exports (Jiménez & Benites, 2020). The impasse faded soon after with a phone call between the Brazilian and the Chinese presidents, in which China won an important concession. This episode provides another example of the consolidation of the dual hegemony: The US fueled the anti-China rhetoric, Brazil followed, China punished Brazil and then won a concession.

### *The COVID-19 Crisis*

The effects of the Sino-Brazilian diplomatic impasse went beyond trade, endangering China's provision of medical equipment necessary to address the COVID-19 outbreak in Brazil. Chinese masks and mechanical ventilators were being negotiated when the president's son and his Education Minister attacked China via Twitter. Domestically, the episode complicated the already poor handling of the crisis by the government. Then Health Minister, Luiz Henrique Mandetta, had to distance himself from Bolsonaro and actively engage in the negotiations with China to try to secure the much-needed equipment, with several governors deciding to negotiate directly with Beijing (Benites, 2020), and thus bypassing the federal government.

While Bolsonaro struggled to secure any equipment from China, the state of Maranhão was able to buy 107 mechanical ventilators and 200,000 masks (CartaCapital, 2020). São Paulo, a state that has strengthened its relations with China significantly under the administration of governor João Doria, secured 342 mechanical ventilators (Jornal Opção, 2020). On top of the federal government's struggles to manage the crisis, in April 2020, Minister Mandetta claimed that the United States' massive buy of Chinese equipment was the cause of the cancellation of many acquisitions that Brazil had negotiated with Beijing (Cancian & Uribe, 2020). Days after, it was reported that 600 Chinese mechanical ventilators worth 7.4 million dollars travelling to Brazil were blocked in Miami. The purchase was ultimately cancelled on the grounds of "technical reasons" (Zanini, 2020).

When the role of the US in blocking the Brazilian purchases of Chinese equipment went public, Senator José Serra criticized President Bolsonaro and asked him to demand an explanation from Donald Trump about the use of Washington's economic power to harm the population of a country that is, supposedly, a partner (Mota, 2020).

### *Diminishing Brazil's Dependence on China*

During his campaign, Bolsonaro clearly expressed his intention to align with the United States and to diminish Brazil's dependence on China, understanding very clearly that, for Latin American countries, approaching any of the two poles meant almost inevitable distancing from the other (Urdinez et al., 2016). However, as all the cases above show,



the Brazilian president has struggled to achieve these objectives due to the new condition of dual hegemony. Despite Bolsonaro's initial willingness to decouple, Brazil-China relations strengthen in several realms (Stuenkel, 2019)—sometimes even at the cost of displeasing Washington (de Sá, 2019).

Beyond the 100 billion dollars for infrastructure investment announced in November 2019, several Chinese companies have participated and won contracts in various sectors of the economy: oil (e.g., bid for the Buzios oil fields), mining (e.g., construction of a steel rolling mill in Marabá), and technology (e.g., launch of the 6th Sino-Brazilian satellite). São Paulo, Brazil's most populated state and its most important financial and industrial center, began negotiations to increase China's investment in hydro and solar energy (SP Notícias, 2019). A Chinese company has also begun negotiations for the concession of the Line 6 in the state's metro railway system (Estadão, 2019).

Bolsonaro's shift in stance vis-à-vis China seems to suggest that he has realized that the country's dependence on China is deeper than expected, and that the possibility of diminishing it under dual hegemony seems almost impossible. The US has not been willing to reciprocate Bolsonaro's intentions to strengthen the relationship, the commodities boom is over, and Chinese influence extends beyond the federal government's reach. The strengthening of the Sino-Brazilian relationship under Jair Bolsonaro, a president that intended to do the exact opposite at the beginning of his government, reinforces our case about systemic opportunities being necessary for true Brazilian agency in foreign policy.

The cases analyzed here show that China and the US are the actors that have determined the outcome in each of them, imposing rigid boundaries on the Brazilian space of maneuver, just as we predicted would be the case under dual hegemony.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have provided a new framework to understand the behavior of relatively small countries like Brazil under the current hegemonic transition, developing a concept we dubbed “dual hegemony.” While traditional work on the foreign policy of subaltern states like Brazil has usually focused on the constraints imposed by US hegemony and the foreign policy strategies that such countries might pursue to increase their autonomy, little theoretical work has been devoted to understanding the

forces at work in a situation in which both the hegemon and its challenger in a global power transition impose constraints upon these actors. We propose that these situations might narrow the space of maneuver for states where the presence of hegemon and challenger overlap. This space corresponds to the intersection of foreign policies that great powers are willing to accept without imposing severe costs or, in other words, a veto.

One empirical implication of the argument is that, to be located in a position of dual hegemony, there must be a loosening of the hegemon's sphere of influence and the subaltern state must move toward the challenger. Looking at the case of Brazil, we corroborate that this fits what we know about five key cases of Brazilian foreign policy "successes" in the twenty first century: the creation of UNASUR, the boycott of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), participation in the BRICS group, the development of ties with China, and distancing from the US in multilateral institutions. Although Brazilian agency might have played a role in these developments, changes in the underlying great power structure were undoubtedly necessary for them.

A second empirical implication of our argument is that, once in a space of dual hegemony, subaltern states will find themselves in a tight corset imposed by the limits of what both hegemon and challenger are willing to tolerate. Again, focusing on Brazil, we have found this to be true when analyzing the Brazilian travails to join the OECD, the tense Brazilian 5G network negotiations, the unwilling moderation of Bolsonaro's anti-China rhetoric, China's forceful role in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and Bolsonaro's frustrated quest to reduce dependency on China.

Our findings suggest that this framework enhances an understanding of Brazilian foreign policy. They also suggest that these dynamics are largely dependent on the foreign policy of great powers like the US and China, and that countries under dual hegemony might find the situation to be increasingly untenable in a context of rising tensions between the poles. Changes in US and Chinese foreign policies might even reduce margin of maneuver to zero, possibly causing the intersection disappear—there would be no possible overlap, as in the Cold War—and forcing countries currently under dual hegemony to make a choice. At the present moment, however, this has not happened, and the dynamics we find in Brazil are probably affecting many other states around the world.

## REFERENCES

- Abdenur, A. E. (2014). China and the BRICS development bank: Legitimacy and multilateralism in south-south cooperation. *IDS Bulletin*, 45(4), 85–101.
- Adghirni, S., & Sink, J. (2019, October 10). Trump says he still supports Brazil in OECD, Despite Letter. *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-10/u-s-turns-down-brazil-s-oecd-bid-after-publicly-endorsing-it>. Assessed 9 November 2020.
- Almeida, P. R. d. (2010). Never Before Seen in Brazil: Luis Inácio Lula da Silva's Grand Diplomacy. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, 53(2), 160–177.
- Almeida, P. R. d., Tavares, M., Onuki, J., & Carneiro, L. (2011). *Brasil, as Américas e o Mundo: Opinião Pública e Política Externa*. Instituto de Relações Internacionais da USP.
- Álvares, D. (2019, December 4). EUA Ameaçam Cancelar Acordo de Alcântara Se Brasil Mantiver China No Leilão 5G. *Huffpost*. <https://tinyurl.com/uvv9386>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Amorim Neto, O. (2012). *De Dutra a Lula: A Condução e os Determinantes da Política Externa Brasileira*. Elsevier.
- Benites, A. (2020, March 25). Desconfiados de Bolsonaro, Governadores Recorrem à China por Ajuda Contra Coronavírus. *El País, Brasil*. <https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2020-03-25/desconfiados-de-bolsonaro-governadores-recorrem-a-china-por-ajuda-contra-coronavirus.html>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Bernal Meza, R. (2010). International thought in the Lula Era. *Revista Brasileira De Política Internacional*, 53, 193–213.
- Boadle, A. (2020, January 15). U.S. Backs Brazil for OECD Membership Ahead of Argentina. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-oecd-usa/u-s-backs-brazil-for-oecd-membership-ahead-of-argentina-idUSKBN1ZE01Z>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Burges, S. (2017). *Brazil in the world: The international relations of a South American Giant*. Manchester University Press.
- Burges, S., & Chagas, F. (2017). The importance of presidential leadership for Brazilian foreign policy. *Policy Studies*, 38(2), 277–290.
- Campos Mello, P. (2019, December 24). Brasil Deve Aderir a Programa de Investimentos dos EUA que Tenta Frear China. *Folha de S. Paulo*. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/12/brasil-deve-aderir-a-programa-de-investimentos-dos-eua-que-tenta-frear-china.shtml>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Campos Mello, P. (2020, April 14). Ataques Fragilizam Brasil e Ajudam China a Obter Concessões, Avalia Acadêmico. *Folha de S. Paulo*. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2020/04/ataques-fragilizam-brasil-e-ajudam-china-a->

- obter-concessoes-avalia-academico.shtml?utm\_source=twitter&utm\_medium=social&utm\_campaign=comptw. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Cancian, N., & Uribe, G. (2020, April 1). Compra em Massa Pelos EUA Cancelou Aquisição de Equipamentos Para o Brasil, Diz Mandetta. *Folha de S. Paulo*. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/equilibrioesaude/2020/04/compra-em-massa-pelos-eua-cancelou-compras-de-equipamentos-para-o-brasil-diz-mandetta.shtml>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Carta Capital. (2020, April 16). *Flávio Dino Dribla Trump e Bolsonaro Para Comprar Respiradores da China*. <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/saude/flavio-dino-dribla-trump-e-bolsonaro-para-comprar-respiradores-da-china/>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Cordeiro, M. (2015). Notas Sobre a Parceira Estratégica Brasil—China. In A. B. Soria & P. M. García (Eds.), *China en América Latina y el Caribe: Escenarios estratégicos subregionales* (pp. 249–274). FLACSO-CAF.
- Danese, S. (2017, July 15). Brasil, América del Sur, y el resto del mundo. *La Nación*. <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/brasil-america-del-sur-y-el-resto-del-mundo-nid2042983/>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- De Sá, N. (2019, November 18). Com Brics “Mais Coeso que G7”, Bolsonaro Deixa Trump Por Xi. *Folha de S. Paulo*. <https://tinyurl.com/w4u9rfy>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2018). *Exploring New Forms of Cooperation Between China and Latin America and the Caribbean*. [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/43214/1/S1701249\\_en.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/43214/1/S1701249_en.pdf). Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Ellis, R. E. (2016). Cooperation and mistrust between China and the US in Latin America. In M. Myers & C. Wise (Eds.), *The political economy of China-Latin America relations in the new millennium* (pp. 39–57). Routledge.
- Estadão. (2019, October 19). *Chineses estão perto de assumir Linha 6 do Metrô de São Paulo*. <https://exame.abril.com.br/economia/chineses-estao-perto-de-assumir-linha-6-do-metro-de-sao-paulo/>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Flores-Macías, G., & Kreps, S. (2013). The foreign policy consequences of trade: China’s commercial relations with Africa and Latin America, 1992–2006. *Journal of Politics*, 75(2), 357–371.
- Jiménez, C., & Benites, A. (2020, April 9). Provoações à China Geram Apreensão em Plena Pandemia e Podem Cobrar ‘Desconto’ em Exportações do Brasil. *El País, Brasil*. <https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2020-04-09/provocoes-a-china-geram-apreensao-em-plena-pandemia-e-podem-cobrar-desconto-em-exportacoes-do-brasil.html>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Jornal Opção. (2020, April 10). *São Paulo de João Doria Consegue Comprar dos Chineses. Mas Bolsonaro Não Consegue*. <https://www.jornalopcao.com.br/bastidores/sao-paulo-de-joao-doria-consegue-comprar-dos-chineses-mas-bolsonaro-nao-consegue-247360/>. Accessed 9 November 2020.

- Leiva, D. (2017). Xi Jinping and The Sino-Latin American relations in The 21st century: Facing the beginning of A new phase? *Journal of China and International Relations*, 5(1), 35–67.
- Leiva, D. (2020). *China's approach towards Latin America vis-à-vis the United States: A "cautious balancing" strategy*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Mahoney, J., & Vanderpoel, R. (2015). Set diagrams and qualitative research. *Comparative Political Studies*, 48(1), 65–100.
- Malamud, A., & Alcañiz, I. (2017). Managing security in a zone of peace: Brazil's soft approach to regional governance. *Revista Brasileira De Política Internacional*, 60(1), 1–22.
- Mijares, V. M. (2020). Filling the structural gap: Geopolitical links explaining the South American Defense Council. *Colombia Internacional*, 101, 3–28.
- Mota, E. (2020, April 7). *Serra Cobra Posição de Bolsonaro Sobre Bloqueio à Compra de Respiradores*. UOL. <https://congressoemfoco.uol.com.br/legislativo/serra-cobra-posicao-de-bolsonaro-sobre-bloqueio-a-compra-de-respiradores/>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Mourón, F., & Urdinez, F. (2014). A comparative analysis of Brazil's foreign policy drivers towards the USA: Comment on Amorim Neto (2011). *Brazilian Political Science Review*, 8(2), 94–115.
- Myers, M., & Gallagher, K. (2020). *Scaling Back: Chinese Development Finance in LAC, 2019*. <https://www.thedialogue.org/analysis/scaling-back-chinese-development-finance-in-lac-2019/>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Paraguassu, L. (2020, March 9). Brazil, U.S. Sign Agreement to Develop Defense Technology. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-brazil-defense-idUSKBN20V0X7>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Phillips, N. (2003). Hemispheric integration and subregionalism in the Americas. *International Affairs*, 79(2), 327–349.
- Phillips, T. (2020, March 20). Bolsonaro's son enrages Beijing by blaming China for coronavirus crisis. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/19/coronavirus-bolsonaro-son-china-row>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Ramanzini, H., & Vigevani, T. (2010). The changing nature of multilateralism and Brazilian foreign policy. *The International Spectator*, 45(4), 63–71.
- Rampton, R., & Paraguassu, L. (2019, March 19). U.S. Warns Brazil About Huawei and 5G in Talks: Senior U.S. Official. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-brazil-huawei-tech/u-s-warns-brazil-about-huawei-and-5g-in-talks-senior-u-s-official-idUSKCNIQZ2IK>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Ray, R. (2017). The Panda's Pawprint: The environmental impact of the China-led re-primarization in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Ecological Economics*, 134, 150–159.

- Ray, R., & Wang, K. (2019). *China-Latin America economic bulletin, 2019 edition*. <https://www.bu.edu/gdp/files/2019/02/GCI-Bulletin-Final-2019-1-1.pdf>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Riggiozzi, P., & Grugel, J. (2015). Regional governance and legitimacy in South America: The meaning of UNASUR. *International Affairs*, 91(4), 781–797.
- Roett, R. (2011). *The New Brazil*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Russell, R., & Tokatlian, J. G. (2003). From antagonistic autonomy to relational autonomy: A theoretical reflection from the Southern Cone. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 45(1), 1–24.
- Schenoni, L. (2012, November 14). *Los Determinantes Sistémicos de la Política Externa Brasileña en el Contexto de América Latina*. Paper presented in the Fourth Uruguayan Congress of Political Science, Montevideo.
- Schenoni, L. (2013). As Possíveis Causas Domésticas da Liderança Brasileira na América do Sul. *Contexto Internacional*, 34(2), 659–691.
- Schenoni, L. (2017a, July 12). Brasil Contrae su Política Exterior. *La Nación*. <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/brasil-contrae-su-politica-exterior-nid2041884/>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Schenoni, L. (2017b). The Argentina-Brazil regional power transition. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 14(4), 469–489.
- Schenoni, L. (2019). Hegemony. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of international relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.509>.
- Schenoni, L. (2021). Brazil: Pursuing the multipolar mirage. In B. Zala (Ed.), *National perspectives on a multipolar order*. Manchester University Press.
- Schenoni, L., Belem Lopes, D., & Casarões, G. (2019). *Myths of multipolarity: The Sources of Brazilian overexpansion* (LSE Global South Unit Working Paper, 1). <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/102579/>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- South China Morning Post*. (2019, November 14). China Part of Brazil's Future, Jair Bolsonaro Says as He and Xi Jinping Sign Transport and Investment Agreements. <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/americas/article/3037631/china-part-brazils-future-jair-bolsonaro-says-he-and-xi-jinping>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Souza, A. (2008). *O Brasil na Região e no Mundo: Percepções da Comunidade Brasileira de Política Externa*. Centro Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais (CEBRI).
- SP Notícias*. (2019, August 9). *SP Abre as Portas para Investimento de Gigante Chinesa de Energia*. <https://www.saopaulo.sp.gov.br/spnoticias/sp-abre-as-portas-para-investimento-de-gigante-chinesa-de-energia-2/>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Spektor, M. (2016). Brazil: Shadows of the past and contested ambitions. In W. I. Hitchcock, M. P. Leffler, & J. W. Legro (Eds.), *Shaper nations: Strategies for a changing world* (pp. 17–35). Harvard University Press.

- Spektor, M. (2018, December 27). Bolsonaro will regret baiting the Chinese Tiger. *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/b5371a10-044a-11e9-bf0f-53b8511afd73>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Strüver, G. (2015). China's strategic partnership diplomacy: Determinants and outcomes of international alignment. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 10(1), 31–65.
- Stuenkel, O. (2017). *Brazil's Foreign policy isn't dead. It's just hibernating*. Americas Quarterly. <https://www.americasquarterly.org/content/brazils-foreign-policy-hibernating>. Accessed 23 November 2020.
- Stuenkel, O. (2019, December 6). Bolsonaro placed a losing bet on Trump. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/06/bolsonaro-losing-bet-trump-brazil-tariffs/>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Stuenkel, O., & Taylor, M. (2015). *Brazil on the global stage: Power, ideas, and the liberal international order* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tsebelis, G. (2002). *Veto players: How political institutions work*. Princeton University Press.
- Urdinez, F., Mouron, F., Schenoni, L., & Oliveira, A. (2016). Chinese economic statecraft and U.S. hegemony in Latin America. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 58(4), 3–30.
- Vigevani, T., & Cepaluni, G. (2007). Lula's foreign policy and the quest for autonomy through diversification. *Third World Quarterly*, 28(7), 1309–1326.
- Weiffen, B., Wehner, L., & Nolte, D. (2013). Overlapping regional security institutions in South America: The case of OAS and UNASUR. *International Area Studies Review*, 16(4), 370–389.
- Wise, C., & Chonn Ching, V. (2018). Conceptualizing China-Latin America relations in the twenty-first century: The boom, the bust, and the aftermath. *The Pacific Review*, 31(5), 553–572.
- WITS. (2020). *Brazil exports, imports and trade balance by country and region 2018*. World Integrated Trade Solution. <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/BRA/Year/LTST/TradeFlow/EXPIMP>. Accessed 9 November 2020.
- Zanini, F. (2020, April 3). China Cancela Compra de Respiradores pela Bahia, e Carga Fica Retida nos EUA. *Folha de S. Paulo*. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2020/04/china-cancela-compra-de-respiradores-pela-bahia-e-carga-fica-retida-nos-eua.shtml>. Accessed 9 November 2020.