


ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Reshaping the Policy Arena: How the Agro-Export Policy Network Propelled Brazil within Global Agricultural Governance

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(Received 2 June 2019; revised 21 August 2019; accepted 28 August 2019; first published online 22 October 2019)

## Abstract

The article analyzes how Brazil has become an increasingly active voice for liberalization within global spheres of agricultural governance. With the focus on domestic institutional developments, we identify the gradual materialization of an agro-export policy network consisting of public and private actors. We conduct a periodization of the overarching phases of the policy network's development, from its incipient formation during the Uruguay Round to a high degree of organizational refinement in the new millennium. Through analysis of its external linkages, internal structure, and the distribution of resources, we examine how this network became an absolutely central factor in spurring the offensive orientation and assertive engagement of Brazil within the global agricultural policy arena. We thereby provide a domestically rooted explanation for the rise of Brazil as a central agricultural 'player', with the focus on the collective agency capacity of public and private stakeholders.

**Keywords:** Policy network; Brazil; agribusiness; agriculture; trade negotiations

## 1. Introduction

Brazil has become a sizeable food exporter in recent decades, and the country has gained leverage within spheres of global agricultural governance. Efforts to influence international processes of agricultural policy-making have enjoyed strong domestic backing from various public and private entities engaging in new interrelationships to enhance foreign market access of the Brazilian agribusiness (Carvalho, 2003; Shaffer et al., 2010). In this study, we identify the emergence and gradual consolidation of an 'agro-export policy network' since the 1990s. We conceive of this network as consisting of public and private entities and individuals who over time have engaged in consistent deliberations and structured cooperation with the goal of promoting Brazilian agricultural exports. This has led to the concentration of efforts, the pooling of resources, and the establishment of an institutional space which provides the foundation for Brazilian economic foreign policy within this field. This agro-export policy network's evolution thereby constitutes a domestically rooted explanation for the increasingly assertive role played by Brazil and its impact globally on agricultural policy formation (Hopewell, 2013; Carvalho, 2010; Hurrell and Narlikar, 2006).

The present study builds on a body of literature which analyzes Brazilian economic diplomacy (Doctor, 2015; Hurrell and Narlikar, 2006; Ramanzini Júnior and Mariano, 2013), and in particular contributions that emphasize how domestic constituents influence this foreign policy field (Farias, 2010; Carvalho, 2010; Conceição-Heldt, 2013; Hopewell, 2014). These contributions

have often been structured as case studies, with a focus on the WTO system. Shaffer et al. (2010) undertake a longitudinal analysis of the development of Brazilian trade policy networks, mainly through an empirical focus. We contribute to existing knowledge by focusing on the establishment of a Brazilian policy network set on increasing global market access in the field of agriculture. We thereby link domestic institutional developments with the trajectories of actors that would eventually influence global agricultural governance and regulatory spheres. On a conceptual level, we adopt the policy network approach (Rhodes, 1988; Marsh and Rhodes, 1992; Marsh and Smith, 2000) and try to make sense of the linkages between the various actors involved in this process. We therefore offer an integrated perspective on the network as our main unit of analysis, through a theoretical approach which also emphasizes its component parts and complex internal dynamics of change.

We examine the Brazilian agro-export policy network's evolution and its gradually increasing impact on the country's economic diplomacy by scrutinizing its: (1) external linkages, (2) internal structure, and (3) distribution of resources. The changes within these dimensions define the constitution of the agro-export policy network at any given point in time. We, therefore, structure our analysis using periodization, that is we divide our period of analysis into three: 1990 to 2001, 2001 to 2008, and from 2008 onwards. Within the initial period from 1990 to 2001, Brazil abandoned its national developmentalist economic model, and aspired to integrate within the global economy by accepting the institutions of the global commercial framework. Spurred on by increasing commodity prices and the more assertive foreign policy orientation of the Lula administration (2003–2010), in the second period from 2001 to 2008 Brazil increasingly sought to shape the multilateral policy arena to improve the terms of its global commercial participation. From 2008, Brazil's high-profile foreign policy projection declined, initially due to strategic neglect under the first Rousseff administration (2011–2014) (Cervo and Lessa, 2014), and subsequently due to internal political turmoil. Efforts to increase agricultural exports nonetheless continued, with some success as they aimed at particular governance arenas that were thought to potentially enhance the global market access of specific sub-sectors within Brazilian agribusiness.

We review instances of public–private cooperation within multilateral and bi-regional trade negotiations and the WTO dispute settlement system, lobbying within the EU system, and multi-stakeholder governance. Although the network acts within different institutional spheres, similar strategies and patterns of interactions between its participants can be identified. We draw upon interview data collected by the authors in Brazil from 2016 to 2018, on archival research conducted in the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs over the same period, as well as public policy documents and secondary literature. The remainder of the article proceeds as follows: (1) a review of the policy network theory and a methodological delineation, (2) an analysis of the incipient network formation from 1990 to 2001, (3) an analysis of its gradual maturation from 2001 to 2008, (4) an examination of its operational refinement from 2008 until the present, and (5) our final considerations about the policy network's historical development and its repercussions for Brazilian foreign policy.

## 2. Conceptualizing the Agro-Export Policy Network

With the transition towards the information society in the late twentieth century, social organization has assumed an increasingly networked structure (Castells, 2000). Network-based governance approaches have thereby been applied to evermore complex policy issues (O'Toole, 1997; Torfing, 2005). Policy network analysis has been formulated as a tool to examine the often heterogeneous actor interrelationships in contemporary politics. Policy networks have been defined as 'sets of formal institutional and informal linkages between governmental and other actors, structured around shared if endlessly negotiated beliefs and interests in public policy making and implementation' (Rhodes, 2008, p. 426), and as relatively 'stable patterns of social relations

between interdependent actors, which take shape around policy problems and/or policy programmes' (Kickert et al., 1997, p. 6).

We seek to contribute to explanations of how policy networks transform through a longitudinal analysis (O'Toole, 1997) of the rise of the Brazilian agro-export policy network since the early 1990s. Accounting for changes in policy networks has been associated with some difficulty (Thatcher, 1998), and fueled a variety of explanations (Rhodes, 2008, p. 436). We treat the evolution of the agro-export policy network as an interplay between public and private actors, and the broader domestic and global economic and political developments. Policy network analysts have differentiated between (1) the micro-level of particular actors – be these either individuals or organizations, (2) the meso-level interactions between public and private institutions, and (3) the macro-level of intergovernmental relations (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992). Although policy networks can be situated mainly at the meso-level, their interconnectedness with other levels has been strongly accentuated (Atkinson and Coleman, 1989, p. 49; Marsh and Rhodes, 1992, p. 268). A comprehensive account of the evolution of the Brazilian agro-export policy network, while focused on the meso-level, should therefore also be sensitive to structural developments at the macro-level, and to the significance of individual and institutional trajectories at the micro-level.

A fundamental distinction between policy network structure, and 'extra-network structure' is made by Benson (1975, p. 247). The latter refers to linkages to actors outside the network, and is relevant in order to analyze the outputs and inputs between the network and its surrounding environment. A policy network is thereby subjected to macro-level inputs from the political sphere (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992, p. 257; Zafonte and Sabatier, 2004, p. 79) which produces policy outcomes with repercussions for the broader political environment. Marsh and Smith illustrate how the network's policy outputs produce a feedback which both affects its structural context and constituent entities/actors (Marsh and Smith, 2000, p. 10). We treat the foreign-policy outputs of the agro-export policy network through their: (1) internal repercussions within Brazilian foreign policy and (2) their external repercussions through the impact on the international processes of agricultural policy-making. While the internal repercussions are expected to wield a feedback on the policy network, mainly through actors' learning, the external repercussions are expected to produce feedback through the change in the network's structural context (*ibid.*, p. 9).

In our analysis of the evolution of the Brazilian agro-export policy network, we also examine the linkages between public and private institutions within this, its constituent elements, and its internal structure. This focus on the meso-level becomes imperative as 'patterns of network relations have effects independent of the characteristics of individual actors', implying that 'the system of relations amongst actors must be studied as a whole in order to analyze behavior' (Thatcher, 1998, p. 400). The network's internal relations can be ordered along different axes, such as: 'density', referring to the volume of links between its members; the degree of 'centralization', around key participants who mediate relations between participants; and 'fragmentation', referring to the distance between its constituent entities (Morrisey et al., 1994, pp. 61–62). Within a structure of centre–periphery, the significance of actors who obtain centrality through the management of linkages between members is frequently highlighted (Benson, 1975, p. 230; Atkinson and Coleman, 1989, p. 51; Wang, 2013, p. 317). This has been termed 'core agency', where the coordinating function enhances network efficiency (Provan and Milward, 1995, p. 13), or as a 'meta-governors' that both assumes initiative and responsibility for planning and mediation (Palm and Backman, 2017, p. 145). We thereby scrutinize the internal workings of the agro-export policy network, viewed as a specific configuration of actors, as well as the functional relations between them, in order to account for the changes in the network's structure throughout the time periods analyzed.

Our third analytical focus leads us to explore the distribution of resources within the agricultural policy network, and their influence on external policy making. Specifications of such

resources have included money and authority (Benson, 1975, p. 232), and knowledge (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992, pp. 263–264). As different actors each control a different kind of resources, interdependencies are formed within the policy network (Rhodes, 1988, p. 78; Wang, 2013, p. 318). Although the distribution of resources between actors is often asymmetric (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992, p. 255), the heterogeneity of resources and the concomitant interdependency in relations can often spur inter-organizational cooperation (Sun and Cao, 2018, p. 601). ‘Operationally autonomous’ actors therefore become ‘dependent on one another’s resources and capacities in order to get things done’ (Torfing, 2005, p. 307), and resource exchange between actors can define breakthroughs as well as impasses in policy formation (Lu et al., 2018, p. 137).

A network’s effectiveness and capacity to produce impactful policy outcomes may also hinge on its embeddedness in an environment rich in the resources important to policy making (Provan and Milward, 1995, p. 27). Resources thereby both influence a network’s policy outcome by defining its structure and internal relations, while their availability and allocation in turn is determined by the policy outcomes’ effectiveness, and impacts on the network’s structural context (Marsh and Smith, 2000, p. 10). Such feedback mechanisms become highly relevant in assessing how the agro-export policy network’s capability development is positioned within Brazilian economic foreign policy, and how this engagement has influenced its operational capacities.

We establish three research questions with the goal of analyzing the recent evolution and increasing significance of the Brazilian agro-export policy network within the country’s foreign policy:

- RQ1: How do the input and output channels between the agro-export policy network and its surrounding political-economic environment affect its development and ability to influence the conduct of Brazilian foreign policy?
- RQ2: Does the development of the structure of the agro-export policy network reflect centralization around actors who have the capacity and will to pursue common interests?
- RQ3: To what extent has internal resource dependency in the agro-export policy network spurred a process of resource pooling/complementation between its participants?

The development of the policy-network’s external linkages, internal structure, and resource distribution thereby guides our analytical focus. In line with Serdült and Hirschi (2004), we seek to evaluate the impact the evolution of the Brazilian agro-export policy network has wielded on the conduct of foreign policy, and on international policy-making processes within the field of agriculture. We find it reasonable to ascribe this potential to the domestic decision-making processes, due to the increased pluralization of Brazilian foreign policy in recent decades (Anastasia et al., 2012; Cason and Power, 2009), which has occurred in parallel with the consolidation of the agricultural sector’s influence within domestic politics (Barcelos and Berriel, 2009; Simionatto and Costa, 2012; Vigna, 2007). Yet, given the authority which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty) retains within the conduct of Brazilian foreign policy, it nonetheless becomes important to consider this institution’s role in managing the gradual opening of the foreign policy-making process (Farias, 2008; Hurrell and Narlikar, 2006; Ramanzini Júnior and Mariano, 2013). Although the policy-network literature is rooted in a Western political context, recent applications of the policy-network approach have been made in relation to developing countries (Han and Ye, 2017; Lu et al., 2018; Sun and Cao, 2018). This both warrants sensitivity to the particular societal realities of developing nations, but also wields the potential for contributing to the scholarly field by evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the policy-network approach in different institutional contexts.

We adopt a qualitative approach to policy-network analysis, as we examine the network’s development and transformations over time (Weishaar et al., 2015). We thus rely on findings from 44 interviews conducted with Brazilian policy makers/entrepreneurs between 2016 and 2018, and on research within the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the same period,

which involved analysis of 1700 diplomatic cables with relevance for the object of our study. We triangulate these data sources with evidence from public policy documents and secondary literature to obtain different empirical perspectives on the events and processes examined, and on their political significance within the Brazilian foreign engagement.

### 3. 1990–2001: Incipient Formation of the Brazilian Agro-Export Policy Network

The intent to insert agriculture within a multilateral institutional framework during the Uruguay Round spurred a new policy agenda for Brazilian agriculture. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, territorial expansion (Chaddad, 2016, p. 113; Hosono and Hongbo, 2016), technological modernization (Hopewell, 2016a; Lopes et al., 2012), and market-oriented agricultural reform (Helfand, 1999; Mueller and Mueller, 2014) meant that by the 1990s a more internationally competitive agribusiness sector had emerged. While this sector was globally connected in terms of investment (Sauer and Leite, 2012; Jank et al., 2001) and had adopted highly vertical agro-industrial production models (Albano and de Sá, 2011; Mendonça, 2015), it nonetheless faced significant barriers for foreign market access, – particularly from developed countries (Jank et al., 2004, p. 21). The Brazilian agribusiness sector thus increasingly stressed the need to confront global agricultural protectionism, due to its perceived negative impacts on food exports (Costa, 1992, p. 20; Gramacho, 1993, p. 15). This new focus gradually spread amongst agribusiness leaders following developments in the Uruguay Round. By 1988–1989, a turning point was reached when leading representatives of the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives (Organização das Cooperativas do Brasil – OCB), and the Brazilian Rural Society (Sociedade Rural Brasileira – SRB) together with expert advocates from the poultry and orange juice sub-sectors were included in the GATT's trade-negotiations in Geneva.<sup>1</sup>

This new-found strategic perspective also resonated within Brazilian public institutions, particularly the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAPA) (Zandonadi, 1994, p. 10). In accordance with signals from an increasingly wide array of domestic stakeholders in and around the agribusiness sector, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the Itamaraty) also became more positive towards agricultural liberalization. During the Uruguay Round, consensus around an offensive engagement within agricultural negotiations was thereby gradually formed between the foreign policy establishment, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the private sector (Farias, 2010, p. 680). By the early 1990s, a general understanding was reached between the private sector and the most important institutions within the federal bureaucracy regarding the need to actively pursue global agricultural market access. This joint objective engendered a loosely coordinated recalibration of public and private institutions in order to respond to the challenges of the new international trade architecture.

The relationship between the Itamaraty and the private sector organizations became central in defining Brazil's engagement in international agricultural policy-making. Because the agro-export policy network's technical advises and policy guidelines have to pass through Itamaraty in order to wield an effective international impact, this institution has retained a certain gatekeeper function (Hurrell and Narlikar, 2006, p. 427), which bestows it with a special authoritative position. The process of re-democratization from the mid-1980s led to diversification of interests in the foreign policy-making process, and provided more space for private actors (Cason and Power, 2009, p. 119). The Itamaraty nonetheless still had a significant degree of institutional autonomy, meaning that inputs from other societal actors could be viewed as demands that largely converged with its own agenda (Ramanzini Junior and Mariano, 2013, pp. 1207–1208; Doctor, 2015, p. 292; Anastasia et al., 2012, pp. 626–627). However, as Brazil assumed a more offensive posture, the gap in trade negotiation capabilities compared to developed countries quickly became evident. The complexity of exerting influence within commercial negotiations was therefore an important

<sup>1</sup>Interview with OCB former president, 9 December 2016.

factor which spurred the Itamaraty to seek competence outside of its institutional confinements (Conceição-Heldt, 2013, p. 180).

Business organizations therefore realized the potential significance of their support within the commercial foreign policy-making process (Mancuso and Oliveira, 2006; p. 161; Shaffer et al., 2010, p. 63). With its accumulated technical knowledge and strong ties to agribusiness, MAPA contributed to these efforts through close and frequent contacts within the Itamaraty, or as an active articulator of aggregate sectorial concerns. Thus, rather than the promotion of particularistic interests, from the 1990s Brazilian foreign policy began to reflect broader sectorial demands for global agricultural market liberalization. The widening of the institutional arena for foreign economic policy-making thereby permitted the materialization of a policy network to promote agricultural exports.

With the liberalization and structural transformation of the Brazilian economy in the 1990s, the structure within many business sectors also changed (Doctor, 2007, p. 113). While the previously closed economic model was marked by mandatory modes of representation, exposure to increased competition led to a form voluntary collective organization. The new organizations performed a wide range of tasks for their members, beyond purely representational functions, such as assisting in the challenges associated with internationalization and global market access (Diniz and Boschi, 2003). These modes of agribusiness organization both resulted in a sub-sectorial interest representation, but also in broad cross-sectorial associations with export promotion as a common aim (Hopewell, 2014, p. 299), as evidenced by the creation of the Brazilian Agribusiness Coalition (Associação Brasileira do Agronegócio – ABAG) in 1993, which encompassed various entities from the Brazilian agribusiness complex and also aimed to support international economic integration. Adopting a strong focus on international commercial negotiations, the Brazilian Enterprise Coalition (Coalisão Empresarial Brasileira – CEB) was created in 1996 as a supra-sectorial organization representing both industry and agriculture. On the sub-sectorial level, new producer associations also proliferated, and would provide vital support for Brazilian litigations at the WTO. The new organizational structure for the rural sector's interest representation also provided the basis for the creation of institutional vehicles aimed at international commercial negotiations in cooperation with traditional corporativist organizations.

In 1999, the ABAG founded the 'Permanent Forum for International Agricultural Negotiations' (The Forum) together with the National Confederation for Agriculture (CNA), and the OCB. The Forum was created to support negotiations to reform agricultural trade as an offensively minded response to disagreements with the more protectionist Brazilian manufacturing sector, which imposed certain restrictions on the Brazilian commercial diplomacy within international negotiations. The establishment of the Forum thus provided a means to circumvent such limitations (Mancini, 2010, p. 149).

The new mode of sectorial interest representation for Brazilian agribusiness also redefined its relationship with public institutions, while it simultaneously spurred an increasingly international orientation. Public institutions were also quick to embrace the changes, and to actively pursue cooperation. In the early 1990s, MAPA established a series of agricultural Sectorial Chambers to manage interactions with specific sub-sectors and forge consensus on courses of action within a more competitive business scenario (Iglécias, 2007, p. 82). MAPA gained a special position within the nascent agro-export policy network, as close connections to the agribusiness sector provided it with a representational mandate as the sector's public voice. The Ministry was also tuned into the demands and challenges faced by individual producer groups, which enabled it to provide the essential inputs for the development of the Brazilian commercial strategy. Cross-sectorial organizations were similarly instrumental in channeling broader agribusiness demands and suggestions towards the foreign policy-makers in the Itamaraty. The CEB and Forum maintained close and formalized contacts with the foreign policy establishment regarding trade issues, but also had a more informal recurrent dialogue with other ministries (Mancini, 2010, p. 149). The official sectorial representative, the CNA, cultivated increasingly close relations

with the Itamaraty during the 1990s. While the CNA both exercised its representational function to influence decisions taken within this ministry, it also retained a degree of leverage as this sector's aggregated voice. Thus, in cases when the Itamaraty sought private sector backing, convincing the CNA could often provide such support (*ibid.*, p. 154).

Coordination mechanisms for agro-export policy and strategies between public entities were also established in this period. The Foreign Trade Chamber (Camex) was founded in 1995 as an inter-ministerial forum for trade planning. As MAPA and particularly the Itamaraty were amongst the most active and influential participants within the Camex, agricultural liberalization became a central point of discussion – although a more free-trade oriented posture marked the former compared to the latter (Marzagão, 2007). A milestone in the process of reorientation of Brazilian agribusiness towards global markets was the establishment of the National Forum for Agriculture, in 1996. The initiative provided unprecedented experience of close deliberations between public and private agribusiness stakeholders, and resulted in the formulation of various recommendations to strengthen the Brazilian competitive position. These included measures such as technological specialization, credit provision, regulatory concessions, investment facilitation, and support for sectorial market integration (De Souza, 1998).

From the Uruguay Round and towards the turn of the millennium, a process of strategic reorientation and institutional reshuffling marked the relations between public and private entities, which led to a gradual materialization of an agro-export policy network. This set a new course for Brazilian economic foreign policy, and provided important institutional and technical support from the private sector. It also gave Itamaraty a mandate to engage more assertively in the pursuit of agricultural market access. While this did not lead to immediate results in terms of foreign policy achievements, it did lead to a change in Brazilian foreign policy, which became evident towards the late 1990s. Throughout 1999, the Forum held meetings with different agribusiness stakeholders, and formulated suggestions to guide Brazilian participation in the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle that year. The Forum also maintained consultations with private entities from other Mercosul countries and the Cairns group, in order to define common offensive interests. Although these efforts did not produce results at Seattle, they represented an hitherto unseen degree of sectorial organization in support of an offensive Brazilian position within the field of agriculture (Beraldo, 2000, p. 4). Through the domestic public–private alignments, by the dawn of the new millennium the ground had been laid for a more active and impactful engagement to increase Brazilian agribusiness' global market access.

#### 4. 2001–2008: Functional Refinement and Outwards Projection

As a new round of multilateral commercial negotiations approached in 2001, many domestic stakeholders mobilized in order to influence and support Brazilian participation. The initial framing of the 'Development Round' implied that agricultural market access to developed countries, – an issue which had been largely neglected during the Uruguay Round – was placed centrally on the multilateral agenda. Furthermore, being amongst the few areas within which the country could assume a demanding posture, and given the increasing significance which agriculture had gained within the Brazilian economy due to its export performance (Rodrigues, 2001), this sector had assumed a position of special importance. Brazil thus pursued the goal of offensive agricultural reform at the outset of the Doha Round. Yet, in spite of the consensus between influential public and private actors around this offensive engagement, garnering the necessary resources to provide elaborate and consistent negotiation proposals still constituted a challenge. Diplomatic correspondences between Brazil and the country's WTO representation in Geneva reveal how the Itamaraty, in conjunction with the Ministry of Development, Industry, and Commerce (MDIC) and most noticeably MAPA, actively sought the involvement of sectorial representatives in deliberations with third countries. MAPA also provided important technical inputs for Itamaraty in the preparatory phase of the negotiations. Although the text on agriculture within

the final Doha programme in late 2001 was seen by Brazil as tolerable, the more offensively minded domestic stakeholders were dissatisfied with the slow course of negotiations throughout 2002 and early 2003. These sentiments were particularly nurtured by the US Congress' approval of a new Farm Bill in 2002, which prolonged many agricultural subsidies, and by the two majors'<sup>2</sup> apparent resentment towards profound reform in the run-up to the Cancun Ministerial in 2003. These circumstances sparked a sense of urgency within Brazil, and organizational efforts to challenge the status quo within the field of agricultural policy-making were undertaken in response, as the former Minister of Agriculture, Roberto Rodrigues highlights:

As soon as I took office as Minister of Agriculture, I started making contacts in order to discuss our positions to the Cancun meeting in September 2003 ... In the course of the negotiations, we came to know that Americans and Europeans had already prepared a draft paper and were devising an agreement that would guarantee the success of the Doha Round. Thus, we were heading to a repetition of what happened at the Uruguay Round and we could not accept that. I went to a side meeting of the Cairn's Group in Montreal and expressed my concerns and urged for some reaction that didn't come. So, I announced that the Brazilian government would prepare its own draft paper. Back in Brazil, I gathered the leading ambassador for the Doha Round appointed by Itamaraty (who was also advising me in Montreal) together with experts from MAPA and the CNA. As a result, we drafted a document which, in a few weeks and after some adjustments, ended up at the Brazilian delegation in Geneva where it was circulated amongst other diplomatic delegations and proved to be key to inspire the formation of the agricultural G-20.<sup>3</sup>

(Interview with former Minister of Agriculture, 9 December 2016. Authors' translation).

Also in 2003, the Institute for Trade Studies and International Negotiations (ICONE)<sup>4</sup> was founded, and provided important technical support for the negotiators in Itamaraty. As the sophistication of the tabulations and trade projections required to make consistent negotiation proposals had risen to a high level of complexity, it became evident that private sector organizational resources to support Brazilian diplomatic staff were needed. ICONE provided such support that often formed the basis for negotiation proposals presented by Brazil and the G-20 group of developing country agricultural exporters within the WTO (Hopewell, 2016b, p. 115). ICONE also increased the public visibility of trade-related issues, and gave birth to a generation of trade specialists who would eventually contribute to the crystallization of an epistemic community within the field of agricultural trade.

The two main groups involved in interactions between public and private actors were the Thematic Chamber for International Agricultural Negotiations (*Câmara*) and the Informal Technical Group (Technical Group) (Mancini, 2010, pp. 148–149). The *Câmara* was established by MAPA and was composed of different bureaucratic institutions, as well as ICONE and entities representing the agribusiness sector. The meetings were headed by the CNA, and the group became essential to the formulation of joint positions and strategies for the Brazilian engagement in the Doha Round (Carvalho, 2010, pp. 418–419). The Technical Group, established by the Itamaraty in June 2003, also included MAPA, MDIC, the CNA, ICONE, the Confederation of Agricultural Workers (Contag), and the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA). The

<sup>2</sup>Jargon referring to the European Union and the United States.

<sup>3</sup>The Agricultural G-20 consisting of developing country food exporters within the WTO should not be mistaken with the financial G-20, which comprises of the heads of state and finance ministers of 20 of the largest global economies.

<sup>4</sup>ICONE was founded with support from private entities within the beef (Abiec), chicken (Abef), oilseed (Abiove), pork (Abipecs), sugarcane (Unica) sectors, as well as the industrial federation of São Paulo (Fiesp) and the Brazilian agribusiness association (Abag). The initiative was conceived by Marcos Jank, a former professor of agricultural economics at the University of São Paulo, who's close ties to agribusiness made him a central policy entrepreneur in terms of bridging public and private interests.



Technical Group was central in managing the recurrent contacts with the representation in Geneva, and in devising negotiation tactics. Although it constituted an informal sphere for public–private deliberations, the Technical Group eventually became an important locus of decision-making, as its members’ de-facto authority regarding the negotiations meant that consensus within this group often was directly translated as the official Brazilian position in Geneva.

The pooling of resources and efforts within the Brazilian agro-export policy network appears to have produced noticeable outputs, which influenced the course of the Doha negotiations. At the Cancun Ministerial in September 2003, the Brazilian counter proposal, – largely molded within this policy network – permitted the formation of the group of developing countries, which challenged the agenda set forth by developed nations. During the Conference, representatives from both the CNA and the CEB followed the Brazilian negotiators closely and supported their engagement. The breakdown of negotiations in Cancun fundamentally reshaped the negotiation dynamics, wherein Brazil and the agricultural G-20 henceforth gained a central position. Correspondences between Brasilia and Geneva hereafter indicate an intensification of deliberations with the agricultural sector – especially within the Technical Group. The close cooperation between Itamaraty, MAPA, and agribusiness sectorial organizations within joint working groups and mechanisms of coordination underlay Brazil’s ability to influence the July Package in 2004, as well as the Hong Kong Ministerial in 2005. From 2006, internal divisions became evident between offensive and more defensive minded members of the G-20. This disjuncture was also apparent amongst stakeholders within Brazil, where agribusiness interests and MAPA were often opposed by MDA and Contag. Itamaraty’s centrality within decision making seems to have been crucial in terms of maintaining a relatively cohesive external posture (Ramanzini Junior and Mariano, 2013, p. 1222). Yet, with the increasing economic growth of China and India, the special safeguards measures demanded by these countries were condemned by large swaths of Brazilian agribusiness, who feared potential losses in future exports. The Brazilian agro-export policy network thus became evermore skeptical towards the G-20. The growing resentment amongst agribusiness organizations towards the G-20 group would eventually lead to strong pressure on Itamaraty, and spur Brazil to abandon the G-20 shortly before negotiations definitively broke down by mid-2008.

While the multilateral negotiations undisputedly did receive most attention in the early 2000s, actors within the Brazilian agro-export policy network also engaged in other spheres of the WTO. The establishment of the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) provided an important means for challenging developed countries’ agricultural protectionism through litigation. Sub-sectorial organizations within the sugarcane industry (UNICA) and cotton producers (ABRAPA) thus began to evaluate the possibility of challenging the European subsidy regime for sugar and the US cotton support measures, respectively. MAPA took a positive stance towards these courses of action, and sought stakeholder support, while assuming a pro-active posture by demonstrating the technical viability of initiating proceedings, given the strong indications of global market distortions produced by these support measures. The Secretary of Production and Trade at MAPA in the early 2000s, Pedro Camargo, was very active in this respect. As former president of the Brazilian Rural Society, Camargo had close contacts within the private sector, and his personal engagement in bringing public and private actors together to reach consensus was essential in the preparatory phase of both the cotton and the sugar disputes (Stefano, 2016, p. 34; Shaffer et al., 2010, p. 67). The Itamaraty was initially more hesitant, as the Ministry feared that WTO litigation might wield negative repercussions within other foreign policy areas. The potential benefits had to be weighed against the risks and implications of losing such disputes. ABRAPA’s initiative to seek private sector expertise by contracting the US law firm, Sidley Austin, provided important evidence for the legal consistency of litigation directed at the US cotton support measures. UNICA would also make use of Sidley Austin’s services in the eventual case against the EU’s sugar regime. Consensus around pursuing an offensive course of action was eventually reached between MAPA, Itamaraty, the CNA, and each of the sub-sectorial organizations, and a presidential mandate was given to request consultations by late 2002. In both cases, the negotiations were

prolonged and marked by highly complicated procedures, involving the presentation of arguments based on econometric and legal evidence on behalf of the parties involved. In the cotton case, indepth exchanges took place between the ABRAPA, Sidley Austin, MAPA, the General Coordination of Dispute Settlement – a specialized division within the Itamaraty – as well as the Brazilian representation in Geneva, in response to the challenges arising throughout the case. In 2004, panel reports provided favorable rulings for Brazil in the sugar and cotton cases, which were cemented by the Appellate Body in 2005 (WTO, 2005a; WTO, 2005b). The efforts undertaken by both public and private actors, and the delegation of responsibilities to actors with the resources to provide a specialized contribution had thus proven to be highly successful. Lawyers from Sidley Austin interviewed highlight how the cotton case was unique both in terms of the complexity of the legal proceedings, but also due to the significance of a developing country successfully challenging a developed country with a resulting compensational disbursement of US \$750 million.<sup>5</sup> This victory thus also assumed a broader significance, as it proved that a developing country, with sufficient organizational resources, could make use of international legal instruments to impose changes upon agricultural support regimes in the developed world. The cotton and sugar cases at the WTO thus constitute landmarks in the organizational refinement of the Brazilian agro-export policy network as seen in the offensive posture taken, and bear testimony to its capacity to impact the global institutional framework within the field of agriculture.

## 5. 2008 Onwards: Enhancement of Private Sector Capacities and Independent Agency

The breakdown of the Doha Round spelled out a series of new challenges for the Brazilian agro-exporters, as the country had been betting strongly on obtaining market access through the multilateral negotiation track. As the WTO thereafter lost importance as an institutional vehicle for the pursuit of new market access (Low, 2015) and in a global context of increasing commercial preferentialism (Acharya et al., 2011; Wilson, 2015), the central actors within the Brazilian agro-export policy network were forced to reconsider their international strategy. The increasing importance of private standards within global agricultural commodity chains (Chkanikova and Lehner, 2015; Fuchs et al., 2011; Tallontire, 2007) also constituted a new dimension within which the Brazilian agribusiness would have to engage. Thus, while the multilateral negotiations had concentrated the efforts of stakeholders within this policy network, the Doha Round's termination led to a diffusion of attention towards a variety of global policy-making processes and transnational political spheres. This did not reflect a decline in the priority of foreign agricultural market opening, but, on the contrary, became a necessary reshuffling in order to respond to the increasingly complex regulatory challenges, which the capacity accumulation of the previous years had enabled.

The setbacks within the multilateral sphere prompted Brazil to focus on alternative avenues for accessing the large consumer markets of developed countries. By 2010, the interregional negotiations between Mercosul and the European Union were thereby resumed. Although only 10.6% of the EU tariff lines are made up of non-ad-valorem tariffs, these account for 46.5% of tariff lines in the agricultural sector. Furthermore, as Brazil does not fall within the Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP), the country faces peaks in MFN tariffs on product groups of central interest to its agricultural producers, such as sugars and confectionary (25,7%), animals and products thereof (20,2%), and dairy products (36,1%) (BID, 2019). A trade agreement with the EU comprising of both regulatory cooperation and tariff reductions thereby holds the potential to significantly augment Brazilian agricultural exports (Thorstensen and Ferraz, 2016). Yet, the experiences from the first – inconclusive – stage of the interregional negotiations from 1999 to 2004 (Doctor, 2007, p. 295) indicate that European agricultural protectionism would provide a significant obstacle. Similar to the Doha Round, the interregional negotiations thus gained strong

<sup>5</sup>Video conference interview with Sidley Austin lawyers on 2 May 2018.

support from both Itamaraty and MAPA, who engaged in close and fluent cooperation with sectorial organizations. The CNA was strongly supportive of these negotiations and gained a central position as it presented sub-sectorial demands to the Department for Basic Products (DPB)<sup>6</sup> at the Itamaraty, and the Secretary for Agribusiness International Relations<sup>7</sup> at MAPA. Deliberations between the CNA and sub-sectorial organizations became the locus at which the specific position within each product line initially was defined, before it became incorporated into the official Brazilian strategy at the ministerial level. Under the leadership of the agricultural producer and later Minister of Agriculture, Kátia Abreu, the CNA adopted a very proactive international posture. The organization also accompanied the committee for bi-regional negotiations in Brussels. In the words of a CNA employee:

we join them [the negotiators] in what we call 'he room next door'. We stay there in Brussels and we are ready to support the government in case that it needs any advise ... It's the government that negotiates, and we don't enter the formal negotiations table, but at the end of every day, we have what we call the negotiator's briefing, where he presents the main issues that have been discussed, poses questions, and consults our positions according to the progress of the negotiations.

(Interview with CNA employee, 3 October 2016. Authors' translation)

Despite the strong support from private-sector organizations to reach an agreement with the EU, substantial results within the field of agriculture had a long way to go. The final agreement announced in mid-2019 constitutes a landmark for Mercosul's global interconnectedness and appears to have been made possible by the convergence of commercial agendas in Buenos Aires and Brasilia from 2016. The positive sentiments towards an agreement amongst Mercosul parties was important to fine-tune demands presented in previous stages of the negotiations concerning both quantitative quotas and regulatory issues. From the EU's perspective, the deal with Mercosul is part of the efforts to boost strategic partnerships with major global players and to counterbalance the Trump administration's protectionism. Nevertheless, the agreement's path towards ratification and eventual implementation may face obstacles related to environmental concerns and human rights in Brazil under the far-right Bolsonaro government.<sup>8</sup> As it became evident throughout the negotiation process, environmental transgressions in Mercosul provide strong munitions for European voices opposed to the agreement.

The international strategy and efforts to promote exports by different interrelationships of actors within the Brazilian agro-export policy network was not limited to trade negotiations. Alternative avenues to enhance market access were thus pursued over a broad range of policy spheres. This encompassed rearrangement of relations between public institutions, as well as the independent participation within transnational spheres of agricultural policy-making by private entities. With the decree no. 6.464 of 2008 (Brazil, De. 6.464, 2008), a new policy was inaugurated which led to the presence of agricultural attachés at selected Brazilian embassies. Although studies of inter-ministerial communications reveal very intensive interactions between Itamaraty and MAPA,<sup>9</sup> the formal institutionalization of the presence of 'agro-diplomats' delegated a position to MAPA within the Brazilian foreign service which hitherto only had been conceded to the Armed Forces. Agricultural attachés were allocated to Brazilian representations in

<sup>6</sup>Departamento de Produtos de Base (DPB).

<sup>7</sup>Secretaria de Relações Internacionais do Agronegócio.

<sup>8</sup>The initial confusion regarding whether Jair Bolsonaro would honor his campaign promise and leave the Paris climate accord was explicitly highlighted by French President Macron as something which would frustrate the EU–Mercosul agreement. Similar signaling was made by German chancellor Merkel.

<sup>9</sup>Analysis of inter-ministerial written communication of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reveals flows between Itamaraty and MAPA which far surpass that of any other inter-ministerial communications by Itamaraty.

countries of particular strategic importance within the field of agriculture.<sup>10</sup> As the sector gained increasing significance within Brazilian economic diplomacy, the degree of technical complexity associated with this field required expertise which reached beyond that which most diplomats could normally obtain. A new operational link between the two central public entities in the Brazilian agro-export policy network was hereby established, and served to connect the network's domestic and the international levels.

New modalities of internationally oriented public-private cooperation were also devised as sub-sectorial organizations became increasingly involved. As the EU from around 2006 began defining a new Renewable Energy Directive (RED) which potentially could provide a niche for Brazilian ethanol on the European market, the Brazilian representation in Brussels assumed interest in influencing this process. The Itamaraty took initiative to involve UNICA, which established a representation in Brussels by 2008. Throughout 2008 and 2009, Itamaraty and UNICA engaged in a close partnership to lobby the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP) to push for a definition of sustainability criteria that would favor the import of Brazilian biofuels. Diplomatic correspondences between Brussels and Brasilia from 2006 to 2009 thus reveal how these actors participated closely in public consultations and provided technical inputs to the policy-making process, while also engaging in informal deliberations with sympathetic groups within the EC and the EP. Similar to the Doha Round, Brazil led a group of developing countries composed of biofuel exporters who exerted coordinated pressure for less restrictive biofuel sustainability criteria. The eventual formulation of the sustainability criteria within the RED of 2009 fell in favor of Brazilian biofuel producers. Third-party diplomatic sources attributed this to the efforts of the UNICA and the Itamaraty.<sup>11</sup> As far as the Brazilian public-private coordination might have influenced the final RED draft, this illustrates a noticeable enhancement of capacities within the Brazilian agro-export policy network to navigate and impact the policy-making process beyond its domestic locus.

Finally, both sectorial organizations and individual enterprises within Brazilian agribusiness have, in some cases, also reached a point at which they have become capable of acting independently of public institutions. A noticeable example of this is the formation of the Roundtable of Responsible Soy (RTRS). The RTRS was defined as a multistakeholder governance initiative, in which soy producers, industry, retailers, and NGOs deliberate to define a private standard for 'responsible' soy production. Brazilian actors, such as the individual producer groups of Amaggi and SLC Agricultura, and the producer organizations of ABIOVE and Aprosoja, have actively engaged within the initiative since its inception in 2005. A major point of contention in the definition of criteria for sustainable soy concerned whether genetically modified (GM) soy should be accepted. This issues pitted NGOs against soy producers, and the latter's leverage eventually resulted in a final definition which did not explicitly exclude GM products, thus constituting a victory for agribusiness (Schouten and Glasbergen, 2012, p. 70).

Another point of contention in 2009 revolved around whether a deforestation ban for producers within the initiative should be adopted. As a zero-deforestation clause was incorporated in the Campinas declaration in 2009, the Brazilian soy producer associations ABIOVE and Aprosoja left the initiative (RTRS, 2009; RTRS minute 71, 2010). Despite disproving of this ban, Amaggi and SLC Agricultura nonetheless opted to continue within the RTRS. As members of the RTRS executive committee, these groups benefitted from their technical knowledge of soy production, and were able to influence the initiative's development through recurrent deliberation with other participants. Brazilian agribusiness' participation within the RTRS thus reflects how certain entities have become capable of maneuvering independently within fluent transnational spheres of regulatory formation, and of cooperating with groups of highly diverse stakeholders within and outside the Brazilian agricultural sector.

<sup>10</sup>Brazilian agricultural attachés were designated to Buenos Aires, Moscow, Brussels, Geneva, Beijing, Pretoria, Tokyo and Washington DC.

<sup>11</sup>Cable 69, BRASEUROPA (Brussels) to SERE (Brasilia), 24/1, 2008. Reserved.

## 6. Conclusion: Reshaping the Policy-Arena

Brazil's alleged 'vocation', as a country destined to feed the world, has often been accentuated in a deterministic fashion in order to explain the dramatic rise of its food exports in recent decades. While abundant land resources and a favorable climate are inherent features of this country, the agency dimension should also be taken into consideration when accounting for this development. This both regards the efforts to position Brazil as a competitive agro-exporter (Hopewell, 2016a; Hosono and Hongbo, 2016), but also – as has been emphasized in this study – the organizational and political ambitions to drive the sector's internationalization. A look at the last thirty years clearly displays how the expansion of agricultural exports was backed by a consistent and highly organized network of both public and private actors.

Regarding research question 1, we observed a process through which the essential inputs for the development of the Brazilian commercial strategy and resultant outputs have helped consolidate the agro-export policy network over time. The network has responded to a series of institutional changes within the global trade arenas, as well as domestic demands to engage within these arenas. In a period of democratic opening and pluralization of Brazilian politics, pressures to encounter new modes of public-private organization were incorporated by the central public actors within this network. As its participants proved to effectively respond to challenges of internationalization, the network obtained a high degree of political goodwill, but also an important measure of confidence from agricultural producers. This momentum positioned the agro-export policy network as a driving force which helped define and support Brazilian foreign policy efforts. With time, this network's outputs would thus both lead to internal repercussions *within* the conduct of foreign policy, but importantly, it would also wield external repercussions *from the results* of the Brazilian international engagement.

Concerning research question 2, the policy network's structure also evolved in tandem with the growing importance and assertiveness of Brazil within the field of global agricultural policy-making. Itamaraty, MAPA, and the CNA constituted the network's 'core agencies' (Provan and Milward, 1995, p. 13), or 'meta-governors' (Palm and Backman, 2017, p. 145), and to a wide extent also defined the network's general development. As interactions became increasingly dynamic and fluent over time, the network became more concentrated, and engaged in a broad range of issues and mediated interactions between its constituent entities. The institutionalization of the cooperation also gave birth to new network participants, with specific functions according to the issues at hand, such as ICONE, the Technical Group, and the Forum. Other participants such as MDIC, CEB, ABAG, and a series of sub-sectorial organizations such as ABRAPA and UNICA occupied more peripheral positions within the network. However, they became central participants within actor interrelationships that developed around specific issues, mainly in varying forms of cooperation with the network's core members. Finally, the network also included individuals who oscillated between public office and private agribusiness organizations, which meant that they were in a special position to undertake initiatives that spanned across spheres. While other individuals also might have been important, figures mentioned in the foregoing such as Marcos Jank, Roberto Rodrigues, Katia Abreu, and Pedro Camargo stand out due to their centrality as agricultural policy entrepreneurs.

The role of resource distribution, central to research question 3, constituted an absolutely vital aspect of the formation and operation of the Brazilian agro-export policy network. The incorporation of private actors and organizations within Brazilian foreign policy planning should be viewed as an inevitable response to the increasingly complex challenges within trade negotiations and other global processes of agricultural regulatory formation. Just like public organizations required private sector funding and technical knowhow, private actors were attracted by the political authority and bureaucratic capacities of especially Itamaraty and MAPA. This resulted in a situation in which operationally autonomous actors became intertwined in a relationship of mutual resource dependence (Torfing, 2005). In time, this pooling of capabilities resulted in a

significant process of operational capacity building, which permitted the Brazilian agro-export policy network to exercise a high degree of influence in agricultural policy-making processes at the global level. Eventually, a positive feedback loop became evident, as the successful policy outputs/results attributed a position of prestige to the central network participants, which in turn augmented the political and economic resources allocated to them from other public institutions.

Considering the agro-export policy network's evolution throughout the periods analyzed in this study, it is remarkable how, in little more than two decades, it completely changed Brazil's position within global agricultural governance. The period from 1990 to 2001 marks an incipient shift from a defensive stance regarding agriculture during much of the Uruguay Round, towards a broader realization of the need to become an agricultural *demandeur*. This period saw significant sectorial reorganization, which resulted in a much stronger focus towards increasing international market access. A public–private consensus around the need to pursue this goal through coordinated efforts also became evident in this period. From 2001 to 2008, the external repercussions of these internal restructurings were strongly expressed as Brazil demonstrated highly active and assertive participation within different spheres of the WTO. Cooperation between public and private actors within the policy-network provided vital support for the Brazilian engagement within both the Doha Round and the cotton and sugar disputes at the WTO. Events in this period thereby epitomize the new self-confident Brazilian posture within the field of agriculture, as the country came to 'punch above its weight'. The breakdown of the multilateral negotiations in 2008 inaugurated a period which in general terms has continued until the present, wherein Brazilian efforts became somewhat diffused in a multitude of governance arenas of interest to agricultural exporters. This did not lead to a decline in the agro-export policy network's activities, but rather meant that new ways of projecting influence and participation within alternative governance arenas were explored. This thereby points towards an operational refinement and enhancement of competences on behalf of network participants who encountered new avenues to facilitate market access for Brazilian agricultural produce.

**Funding.** Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – CAPES.

**Acknowledgements.** We would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on our work. We are also extremely grateful to our interviewees, our respective PhD supervisors and other colleagues for their assistance in the research leading up to this article.

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