



# **Translations of the climate agenda by Brazilian governments from 1995 to 2022: between constructions and dismantling**

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## **Abstract**

This study analyzes how the Global Climate Agreements (GCA) were translated in Brazil across different administrations (1995-2022). The GCA emerges from collective decisions made by countries during the Conferences of the Parties (COPs), events that bring together diverse global actors to discuss and disseminate ideas related to climate issues. Countries' participation in these events is shaped by the interaction of various actors, with distinct ideas and discourses, immersed in different institutional dynamics. Drawing on the debate surrounding the translation of public policies, the study examines how the interactive, discursive, and institutional dimensions of various Brazilian governments resulted in different international engagements and repercussions for national environmental policies. Methodologically, the research involved document analysis and interviews with actors connected to the climate agenda in Brazil, covering the period from February 2018 to April 2022. Far from being linear or unidirectional, the findings suggest that the translations of the GCA varied over time under different Brazilian administrations, involving both constructions and dismantlings. Additionally, ideas were both "translated" into the country and influenced by it.

**Keywords:** Climate change. Climate agreements. Translation. Public policies.

**Traduções da agenda climática pelos governos brasileiros no período de 1995 a 2022: entre construções e desmantelamentos**

## **Resumo**

Este trabalho analisa como os Acordos Climáticos Globais (ACG) foram traduzidos no Brasil ao longo de diferentes governos (1995-2022). Os ACG resultam de decisões coletivas dos

países participantes da Conferência das Partes (COPs), um evento que reúne diversos atores mundiais para discutir e difundir ideias relacionadas à questão climática. A participação dos países nesses eventos é construída a partir da interação entre diferentes atores, que possuem ideias e discursos distintos, estando imersos em variadas dinâmicas institucionais. Com base no debate sobre a tradução de políticas públicas, o estudo analisa como as dimensões interativa, discursiva e institucional de diferentes governos brasileiros resultaram em diversas inserções internacionais, com repercussões para as políticas ambientais nacionais. Metodologicamente, o trabalho incluiu análise documental e a realização de entrevistas com atores relacionados à agenda climática no Brasil, no período de fevereiro de 2018 a abril de 2022. Longe de serem lineares e unidirecionais, os resultados indicam que as traduções dos ACG variaram ao longo do tempo pelos governos brasileiros, envolvendo construções e desmantelamentos. Além disso, ideias foram tanto “traduzidas” para o país quanto influenciadas pelo mesmo.

**Palavras-chave:** Mudanças climáticas. Acordos climáticos. Tradução. Políticas públicas.

### Traducciones de la agenda climática por los gobiernos brasileños de 1995 a 2022

#### Resumen

Este estudio analiza cómo los Acuerdos Climáticos Globales (ACG) fueron traducidos en Brasil a lo largo de diferentes gobiernos (1995-2022). Los ACG surgen de decisiones colectivas de los países en el marco de las Conferencias de las Partes (COPs), eventos que reúnen a diversos actores globales para discutir y difundir ideas relacionadas con los problemas climáticos. La participación de los países en estos eventos se construye a partir de la interacción entre varios actores, con ideas y discursos distintos, inmersos en diversas dinámicas institucionales. Basándose en el debate sobre la traducción de políticas públicas, el estudio examina cómo las dimensiones interactivas, discursivas e institucionales de diferentes gobiernos brasileños dieron lugar a diversas inserciones internacionales y repercusiones para las políticas ambientales nacionales. Metodológicamente, la investigación incluyó el análisis documental y la realización de entrevistas con actores vinculados a la agenda climática en Brasil, cubriendo el período de febrero de 2018 a abril de 2022. Lejos de ser un proceso lineal o unidireccional, los resultados sugieren que las traducciones de los ACG variaron a lo largo del tiempo bajo diferentes administraciones brasileñas, involucrando tanto construcciones como desmantelamientos. Además, las ideas fueron tanto "traducidas" al país como influenciadas por él

**Palabras clave:** Cambio climático. Acuerdos climáticos. Traducción. Políticas públicas.

#### 1 Introduction

Climate change is at the forefront of the agenda for various national and subnational governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and social movements (IPCC, 2023; 2022; IPES-Food, 2023; Leal Filho, Luetz, and Ayal, 2021; FAO, 2018). Extreme climate events and severe projections of rising global temperatures in the coming decades signal significant impacts of climate change on agriculture, food supply, biodiversity, coastal areas, general infrastructure, and even on the health and survival of populations, particularly those most socially vulnerable (IPCC, 2023; 2022; FAO, 2023).

Since the 1990s, the United Nations has recognized the severity of the environmental situation and committed to adopting measures to mitigate the effects

of climate change, with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) and the Conferences of the Parties (COP), supreme body of the convention. Since 1995, nearly two hundred governments, various actors, and organizations have gathered annually at COP meetings to discuss the environmental agenda and advance measures, establishing a crucial arena for the circulation of ideas. At these meetings, "a vast array of actors from all over the world seeks to present their solutions, ranging from the most technical and specialized to the most political and universal. The hope of universal dissemination can be felt in the air, permeating intense negotiations and unexpected translations" (Kervran, 2021). Additionally, these events have established Global Climate Agreements (GCA), such as the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Paris Agreement in 2015, which set goals to contain and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). These measures and actions are effectively translated (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2021) by each country according to its specific characteristics, interests, institutions, and political dynamics (Chechi, 2019).

While there is some consensus on the occurrence and severity of climate change, this agreement rarely translates into convergence (Hassenteufel, 2008) of measures and actions (UNFCCC, 2022). Constructed collectively, the measures and GCAs involve intense conflicts and negotiations, both within and between countries, from their formulation to their implementation.

It is not uncommon for changes in government to constrain or drive the translation of public policies (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2021; Hassenteufel et al., 2017), as well as the national debates on environmental issues and climate change. Different governmental arrangements allow for the participation of new actors, who, based on their ideas and discourses, take advantage of the institutional environment to produce advances or setbacks in environmental policies, assuming greater or lesser prominence in the process of constructing the Agreements. Unlike a linear process, the translation of public policies and GCAs involves reinterpretations, constructions, and dismantling (Bauer and Knill, 2012)<sup>1</sup>, shaped by national political changes. Furthermore, unlike a unidirectional process, national political changes can complicate the roles among the parties involved, creating difficulties in distinguishing between exporters and importers of public policies. Governments may adopt more passive, defensive, contestatory, or antagonistic stances in the processes of translating GCAs (Milhorance, 2020; Stone, Oliveira, and Pal, 2019).

Considering the importance of national political dynamics in the translation of public policies, this article analyzes how GCAs were translated in Brazil across different governments from 1995 to 2022. Following the approach to public policy translation (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2021; Hassenteufel et al., 2017), it was analyzed how different compositions of actors (interactive dimension) reinterpreted and verbalized environmental issues and the GCAs (discursive dimension) over time, taking advantage of or constructing various institutional environments (institutional dimension). Indeed, the different Brazilian governments (1995-2022) included the participation of various actors, oriented by different political-ideological alignments and interpretations of environmental issues, situated in various institutional

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<sup>1</sup> According to Bauer and Knill (2012, p. 35), dismantling is understood as "a change of direct, indirect, hidden, or symbolic nature that may decrease the number of policies in a particular area, reduce the number of instruments used, or reduce their intensity."

arrangements. In line with this approach and contributions from other authors on the debate of policy transfer (Stone, Oliveira, and Pal, 2019; Oliveira and Pal, 2018), it is assumed that the processes of translating GCAs were neither linear nor unidirectional. In other words, they were translated in different ways over time, involving advances and setbacks, and were both "transferred" to Brazil and influenced by the country.

The article involved documentary research and analysis, in addition to conducting semi-structured interviews. Regarding the first technique, it involved the collection and analysis of official COP documents, Brazilian government documents and reports, and legal frameworks for Brazilian environmental policies. Concerning the interviews, they were conducted between February 2018 and April 2022 with 39 actors (researchers, public managers, parliamentary advisors, politicians, NGO representatives, and interest groups) involved in Brazilian climate policy across different governments.

In addition to this introduction, the article is structured into five sections. The first revisits some conceptual elements regarding the transfer and translation of public policies. The following three sections analyze the processes of translating GCAs under the administrations of FHC (1995-2002), Lula and Dilma Rousseff (2003-2016), and Temer and Bolsonaro (2016-2022). Finally, the conclusions summarize the findings.

## **2 Conceptual Elements on Policy Transfer and Translation**

Since the 1960s, a vast body of political science literature has been interested in understanding how public policies are diffused or transferred from one government to another (Linsenmeier, Mohommad, and Schwerhoff, 2022; Oliveira, 2021; Stone, 2012; Knill, 2005). For illustrative purposes, it was highlighted that: i) various authors have mobilized different notions and approaches to characterize this process — diffusion of public policies (Oliveira, 2013; Walker, 1969), policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; 1996), lesson-drawing (Rose, 1993), policy convergence (Hassenteufel, 2005; Knill, 2005), and policy translation (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2021; Hassenteufel et al., 2017; Hassenteufel and De Maillard, 2013); ii) various studies have sought to map the elements contributing to the processes of diffusion (internal determinants, external determinants, competition, emulation, etc.), transfer (coercive, voluntary), and policy convergence (functional, political, normative, and cognitive convergence) (Coelho, 2016; Hassenteufel, 2008; Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; 1996; Walker, 1969); iii) many authors have focused on understanding the actors involved (governments, international organizations, social movements, between others) (Oliveira and Koga, 2022; Stone, 2012; Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; 1996), the elements transferred (soft or hard transfer — Benson and Jordan, 2011; Stone, 2004), the degrees and outcomes of the transfer (Hassenteufel, 2008; Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; 1996); and iv) several studies address the specificities of transfer processes from North to South, the resurgence of South-South transfers, and even the processes of learning from South to North (Oliveira and Milani, 2022; Milhorange, 2020; Oliveira et al., 2019; Stone, Oliveira, and Pal, 2019). Among the debates driven by this subfield of political science, four elements are of interest to this article's objectives.

The first relates to the actors involved in the processes of policy diffusion or transfer. According to Stone (2004), early literature on policy diffusion and transfer was marked by a certain “methodological nationalism,” focusing mainly on relationships between “nation-states with a tendency to highlight bilateral relations” and concentrating primarily on the role of official agents (bureaucrats, politicians, and government experts). Contradicting these perspectives, the author emphasizes that transfer processes can span networks of governmental actors, international organizations, and transnational non-state actors (interest groups, social movements, think tanks, among others). More recently, several authors have also highlighted the importance of “deterritorialized” or transnational spaces, arenas, and events in the diffusion of public policies, such as international meetings, forums, and summits (Stone, Oliveira, and Pal, 2019; Oliveira and Pal, 2018; Oliveira and Faria, 2017). “Transnational spaces where policymakers interact constitute loci of production, circulation, and legitimation of ideas, models, and public policy instruments” (Oliveira and Faria, 2017).

As noted by Kervran (2021), COPs are emblematic events for the diffusion and circulation of ideas related to the environmental agenda and climate change. In this context, a complex configuration of individuals and organizations involved in policy transfer becomes visible, including government bureaucracy, think tanks, professional communities, representatives of companies, and civil society (Kervran, 2021). With this “diversity of actors involved and their archipelago of meetings” (Kervran, 2021), as highlighted by an interviewed researcher and professor, all countries aim to draw attention, to “raise their flag,” and therefore bring to COPs well-crafted speeches about their contributions and future goals.

The second element concerns the notion of policy translation (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2021; Hassenteufel et al., 2017; Oliveira and Pal, 2018; Stone, 2012), which “refers to a work of recreation of guidelines, principles of action, norms, institutions, and instruments operated by the translators based on external sources of inspiration” (Hassenteufel and Maillard, 2013). Thus, transfer always implies the reinterpretation of public policy by those who receive or implement it, making it consistent to refer to this process as translation (Oliveira and Pal, 2018).

Due to these reinterpretations, Hassenteufel and Zeigermann (2021) emphasize that the notion of policy translation provides at least three important shifts in the debate on policy transfer: i) while translation acknowledges that ideas come from different scales (such as organizations, arenas, or international events mentioned above), the notion focuses on the national or local level, where ideas, designs, and instruments are transformed, reformulated, and implemented — a scale not always prioritized in the debates on policy diffusion and transfer; ii) while transfer focuses on identifying standardized models of public policies transferable from one place to another, translation seeks to understand the transformation and implementation of these models; and iii) while transfer focuses on the content to be transferred, translation pays attention to historically and culturally rooted elements and actor interactions, which produce distinct outcomes in the reinterpretation of problems and the implementation of public policies.

To address these shifts, Hassenteufel and Zeigermann (2021), Hassenteufel et al. (2017), and Hassenteufel and De Maillard (2013) propose focusing the analysis of translation on three dimensions: i) the discursive dimension, which concerns how

actors reinterpret public problems and public policies coming from international institutions, transnational actors, and/or other countries, in a way that makes political changes acceptable and legitimized at the national/local level; ii) the actor dimension, which corresponds to the different configurations of actors and powers present in national/local spaces, helping to understand the influence of political dynamics in transforming transferred public policies; and iii) the institutional dimension, which refers to the adjustment of translated policies and ideas to the existing institutional configurations in national/local spaces. Thus, “political actors are constrained not only by other actors but also by existing institutions, inherited from previous public policies, which determine the public policy process, especially its implementation capacity” (Hassenteufel et al., 2017, p. 82).

These dimensions provide interesting insights into understanding the conflicts and different translations of GCAs between countries. Indeed, Hassenteufel and Zeigermann (2021) comment that translation makes it possible to “understand why and how international and transnational public policies do not necessarily lead to a linear process of convergence.” Although we do not delve into cross-country comparisons, this analytical framework also seems interesting for understanding how, within the same country (Brazil) and over time, different configurations of actors, discourses, and institutions produced distinct understandings and translations of international debates in the domestic context.

These changes in the dynamics of translation within the same country over time lead us to the third element of this subfield, which concerns the non-linearity of public policy translation. Indeed, diffusion and circulation are far from being technical, linear, and rational processes (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2021). In reality, they are complex processes, permeated by political relations and embedded in different institutions, actors, and scales. As political life is marked by changes in power relations and configurations of actors and institutions, it can, thus, be assumed that the translation of public policies can be marked by institutional constructions and dismantling. This understanding seems fundamental to comprehending and explaining the changes in Brazil’s environmental agenda under various governments, as it will be elaborated further.

The fourth element concerns the circulation and feedback of ideas that permeate the diffusion and transfer of public policies (Hassenteufel et al., 2017; Constantine and Shankland, 2017). Instead of a unidirectional process, the circulation and translation of public policies can involve both the exporter and importer in a process of mutual learning, or even key actors may take on this dual role by occupying national and international positions, engaging in a “two-level game” to mutually reinforce both types of positions (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2021). This may be the case when Brazilian political actors assume greater prominence in international events and arenas, as they not only attempt to disseminate ideas but are also influenced by them. As the General Coordinator of Environment and Climate Change at the Ministry of Finance stated in 2018, in addition to spaces for defining norms that are transferred to the collective of countries, “COPs end up being platforms for projecting the country outward.” Similarly, as noted by Stone, Oliveira, and Pal (2019), “the directionality of transfer, previously considered linear, bilateral, or multilateral, gives way to continuous, transnational, multi-scalar, and multi-actor circulation.”

### 3 New Discourses and Shifts in the Translation of GCAs in the FHC Governments (1995-2002)

The environmental agenda of the FHC government was influenced by international environmental events preceding the start of its term, notably the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio-92 or Eco-92, held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. According to Viola (2002), at this event—unlike in the 1970s and 1980s when, from an interactive standpoint, Brazil led “the alliance of peripheral countries opposing the recognition of the importance of discussing environmental issues”—the country asserted that “global environmental problems were relevant and should be treated as a priority by the international community.” This interpretation is reaffirmed by one of the interviewees for this study (an Embrapa researcher), who stated: “After '92, the Eco-92 event, the sustainable development issue started to gain more prominence, and efforts began to really incorporate these social, economic, and environmental aspects.” However, according to Viola (2002), Brazilian actors argued “that responsibility differed both in terms of cause and solution to global environmental problems, which increased the cost for rich countries.” The event also raised awareness among the Brazilian population about environmental issues, shifting the prevailing discourse until the 1980s, which advocated that the Amazon rainforest should be replaced by agricultural, hydroelectric, mining, urban, and industrial development (Viola, 1998).

Beyond these reinterpretations and discourses, at Rio-92, countries established the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) with the goal of, while respecting the differences between countries, encouraging, disseminating, and converging (Oliveira and Palm, 2018) actions to stabilize atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHG). As the supreme body of the Convention, COP 1 was held in 1995, with representatives from 117 countries participating. Evaluating the shortcomings of the measures established so far, participants sought to reach a consensus on the importance of more effective actions to mitigate the greenhouse effect, which would result in the Kyoto Protocol, established in 1997 at COP 3.

Despite increased awareness regarding environmental and Amazonian issues, and the FHC government’s interest in strengthening its international presence (Silva, 2008), at COP 1, due to its interactive alignment with non-Annex I countries, Brazil opposed strengthening measures to contain GHG emissions, with the famous remark by the head of the Brazilian delegation: “we will not trade smoke for trees” (ENB, 1995). In this sense, Carvalho (2010) classified Brazil as a veto state, given its opposition to including “standing” forests in the climate change regime, defending “the country’s sovereignty over natural resources within its territory and its right to development.” Discursively, the country mentioned technical difficulties and limited knowledge about the role of forests concerning climate. Brazil also argued based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, claiming that developed countries were historically responsible for emissions, and that developing countries should not bear the same burden (Carvalho, 2010). To justify this position, as mentioned by a researcher from the National Institute for Amazonian Research

(INPA), Brazil sought to recount the entire history of the Industrial Revolution and its emissions balance.

In 1997, in Kyoto, Japan, representatives of 159 nations participated in COP 3. At this event, the Kyoto Protocol was established, one of the most important global milestones for environmental preservation, setting goals for reducing GHG emissions, with actions to be implemented by countries. During the negotiations, with a strong presence of the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Itamaraty (Brazilian Foreign Ministry), Brazil initially “maintained the view that all responsibility for reducing emissions lay with developed countries and, therefore, deliberately opposed commitments to reduce the future growth rate of emissions by emerging countries”. Additionally, in an attempt to influence decisions that would be transferred to all countries<sup>2</sup>, Brazil proposed the creation of the Clean Development Fund (CDF), which would receive contributions from Annex I countries based on their participation in global temperature increases. This fund “received strong support from emerging and poor countries, but, as expected, it was heavily criticized by all developed countries” (Viola, 2002). However, through actor rearrangements (closer relations with the United States), reinterpretations, and institutional adjustments, a few months later, the Brazilian and U.S. diplomacies reformulated the proposal (which was approved and implemented with relative agility), renaming it the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which opened the “possibility for developed countries to meet part of their emission reduction targets by financing development projects in emerging and poor countries” (Viola, 2002). For Brazil, this institutional change (CDM) would allow it to harness its great potential for clean energy production, while also enabling the country to play an important role in the international environmental context. Thus, amid interactive and institutional reconfigurations, Brazil changed its stance in international negotiations, given the opportunity to be financed by developed countries.

In addition to this interpretative and discursive shift, from the 2000s onward, new actors began to influence Brazil’s position in the international climate agenda, reducing the strong presence of the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Two institutional changes contributed to this: i) in July 1999, the Interministerial Commission on Global Climate Change (CIM) was created to coordinate the government’s actions translated from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, evaluating and issuing opinions on projects and providing input on the government’s positions in negotiations; ii) in June 2000, the Brazilian Forum on Climate Change — currently called the Brazilian Climate Change Forum (FBMC) — was established, representing “the creation of a suitable arena for forming Brazil’s position, as well as internalizing the climate regime within the country” (Viola, 2002). Chaired by the President of the Republic and comprising representatives from the public sector and civil society, the FBMC aims to mobilize society and contribute to discussions and translations related to climate change, linked to the National Climate Change Policy, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and international agreements.

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<sup>2</sup> The testimony of the Head of the Climate Change Division at Itamaraty is emblematic in this regard. According to the interviewee, “We always made sure our vision was seen. The CDM, for example, is a mechanism that was developed; we proposed a fund, but through negotiations, it evolved into this. Basically, we and the United States designed what the CDM is.”



In this context, the arena was expanded with more active participation from the Ministry of the Environment (MMA), the Brazilian Business Council for Sustainable Development, state governments of the Amazon, researchers, and several NGOs. Although the involvement of these new actors generated new interpretations and tensions regarding Brazil's stance, in the early 2000s, "the position of the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Itamaraty continued to predominate" in the translation of GCAs (Viola, 2002).

#### **4. The Translation of GCAs in the Lula and Dilma Governments (2003-2016): The Country's Leadership in Promoting the International Climate Agenda**

The environmental agenda of the Lula's governments was marked by significant interactive and political-institutional changes, with at least two key elements worth highlighting. One concerns the reconfiguration of actors within the Ministry of the Environment (MMA), with the appointment of Marina Silva as minister, and the actions promoted thereafter being particularly emblematic. The presence of the minister mitigated criticisms that the MMA lacked a consolidated foreign policy, as historically the ministry had few leaders with a background linked to environmental issues, which allowed the economic interests of other ministries, such as the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Supply (MAPA), to prevail (Lisboa, 2002).

Marina Silva's work brought the environmental debate closer to Brazilian society, involving civil society in implementing agendas; integrated environmental concerns with other areas (economy, energy, science, and technology); and contributed to projecting Brazil internationally. Indeed, in 2004, the country created the Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Deforestation in the Legal Amazon (PPCDAm), and at COP 10, held that same year in Buenos Aires, Argentina, it released its First National Communication to the Climate Convention, along with the National GHG Emissions Inventory<sup>3</sup>. The testimony of a former consultant for the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) supports the importance of the ministry and Minister Marina in promoting Brazil's actions in the international context.

A key marker in the climate issue, in general, is the action that was carried out between 2004 and 2007, during Marina's time at the Ministry of the Environment, when those actions were implemented that were more or less legitimized by part of the government and managed to curb deforestation in the Amazon. So that was the first element that gave Brazil international visibility [...] that was the element that positioned Brazil externally and began to establish itself as an important agent in environmental issues, in the environmental agenda, in the climate change agenda.

The second element, related to the first, concerns the foreign policy of the Lula government, which sought to increase its participation in international

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<sup>3</sup> Recognizing the importance of internally translating the guidelines established in the Global Climate Agreement, the government document states that "the First National Communication is evidence of the importance that Brazil attaches to the commitments made by the country under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change" (Brazil, 2004, p. 09).

organizations, forums, and arenas. In this context, the environment became an opportunity, considering the discussions around natural resources, the importance of the Amazon rainforest, the increase in agricultural production, and export agendas (Estevo, 2011; Nascimento, 2018) — elements that were discursively used by Brazilian actors in argumentative strategies to legitimize their proposals and interests (Chechi, 2019).

In 2005, the Kyoto Protocol came into effect, and two years later, in 2007, discussions began for the construction of a new global climate agreement, set to begin in 2012, the end date of the Kyoto Protocol. At that time, Brazil was promoting a series of institutional changes: in 2008, the National Climate Change Plan was introduced, and in 2009, the National Climate Change Fund, the Brazilian Panel on Climate Change, and the National Climate Change Policy were created, with the guidance for the creation of sectoral plans for mitigating and adapting to climate change. These institutional changes were accompanied by interactive changes, with the expansion of actors and ideas participating in Brazil's environmental and climate agenda — with their internal convergences and conflicts<sup>4</sup> (Chechi, 2019). In addition to the actors involved in the sectoral plans, the participation of various ministries (with particular emphasis on the Ministry of the Environment), the Brazilian Climate Change Forum, the Interministerial Commission on Global Climate Change (CIM), representatives from the Third National Environmental Conference, the State Climate Change Forums, researchers, and civil society organizations are also noteworthy.

In this context, considering the expectations of building a new global climate agreement at COP 15 (2009 – Copenhagen) and aiming to become an exporter of ideas and actions, the President of the Republic asked the CIM to have each sector discuss its contributions to reducing GHG emissions. At the time, the Brazilian agribusiness sector took the opportunity to integrate itself into the international climate agenda, seeking to consolidate the "brand" of low-carbon agriculture, which would manifest in the Low-Carbon Agriculture Plan and Program. Until then seen as a driver of deforestation, agribusiness strategically translated, in the period leading up to COP 15, elements of the international context, beginning to discursively incorporate the climate agenda and signaling sustainable practices that should be presented internationally as Brazil's effort (Chechi and Grisa, 2020).

In addition to the international dissemination and diffusion of sectoral measures and other ongoing actions, Brazil used COP 15 to voluntarily commit to reducing 36.1% to 38.9% of projected GHG emissions by 2020. As the INPA researcher commented, Brazil took a leading role in promoting ideas during COP 15:

When we reached 2009, we had a very solid understanding of territorial dynamics. Those were periods of incredible advances, many data were made available, so we had a level of knowledge that allowed us to set goals and commitments. When Brazil went to the COP meeting, I knew the extent of my problem and the challenge I could take on, and they accepted that challenge.

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<sup>4</sup> As an illustrative example, we mention that in May 2008, Marina Silva resigned from her position as Minister of the Environment, citing her departure due to the loss of political support to maintain actions to reduce deforestation in the Amazon and her interpretation that environmental policy should not be an isolated policy within the Ministry of the Environment (Moreira, 2018).

However, there is disagreement among interviewed actors, both governmental and non-governmental, about how Brazil's targets are internally constructed for representation at COPs, as seen in the statement from a representative of MAPA: "... I talk to technicians at my level in MCTIC, the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture, no one knows where these targets came from, they came from the minds of two, four, five people, I think." According to a researcher from the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV), "Brazil didn't arrive at these numbers by chance. It must have been based on some kind of study, some scientific knowledge to avoid proposing something that couldn't be achieved." In this regard, an Embrapa researcher highlights the participation of civil society in these discussions: "It is discussed by these various forums I mentioned, the Brazilian Panel on Climate Change, the National Climate Change Forum, the Brazilian Forum, the GEXs, the SIM. All these groups come together, and it's an exhaustive discussion because it takes a long time to reach a consensus." These statements highlight the power struggle over the influence of actors on Brazil's climate agenda.

COP 15 gathered the largest audience in the history of the conferences to date, with around 40,000 people and approximately 115 world leaders in attendance. The conference consolidated the climate issue in public, corporate, and civil society agendas; however, it failed to achieve its primary goal: converging ideas to build a new Global Climate Agreement post-2012.

Internationally, the next key events were the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Brazil in 2012 — demonstrating the country's interest in leading international environmental debates — and COP-21, held in Paris, France, in 2015. This conference resulted in the Paris Agreement, approved by representatives from 195 countries and intended to replace the Kyoto Protocol in 2020. With ratification by 92 of these 195 countries, the Paris Agreement came into effect in 2016, and from then on, each country was required to translate the guidelines into effective actions.

Following previous steps, Brazil sought to reaffirm its leadership among developing countries. In May 2016, the country released the National Adaptation Plan to Climate Change, and in September (already under the Michel Temer administration, with a new configuration of actors — discussed in the next section), it completed the ratification process of the Paris Agreement, translating Brazil's targets into official commitments. Through the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), Brazil committed to reducing GHG emissions by 37% below 2005 levels by 2025, with an indicative contribution of reducing emissions by 43% by 2030. To achieve this, the country committed to increasing the share of sustainable bioenergy in its energy matrix, expanding the use of renewable energy, ending illegal deforestation in the Amazon, and reforesting 12 million hectares (Brazil, 2016).

The targets translated and assumed by Brazil reinforced the importance of the National Climate Change Policy (PNMC) and politically repositioned agriculture in the commitments. A former MDA consultant mentioned that Brazil's international leadership began with efforts to combat deforestation, and agriculture later gained prominence: "Brazil started taking the lead with the deforestation issue, but that shifted towards productivity, and agriculture became an important agent in the climate change process. It was somewhat seen as a villain, but suddenly, it became

the savior.” In this context, there is a discursive shift in legitimizing Brazil’s climate agenda, from deforestation to productive issues within the agricultural sector.

## **5 (Re)translations and Dismantling of the Environmental Agenda in the Temer and Bolsonaro Governments (2016-2022)**

Starting in 2016, Brazil’s participation in international debates and COPs exhibited a new pattern, distinct from the one that had previously prevailed. Under the Temer government, COP 22 focused on putting the Paris Agreement into action. Brazil’s discursive approach aimed at securing market-driven financing mechanisms in the areas of low-carbon agriculture, reforestation, and renewable energy (Agência Brasil, 2016). Although still maintaining a leadership role, a significant change occurred in the interactive dimension, with greater visibility and participation from MAPA (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Supply), Embrapa, organizations linked to agribusiness, and business entities. Blairo Maggi, one of the largest rural producers and Minister of Agriculture at the time, made controversial statements at COP regarding human rights (Envolverde, 2022), but emphasized the need to align food production with sustainability.

Also focused on implementing the Paris Agreement, COP 23 in 2017 was marked by the United States’ intention to withdraw from the agreement, in a context of climate change denial by the Trump administration, and by China’s rise as a leader in climate discussions. At this event, Brazil’s actions centered on the promotion of biofuels, reinforcing the agricultural sector as a protagonist of pro-environmental changes, no longer as a villain. Additionally, the Ministry of the Environment presented data on the reduction of carbon emissions, approaching the targets set for 2020, but with caveats regarding deforestation in the Amazon and Cerrado regions (Agência Brasil, 2018).

From 2019 onward, Brazil gained international attention, not as a leader in environmental discussions, but as a threat to the Paris Agreement’s goals, due to Jair Bolsonaro’s discursive and interactive alignment with U.S. President Trump’s views. Even before taking office, Bolsonaro considered the possibility of Brazil withdrawing from the Paris Agreement (Agência Brasil, 2018) and requested then-President Michel Temer to withdraw the country’s bid to host COP 25 in 2019, citing the high cost of the event (G1, 2018).

In addition to discursive changes, institutional changes also contributed to a new translation of international debates in the national context. During the Bolsonaro government, after discussions of merging the Ministry of the Environment (MMA) with the Ministry of Agriculture (G1, 2018b), the MMA maintained its ministerial status but lost political influence, with various responsibilities being transferred to other ministries: the National Water Agency was moved to the Ministry of Regional Development, and the Brazilian Forest Service (SFB) along with three other departments were incorporated into MAPA, further strengthening the ministry, then led by Teresa Cristina, nominated by the Parliamentary Front for Agribusiness. Moreover, for the first time, the environmental portfolio was headed by an openly anti-environmentalist minister with ties to agribusiness sectors, as was his successor, a former member of the Brazilian Rural Society.

Along with the MMA's loss of political relevance, various institutional changes were observed. By way of illustration, we mention: i) the dissolution of the Brazilian Climate Change Forum (FBMC), the National Plan for Native Vegetation Recovery, the National Biodiversity Commission, and the National Forests Commission, mechanisms that contributed to translating the objectives of the Paris Agreement into the national context; ii) the reduction in the composition of the National Environmental Council (from 96 to 23 full members), altering the interactive dimension in environmental policy decision-making, notably concentrating power in governmental actors; iii) the suspension of funds from the Amazon Fund after disagreements between donor countries and Brazil's environmental policy dynamics (O Globo, 2019); and iv) the proposal of several bills aimed at changing environmental legislation (Vale et al., 2021). Not surprisingly, this scenario prompted a meeting of former MMA ministers as early as May 2019, where they criticized what they called the "dismantling of socio-environmental governance" (Belessa, 2019).

For Neto (2022), five dimensions summarize the main changes in Bolsonaro's first two years concerning the climate change agenda: i) the depletion of environmental regulatory and enforcement capacities; ii) the persecution of individuals with positions contrary to the government's environmental policies, incitement of conflicts against Indigenous peoples and NGOs, and blaming them for environmental crimes at international events; iii) the exclusion of civil society from policy-making processes and executive support committees; iv) the return of the Amazon issue, where the government views the region as sensitive to development and a risk to Brazilian sovereignty due to international interference; and v) the weakening of Brazil's internationally assumed environmental commitments.

These discursive, interactive, and institutional changes contributed to the dismantling of various environmental policies, whose effects manifested in increased illegal mining in the Brazilian Amazon (Greenpeace Brasil, 2020); a rise in deforestation and fires; the approval of hundreds of new pesticides due to institutional relaxations within MAPA and the National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA); and the controversial statements by Bolsonaro government officials, such as the infamous phrase uttered by the former Minister of the Environment: "take advantage of the moment to pass the herd." The phrase referred to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, which was seen as an opportune time for the government to push for environmental law relaxations, as media and public attention were focused on the health crisis. These movements were illustrated by consultants from the Senate and House Environment Committees during the course of this research, as demonstrated in the following excerpts:

*Starting in 2020, there was a movement for this initial wave of infra-legal changes to effectively become legal changes, meaning they would have the backing of being enshrined in legislation or the Constitution. So, you begin to see a movement towards constitutional amendments (...) everything that comes today in terms of legislative change, from this demand, is practically aimed at dismantling the legal framework. (...) Today, there are bills submitted by the government itself, under the discourse that we need to move forward, that we need to produce more, that we need to solve things, that Brazil cannot be left behind, that Brazil is a great global farm that needs to produce commodities for the international market (...) In contrast, there is a dismantling of the government's own public policies through legislation,*

*in areas that we understand as central to supporting environmental conservation. (Anonymous informant. Interview with the Senate environmental consultant, 2022).*

*So, the movement is "from the gate inward," to relax legislation, lower the level of protection to use more, preferably even within the water, the river, etc., without the Permanent Preservation Area (APP), without anything. (...) The other movement is "from the gate outward," that is, how do I incorporate new areas that are not private today? What are we talking about? Undesignated public lands. (...) Then you have the Land Grabbing Bill, 510, from Irajá<sup>5</sup> (...) and many others. They aim to allow the greatest possible appropriation of these undesignated public lands. But also those that are designated. In what form? Conservation Units. For this reason, there are numerous bills from the Parliamentary Agricultural Front that seek to downgrade the category of conservation units, for example, turning a biological reserve into an APA<sup>6</sup>, because an APA allows for private ownership and intensive use. (Anonymous informant 2. Interview with the environmental consultant of the Chamber of Deputies, 2022).*

As a result of these legislative changes and the speeches of parliamentarians aligned with agribusiness, Bolsonaro, and his ministers, Brazil lost its leadership in proposing and disseminating ideas to address climate change at the COPs. At COP 25, held in Madrid, Spain, the Brazilian government, for the first time, did not have an official booth and did not accredit the participation of civil society organizations, reducing its public presence to a three-minute denialist speech by the Minister of the Environment.

At COP 26, Brazil attempted to restore its tarnished international reputation under the Bolsonaro government by presenting a new NDC, with the commitment to mitigate 50% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030, using 2005 as a baseline (Genin; Frasson, 2021). In contrast to the actions underway in the country, this commitment is part of a series of guidelines presented to achieve climate neutrality, along with the signing of the Global Methane Pledge, which aims to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030.

COP 27 took place in November 2022, after the presidential election that marked the return of President Lula to office. The summit organizers allocated a space in the schedule for the new elected government, and a transition government delegation participated in the event, including President Lula and former MMA ministers Marina Silva and Isabel Teixeira. At this event, Brazil resumed a central role in climate discussions, even before Lula's government began. However, internationally, the event was referred to as a "COP light" (Jornalismo Junior, 2022).

## 6 Final Considerations

As we have seen above, over the years, the Brazilian government has translated the agreements arising from international environmental events and arenas in different ways. In line with Hassenteufel and Zeigermann (2021), we observed that the different interactions prevailing at the national and international

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<sup>5</sup> Draft Law 510/2021, authored by Senator Irajá (PSD-TO).

<sup>6</sup> Environmental Protection Area.

levels, the way environmental issues and debates were interpreted, and the institutional (re)configurations established have shaped various forms of recreating the guidelines, goals, and actions arising from the GCAs.

Although Eco-92 was fundamental in repositioning the Brazilian government discursively regarding environmental issues, the alignment interactions established with non-Annex I countries contributed to the FHC government's opposition to strengthening GHG containment measures at COP 1. Furthermore, in line with the discourse that Annex I countries had much greater responsibility for the established climate conditions, and breaking with the unidirectional transfer of ideas, the country took the initiative to propose the Clean Development Fund (CDF). Through new interactions, discourses, and institutional innovations, the CDF was transformed into the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), and the government changed its position in international negotiations, given the opportunity to be financed by developed countries under the climate agenda. Accompanying this repositioning, institutional changes were established at the national level (Interministerial Commission on Global Climate Change – CIM and Brazilian Climate Change Forum – FBMC), creating tension with the participation of new actors and ideas and the institutionalization of new discourses.

With a new arrangement of actors at the national level (highlighting the greater prominence of the MMA), important national and international institutional and policy signals (PPCDAM and the First National Communication to the Climate Convention), and a repositioning of Brazilian foreign policy in terms of political and socioeconomic affirmation, the Lula government transformed the environment into one of its main agendas. In this context, and amid discussions to build a new GCA, while significant national institutional and interactive advances were being outlined (National Climate Change Plan, National Climate Change Fund, Brazilian Climate Change Panel, and National Climate Change Policy), the Brazilian government took on greater responsibility for leading the export of ideas and actions. An emblematic example was the voluntary commitment adopted at COP 15 to reduce projected GHG emissions by 36.1% to 38.9% by 2020, as well as the dissemination of sectoral environmental actions. Although the new GCA was only established at COP 21 in 2015, during this period, the Brazilian government continued to influence its configuration and translate international environmental guidelines domestically, as well as to disseminate Brazilian climate actions, mobilizing various strategies such as hosting Rio+20, participating in international events, and creating new initiatives.

From 2016 onward, new national interactive, discursive, and institutional configurations produced (re)translations in Brazilian environmental and climate policy. Under the Temer government and, especially, the Bolsonaro government, MAPA and market actors assumed greater leadership in the dissemination and construction of global environmental actions; the MMA (with new ideas and discourses) lost political space, both internationally and nationally; a wide range of public policies and national institutions were dismantled; and various environmental effects and impacts became evident. From 2019 onward, Brazil gained international attention, no longer as a leader in environmental discussions and an exporter of ideas and actions, but as a country whose ideas, discourses, and institutions ran counter to the goals of the Paris Agreement.

By reviewing this trajectory, we reinforce the interpretation that, beyond the different translations between countries, new political, interactive, discursive, and institutional configurations within the same country over time produce (re)translations of international climate agreements and actions. Far from being linear, the processes of public policy transfer and translation are marked by advances and setbacks. Even though some institutional actors remained involved in discussions throughout the analyzed periods, the arrangements changed, and consequently, so did the discourses and institutions. Moreover, these changes produce different rhythms and dynamics in the roles of importer and exporter of ideas and public policies, with positions sometimes more defensive, sometimes more contestatory, or sometimes more leading in the very processes of transferring and translating the GCAs. Thus, it is concluded that the GCAs were translated in different ways over time by Brazilian governments, involving constructions and dismantling, and were both "transferred" by the country and influenced by it.

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