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052 Політологія

Міхновська Євгенія Михайлівна

Керівник: Шаповалов С. А.,

старший викладач

Рецензент(ка) _____

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS	8
1.1 Pragmatism as a Theoretical Approach to Foreign Policy Analysis	8
1.2 Overview of Brazil’s Pragmatic Foreign Policy Approach.....	11
CHAPTER 2. ANALYTICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS	17
2.1 Methodology and Process Tracing Research Design	17
2.2 Analytical Framework and Hypotheses.....	20
2.3 Dataset and Operationalisation	27
2.4 Limitations of the Study	30
CHAPTER 3. THE PRAGMATIC TURN: HOW BRAZIL’S POLICY HAS TRANSFORMED ITS RELATIONS WITH THE EU.....	32
3.1 Brazil in BRICS and Changing Alliances	32
3.2 China’s Competing South-South Agenda.....	33
3.2.1 The Chinese Investments in the Amazon Rainforest.....	35
3.2.2 The Belt and Road Initiative.....	36
3.3 Brazil’s Relationship with russia after the Invasion of Ukraine: Pragmatism and Economic Weaponisation	38
CHAPTER 4. EU’S RESPONSE AS COMPETITION FOR INFLUENCE.....	43
4.1 Overview of Brazil-EU Institutional and Economic Relations	43
4.2 Global Gateway as a Strategic Response.....	45
4.3 Brazil in the EU-MERCOSUR Agreement	47
CHAPTER 5. COMPARATIVE PROCESS-TRACING RESULTS	49
5.1 Hypothesis 1.....	49
5.2 Hypothesis 2.....	52
5.3 Rival Explanation.....	56
CONCLUSIONS.....	59
REFERENCES	62
ANNOTATION	68

INTRODUCTION

Since the very beginning of *Itamaraty* (the Brazilian Foreign Office), the formulation of Brazilian foreign policy has shown a tendency to simultaneously benefit from the possibilities offered by the international system, while also assuming a special position of Brazilian global leadership, especially among Southern Hemisphere countries (Saraiva, 2011). The continuing practice of autonomy, universalist action, and the so-called “destiny of grandeur” - the idea of Brazil occupying a place of greater distinction in international politics - was established during the presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) and became more evident during the first two of Lula da Silva’s three presidential terms (2003-2010). As a result, the largest country in Latin America has long extended its economic and political influence beyond its regional borders, seeking strategic partnerships with global powers. Understanding Brazil’s foundational foreign policy principles of autonomy and universalism, now deeply embedded in the character of its society and state, is essential to explain the country’s positions on various international events and its political and economic cooperation strategies (Saraiva, 2011, p. 55). With growing global political weight comes increased global responsibility, which Brazil has taken on through several key developments, such as joining the economic and political alliance BRICS in 2009, participating in the EU-Mercosur free trade negotiations, which reached a political agreement in 2019 and culminated in the signing of the largest EU-Latin America trade agreement in 2024. Brazil also became the largest recipient of Chinese investment in the world in 2021 (Ceppi & Doval, 2024) and doubled its trade with Russia following Western sanctions after the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine (see Table 1.). To examine the EU's political rather than purely economic relations with Brazil, it is useful to consider Brazil within the broader context of BRICS. Despite the growing collaboration among BRICS countries across political, economic, and diplomatic spheres, the member states differ significantly in their political systems, economic capacities, military strength,

demographic weight, and both regional and global aspirations. To engage with rising powers and complement its primarily regional partnerships, the EU has chosen to institutionalise and deepen its political and economic ties with each BRICS member individually, aiming to establish bilateral “strategic partnerships” with each country, including Brazil (Bas Hooijmaaijers & Keukeleire, 2020).

The **topicality** of this study lies in the need to examine the evolving nature of Brazil–EU relations, especially in light of Brazil’s broader global engagements in the 21st century. Given the structural divergences and occasional misalignments in their strategic objectives, this study seeks to explore Brazil’s role as a pragmatic actor and evaluate the potential for convergence in Brazil-EU relations. By focusing on political and strategic dimensions, while also considering economic interdependence, this work contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the coherence, limitations, and prospects of their partnership in a multipolar world. This study aims to understand how Brazil’s pragmatic foreign policy shapes and is shaped by its evolving relationship with the EU, amid global power reconfigurations. While there is substantial academic attention to Brazil’s role in BRICS and its bilateral relations with global powers like China or the U.S., there is a noticeable gap in studies focusing specifically on the transformation of Brazil-EU relations under the lens of Brazil’s pragmatic foreign policy. In the context of growing global fragmentation, power crises, and the Russo-Ukraine war, the EU is increasingly seeking deeper ties with Global South countries, making the case of Brazil both timely and strategically relevant. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how Brazil’s evolving identity as a pragmatic actor intersects with the EU’s search for new global partnerships.

While Brazil and the EU formalised their Strategic Partnership in 2007, subsequent developments, including China’s rise as Brazil’s top trading partner, the deepening of South-South cooperation through BRICS, and recent EU initiatives such as the Global Gateway, have introduced competing incentives and diplomatic

asymmetries. Following these developments this paper raises an important question: **under what conditions does Brazil recalibrate its engagement with the EU, and what explains the alternation between diplomatic distancing and re-engagement?**

The relevance of this study lies in its effort to trace how Brazil–EU relations reflect broader middle-power adaptation in a multipolar world. While Brazil’s role in BRICS and its ties with China and the U.S. are well documented, few studies apply causal analysis to explain Brazil’s shifting engagement with the EU. **The purpose** of the study is to identify the mechanisms that drive Brazil’s foreign-policy variation toward the EU. It argues that Brazil deprioritises the EU when China’s trade share rises significantly or surpasses the EU’s, and re-engages when the EU links its normative agenda with credible, strategically aligned offers.

Following objectives of the study are: 1) to conceptualise Brazil’s pragmatic foreign policy using the lens of “principled pragmatism” in international relations; 2) to map Brazil’s trade with China, the EU, and Russia from 1997 to 2025 and identify major turning points; 3) to trace the sequence of diplomatic, rhetorical, and policy responses following trade shocks; 4) to assess whether EU initiatives like Global Gateway and EFSD+ succeed in reversing diplomatic drift; 5) to test the explanatory strength of a rival variable (domestic leadership ideology) in shaping Brazil’s foreign policy.

Object of this research is the bilateral relationship between Brazil and the European Union. **Subject of research** is the causal mechanism through which external economic incentives and EU thematic offers influence Brazil’s foreign-policy behaviour under a pragmatic foreign policy approach.

In terms of research methods, the study applies a **theory-testing process-tracing method**, following the research design outlined by Beach and Pedersen (2019). This is supported by structured document analysis, descriptive trade statistics, and comparative case episodes. A custom-compiled dataset of Brazil’s merchandise trade with China, the EU, and Russia (1997-2025) is used to identify economic triggers (see

Table 1.). Diplomatic behaviour is traced using elite speeches, foreign-policy statements, communiqués, and summit documentation. These empirical traces are evaluated through four types of tests: smoking-gun, hoop, straw-in-the-wind, and double-decisive, following the standards of qualitative process tracing.

The bibliographic foundation includes primary sources, such as Brazilian ComexStat trade data, Itamaraty communiqués, EU policies and EU-Mercosur negotiations statements, and Global Gateway documents; as well as academic literature on theory of pragmatism, neoclassical realism, EU's interregionalism, strategic bilateralism, BRICS, South-South cooperation, and Brazil's internal and foreign policy analysis.

Paper consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical foundations, including the concept of pragmatism in Brazilian foreign policy. Chapter 2 presents the analytical and methodological framework, detailing the research design, dataset, and hypotheses. Chapter 3 analyses Brazil's pragmatic turn through its engagement with BRICS, China, and Russia. Chapter 4 explores the EU's strategic responses to Brazil's shifting alignment. Chapter 5 applies comparative process tracing to test the hypotheses and rival explanation across turning points (2009, 2015, 2018, 2020), followed by conclusions, references, and appendices.

The theoretical foundation of the thesis Chapter 1 introduces pragmatism as both a foreign-policy tradition in Brazil and a theoretical lens through which to understand middle-power behaviour. Drawing from neoclassical realism, the study conceptualises Brazil's foreign-policy choices as shaped by systemic pressures and filtered through domestic cost–benefit assessments. The notion of **principled pragmatism** is used to explain how Brazil simultaneously pursues strategic flexibility while maintaining commitments to multilateralism, development, and Global South solidarity.

Methodologically, this study applies a qualitative approach grounded in

neoclassical realism and structured by the analytical lens of principled pragmatism. It uses a comparative case-study method to analyse Brazil's shifting engagement with the EU alongside its relations with China and Russia. Empirically, the research relies on process tracing, supported by a custom-compiled trade dataset (1997-2025) and structured document analysis of official speeches, communiqués, and strategic texts. Critical episodes, such as the EU-Mercosur negotiations, Brazil's stance during the Ukraine war, and Lula's 2023 diplomatic reset, are assessed using causal inference tests (smoking-gun, hoop, straw, double-decisive). Brazil's foreign-policy behaviour is evaluated through a combination of economic indicators, elite rhetoric, and diplomatic agreements, allowing the study to identify when and how pragmatic recalibrations occurred in response to external incentives.

Page count: 69

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

1.1 Pragmatism as a Theoretical Approach to Foreign Policy Analysis

In foreign policy, pragmatism serves as an analytical framework to understand how states act to advance their national interests within the international arena but is not comprehensive enough to be considered a theory (Velazquez-Flores, 2022). Unlike established theories such as *Realism*, *Idealism*, or *Constructivism*, which offer structured paradigms, pragmatism does not seek to prescribe a singular path for state behaviour. Instead, it provides a *practical lens* through which foreign policy decisions can be analysed, focusing on practical decision-making that prioritises solving bilateral issues while maintaining a strong focus on the state's own interests.

According to the literature on pragmatism, coming of the main principles of *realism*, pragmatism draws on the fundamental assumption that states act as rational, unitary entities in an anarchic international system where the pursuit of power and security is paramount. Classic Realist thinkers like *Thucydides*, *Machiavelli*, or *Hobbes* laid the groundwork for this perspective by emphasising the *centrality of power politics* and the inherent struggle for dominance among states (Velazquez-Flores, 2022, p. 10). Within this realist framework, states are not merely passive actors reacting to external forces but proactive agents strategically manoeuvring to secure their national interests. This fundamental idea of rational state behaviour, oriented towards the maximisation of power, underpins the pragmatic approach, which prioritises practical solutions over ideological commitments. The realist foundation of pragmatism is articulated through several core assumptions that shape state behaviour:

First, states are considered the primary actors in the international system, operating as rational, unitary entities that pursue their national interests, often defined in terms of *power*. The international system itself is characterised by *anarchy*, where no overarching authority can guarantee security, prompting states to act in ways that *safeguard their sovereignty* and maintain their strategic position. In this context,

international politics inherently becomes a *competition for power*, where states are driven to build military capabilities sufficient to deter potential threats. Alliances, therefore, become essential tools to enhance a state's ability to defend itself, while *unilateral actions* are often favoured over *multilateral approaches* when it comes to security concerns. The underlying rationale here is that, in a world where power dynamics are constantly shifting, pragmatic strategies enable states to maintain a level of autonomy and universalist action (Velazquez-Flores, 2022, p. 12).

However, pragmatism as an approach does not strictly align with the pure logic of *Realism*. The integration of elements from other theoretical traditions is particularly evident in the concept of "*Principled Pragmatism*", which blends *realist* calculations of interest with *idealistic* commitments to *normative values*. As suggested by Velazquez-Flores (2022), principled pragmatism is not inherently contradictory but rather *complementary*, as it allows states to pursue strategic goals while framing these actions within a *moral or legal context*. This approach reflects the pragmatic understanding that while power remains a core objective, the way it is exercised can be shaped by the broader principles a state seeks to uphold. As noted by Edward H. Carr (1964), political thought that exclusively adheres to either *utopian idealism* or *raw realism* fails to capture the intricate nature of international relations and thus is not effective for foreign policy (p. 93).

While Velazquez-Flores (2022) emphasises pragmatism's alignment with *realist strategic calculations*, Ralston (2011) critiques the tendency to conflate pragmatism solely with Realism, suggesting that the pragmatic approach is broader and more *flexible*. Ralston identifies pragmatism as a framework that challenges fixed doctrines, emphasising that pragmatic decision-making should adapt to the contextual realities of the international system rather than rigidly applying a power-centric model. In contrast, Velazquez-Flores (2022) views pragmatism as primarily grounded in the rational pursuit of strategic interests, highlighting its relevance for states navigating multipolar global

environments.

Further complicating the theoretical landscape, Bauer and Brighi (2009) point out that pragmatism never developed into a coherent theoretical edifice within IR, largely because it did not form a unified school of thought. Pragmatism's origins in Anglo-American philosophy, particularly through the works of Peirce, James, and Dewey, highlight its emphasis on practical reasoning and adaptive strategies rather than abstract theorisation. This foundational principle is crucial when considering how pragmatism is applied within IR, as it resists rigid categorisation and remains inherently context-driven. As Bauer and Brighi argue, the diversity within pragmatic thought has led to various interpretations, but a common thread remains: pragmatism is less about ideological purity and more about practical outcomes (Bauer & Elisabetta Brighi, 2011).

This flexible nature is one reason why pragmatism has been both praised and critiqued within IR. On one hand, it offers a dynamic approach to foreign policy that aligns with the unpredictable nature of global affairs. On the other hand, its lack of coherence as a singular theory leaves room for interpretative ambiguity, which can undermine its explanatory power. Despite this, its application remains valuable precisely because it allows states to balance strategic calculations with normative justifications, thereby navigating the tensions between realism and idealism without succumbing entirely to either. Pragmatism also engages with the epistemological challenge of how states understand their own actions within the international system. While Realism often posits that states act purely in pursuit of power, pragmatism acknowledges that perceptions, norms, and contextual variables play significant roles. As Rorty (1989) argued, pragmatism in international relations should move away from fixed truths and instead embrace a plurality of perspectives, where decisions are made based on the practicalities of the moment rather than on abstract principles.

In essence, pragmatism as an analytical approach offers a way to transcend rigid theoretical categorisations, providing a framework that can incorporate both strategic

rationality and moral considerations. It recognises that states must navigate a landscape marked by competing interests and shifting power dynamics, where the ability to act pragmatically, yet with a sense of purpose, becomes essential for maintaining relevance and influence on the global stage. Therefore, the main purpose of this work is to analyse Brazil's foreign policy actions under such an approach.

1.2 Overview of Brazil's Pragmatic Foreign Policy Approach

Brazil's foreign policy has historically been characterised by a pragmatic approach that balances national interests with international cooperation. Over the years, this pragmatism has evolved, reflecting both internal political changes and shifts in the global geopolitical landscape. The following sections outline the key phases of Brazil's pragmatic foreign policy, emphasising the contributions of pivotal figures such as Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Periodisation of Brazilian Foreign Policy, 1889-2011, derived from Wayne Selcher (1974) and based on Moore (2011), breaks down into 6 significant phases:

- 1) Territorial Diplomacy (1889-1917)
- 2) Phase 2: Limited Outward Projection (1917-1945)
- 3) Phase 3: Active Outward Projection (1960-1963)
- 4) Phase 4: Withdrawal and Conservatism (1964-1966)
- 5) Phase 5: Commercial expansion and pragmatism (1966-2002)
- 6) Phase 6: Active outward engagement (2003-present).

In the early stages, under the influence of close cooperation with the USA, particularly during the presidency of JFK, Brazil's foreign policy was marked by a risk-averse, conservative stance, focusing on maintaining stable diplomatic relations rather than asserting a more autonomous national identity. This cautious approach drew criticism from nationalists who favoured a more pragmatic and interest-driven strategy. Economic pressures and the need for development gradually pushed the government to

integrate National Security and Development concepts, leading to the Doutrina de Segurança Nacional (DSN), which has since influenced Brazilian foreign policy (Moore, 2011, p. 197).

Itamaraty, Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerio dos Relações Exteriores) has been a constantly present and firm actor that has provided the country with successful foreign diplomacy development since the days of the Baron do Rio Branco and ever since. However, the significance of the office has risen together with the country's internationalism and flourished during the first two Lula's presidency terms (Moore, 2011, p. 193). According to Saraiva (2011), the consistent direction toward centralisation in the formulation of foreign policy contributed to continuing diplomatic policies and behaviour based on longer-term principles. Nevertheless, such an approach has made Brazil's foreign policy more protected from the direct interference of domestic policy changes, which have followed the shifts of the country's presidential powers in the 21st century.

Fontaine described Itamaraty as follows: "It is nationalist, but more pragmatic than romantic. It is oriented toward Europe and not America. It emphasises preservation of good relations with old friends, but not at the expense of making new ones. It entails a desire for a larger Brazilian role on the world scene, but it does not exaggerate the nation's present prospects for world power" (Fontaine, cited in Moore, 2011, p. 130).

Continental size, natural resources, regional linguistic characteristics, Portuguese colonial legacy, and comparatively peaceful experience of nation-building, together bring to Brazil's sense of exceptionalism. This insularity holds a list of beliefs that contributed to the continuity of nation-centred foreign policy. Saraiva (2011) identifies such beliefs as: the importance of autonomy, universalist action the so-called Brazil's "destiny of grandeur" - the idea that the country will one day come to occupy a place of greater distinction in international politics (Saraiva, 2011, p. 53).

More evidently, the narrative of Brazil's "special place" in international politics

have been highlighted in the following cases: the "patron of Brazilian diplomacy" (the foreign minister Barão do Rio Branco) highlighted the territorial, ethnical and geopolitical "similarities" between Brazil, presenting Brazil as a "counterpart" of the US in Latin American region. Further, the ex-foreign minister Araújo Castro stated that "few countries in the world have Brazil's potential for diplomatic reach" and "no country can escape its destiny and, for good or ill, Brazil is condemned to grandeur." (Saraiva, 2011, p. 55).

Cardoso's foreign policy supported domestic trade liberalisation through 'economic pragmatism', prioritising monetary stability even at the cost of growth and employment. This approach sought international credibility with financial institutions and emphasised multilateral trade. His neo-liberal economic model, which liberalised finance, trade, and exchange rates, made Brazil more susceptible to international economic fluctuations. Cardoso aimed to increase Brazil's role in shaping international norms and regimes, with MERCOSUL as a key partner. His strategy of 'legalising' international relations through adherence to and participation in international regimes provided Brazil with legal frameworks for action, reducing political friction. By way of example, this was evidenced by Brazil's frequent use of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Mechanism (Moore, 2011, p. 202). Under Cardoso's leadership, Brazil prioritised WTO engagement over regional partnerships like Mercosul. The country focused on major trading partners while reducing attention to smaller markets, with the WTO becoming central to Brazil's economic strategy in its 2000-2003 planning document. Cardoso maintained a conservative international stance, influenced by Brazil's careful recovery from economic challenges during his time as Finance Minister under Franco. Cardoso's foreign policy remained closely aligned with Brazil's traditional diplomatic approach, rooted in historico-legalism and economic diplomacy. It leaned towards a moderate multilateralism, fostering dialogue with multiple international partners while maintaining the US as a primary ally.

In January 2003, Lula da Silva and his Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) (eng. - The Workers' Party) entered Brazilian government, and based on the country's predicament by the earlier international commitments established a new era of foreign policy to build state's autonomy proportionally to 'continental proportions' of Brazil and the objective of winning for Brazil its 'rightful place' in international politics. As noted by Hurrell (2008), "For many on the left (especially in Europe), for many inside Brazil, and for many in the developing world, the assertive foreign policy of the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) is seen as a progressive force in global affairs" (Hurrell, 2008, p. 51). The cultivation of Brazil's search for recognition on the global stage has been taken into practical implementation since Lula's first presidential term. The literature on Brazil's foreign policy has traditionally overlooked the role of the governing Workers' Party (PT) in shaping foreign policy options and ratifying policy instruments. Only recently has there been increased focus on the 'realist' dimension of Brazilian foreign policy, centred on national interest, while much analysis continues to emphasise Brazil's 'soft power' and its image as a 'peaceful' rising power.

Under Lula, Brazil's foreign policy adopted the principle of "autonomy through diversification," which emphasised building alliances beyond traditional partners by fostering South-South cooperation and forming agreements with regions like Asia-Pacific, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. This strategy aimed to balance international asymmetries while maintaining constructive relations with developed countries and engaging with them within international organisations, ultimately seeking to diminish their dominance. This approach, according to Moore (2011), marked a shift from Brazil's traditional foreign policy, which historically adhered to a legalistic, multilateral, and non-interventionist stance rooted in sovereign integration (Moore, 2011).

During Lula's second term, this approach became even more prominent as Itamaraty actively leveraged Brazil's participation in forums like BRICS, the G-7, and

the G-20. This proactive diplomacy aimed to increase Brazil's international visibility and solidify its role as a bridge between developed and developing nations - a concept that had been evolving since the 1970s. By combining pragmatic alliance-building with strategic leadership, Brazil sought to enhance its global standing while also challenging traditional power structures (Saraiva, 2011, p. 62).

Criticism of the PT's influence on Brazil's foreign policy primarily centres on its unclear objectives, often perceived as either misplaced messianism or a vehicle for promoting Lula's image. The focus on South-South diplomacy, particularly alliances with India and China, was met with resistance from business sectors and career diplomats, who questioned the practical benefits. The 2004 recognition of China as a market economy, perceived as yielding little in return, is considered a major foreign policy error of the Lula administration. Another major critique is the politicisation of foreign policy, where long-standing principles like non-intervention and sovereignty were increasingly subjected to PT's ideological agenda. While the end of the military dictatorship marked a return to non-interference, Lula's tenure saw a selective approach, encapsulated in the concept of 'non-indifference'. In summary, criticisms target PT's foreign policy on three levels: institutional influence over Itamaraty, top-down policy formulation dominated by Lula's inner circle, and substantive issues related to the perceived anti-American and anti-imperialist stance, seen as counterproductive to Brazil's broader interests (Moore, 2011, p. 259).

Throughout its modern history, Brazil has pursued a multifaceted foreign policy that seeks to benefit from the global system while simultaneously asserting its leadership. This duality often results in a tension between autonomous action and leading regional initiatives. Notably, while elements of realist pragmatism frequently guide Brazil's diplomatic efforts, these pragmatic approaches are occasionally infused with ideological motives, especially when influenced by the political vision of those in power, which can arguably be presented as principled pragmatism.

Out of all the foreign policy periods, the pragmatic approach became particularly evident during the presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) and the first two terms of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010). While both leaders maintained a commitment to pragmatic foreign policy, Lula's worldview allowed for more explicit ideological expressions, implementing his broader vision of Brazil's role as a leader in the Global South-South cooperation. Thus, Brazil's exceptionalist outlook and aspirational for a global position have also been reflected in modern events that will be further examined in this paper.

CHAPTER 2. ANALYTICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Methodology and Process Tracing Research Design

Process Tracing Research Method

Process-tracing is a qualitative research method used to uncover causal mechanisms in social sciences linking *independent variables* (e.g., China’s trade share; EU’s bundling of green finance with normative standards) to the *dependent variable* (Brazil’s relative tilt toward or away from the EU). The analysis applied in this paper follows Beach & Pedersen’s (2019) “theory-testing process tracing (PT)” template:

Figure 1. Theory-testing process-tracing steps applied in this study

Step	Output	Evidence Test Employed
1) Identify hypothesised mechanism (H1, H2)	Causal diagram	-
2) Derive observable manifestations for each causal step	Indicator table	-
3) Collect and sequence empirical traces	Timeline (Annex 2)	-
4) Assess each trace	Tests: smoking-gun; hoop; straw-in-the-wind; double-decisive tests	-
5) Weigh rival		“Hoop” exclusion

explanations domestic ideology)	(e.g.,	Alternative-cause matrix	
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In theory-testing process tracing, different types of empirical observations contribute to evaluating the strength of a hypothesised causal mechanism. Following Beach and Pedersen (2019), this thesis applies four distinct types of **evidence tests**, each offering varying levels of inferential power:

- 1) A **smoking-gun test** strongly confirms a hypothesis if the evidence is present but does not necessarily disprove it if absent. It is a high-confidence indicator of causality.
- 2) A **hoop test** is necessary for a hypothesis to remain viable, if the evidence fails this test, the hypothesis can be rejected. Passing it, however, only keeps the hypothesis alive without confirming it.
- 3) A **straw-in-the-wind test** offers weak inferential value: passing it marginally increases confidence in a hypothesis, while failing it slightly reduces credibility without falsification.
- 4) A **double-decisive test** is rare but powerful: it simultaneously confirms one hypothesis while disproving its rivals.

These tests are used in this thesis to evaluate whether the hypothesised mechanisms, such as Brazil's response to trade shocks or the EU's strategic bundling of incentives, can be causally linked to observed foreign policy shifts. The combination of test types allows for a graded assessment of evidentiary strength across both hypotheses and their rival explanations.

Consistent with a theory-testing process tracing design, this thesis applies a multidimensional, temporally sensitive assessment of causality, supported by a set of complementary analytical techniques, to evaluate the two core hypotheses. Descriptive statistics are used to visualise changes in Brazil's trade exposure to China and the EU from 1997 to 2025, based on ComexStat data and the author's calculations. These visual

trends help identify turning points and justify the selection of empirical episodes for process tracing.

Sequence testing ensures that changes in the independent variables, such as China_Share increases or EU financial offers, occur before shifts in Brazil's diplomatic behaviour, supporting claims of causal direction.

Turning points analysis is employed at three key moments (2009, 2015, 2018, 2020) to assess how trade or strategic incentives align with foreign policy realignment. Within-case congruence tests whether Brazil's rhetorical framing of the EU corresponds with material incentives (e.g., green finance), particularly relevant for Hypothesis 2.

Finally, rival explanation elimination is conducted through hoop tests to assess whether domestic political ideology (R1) offers a stronger explanation for alignment changes than the trade- or finance-based mechanisms under investigation.

Analytical Techniques and Validity Tests

1. **Descriptive statistics:** include line graphs of Brazil trade with China contrasted with EU trade share over the 1997-2025 years of trade (export and import combined), based on data available by Comex Stat (Comex Stat, 2025).
2. **Sequence tests:** testing if the independent variable changes before the observed policy shift.
3. **Turning points analysis:** 2009 (China_Share increases by ≥ 3.0), 2015 (China_Share surpasses the EU_Share), 2018 (China_Share increases by ≥ 3.0), 2020 (China_Share increases by ≥ 3.0).
4. **Within-case congruence:** cross-checking speech content with material incentives (e.g., EU green-finance pledges).
5. **Rival explanation elimination:** applying hoop tests to domestic politics and global-commodity-cycle hypotheses.

Research Design and Case-Selection Rationale

This study employs a single-country, multi-level case study of Brazil's relations with the European Union from 1997 to 2025. Brazil is treated as a most-likely case for pragmatic foreign-policy behaviour: it is a regional power with diversified partnerships, a high tolerance for policy flexibility, and a demonstrated willingness to recalibrate alignments in pursuit of developmental gains. Focusing on Brazil-EU ties allows leverage over three analytical levels that together capture the "transformation" puzzle:

- Interregional level: EU-Mercosur negotiations and Economic Blocs relations.
- Bilateral level: the 2007 EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership and 2023 reboot.
- Trans-regional competitive level: Brazil's concurrent engagement with China (BRI) and other BRICS partners.

A single, deeply traced case is preferable to a shallow cross-case comparison because the outcome of interest, shifts in alignment driven by pragmatic cost-benefit calculations, is highly sensitive to sequencing, domestic politics, and external shocks.

2.2 Analytical Framework and Hypotheses

This study seeks to understand how and why Brazil's diplomatic engagement with the EU has transformed over time, particularly in the context of China's growing economic influence and Brazil's pragmatic foreign policy. The core argument is that Brazil's foreign policy, characterised by pragmatism, has led to a recalibration of its international partnerships, impacting its relationship with the EU. This transformation is not solely a result of Brazil's actions but also involves the EU's strategic responses. To study this dynamic, this thesis will test the following two primary hypotheses:

Working Hypotheses

H1: When China's share of Brazil's total merchandise trade (China_Share) either (a) increases by ≥ 3.0 percentage points in a single year, or (b) definitively and consistently

surpasses the EU's share (EU_Share), Brazil subsequently deprioritises diplomatic engagement with the European Union. This shift is observable in delayed summits, weakened rhetoric, or reduced progress in strategic negotiations within a 1-3 year timeframe following the trigger.

H2: When the European Union combines its normative expectations with credible, large-scale thematic incentives, such as green finance or targeted investment, Brazil is more likely to re-engage in strategic and diplomatic cooperation with the EU.

Rival Explanation:

R1: Brazil's shifts in engagement with the EU are primarily driven by changes in domestic political leadership and ideological orientation (e.g., Lula vs. Bolsonaro), irrespective of economic incentives.

Causal Mechanism for H1:

1. **Economic Shift (Trigger):** A significant, empirically identifiable change in Brazil-China trade dynamics (either a rapid annual increase in China's share or China's share surpassing the EU's consistently).
Underlying Rationale (Brazil): Recognition of China as an increasingly vital economic partner, driving a foreign policy calculus focused on maximizing national interest.
2. **Elite Perception and Rhetorical Adjustment (Intermediate Step):** Brazilian foreign policy elites adjust their strategic outlook and public discourse to reflect China's enhanced importance.
3. **Policy Behavior Shift - Deprioritization of EU (Outcome):** Brazil reallocates diplomatic resources, attention, and political capital, leading to a relative downgrading of the EU's strategic importance in observable ways.

This hypothesis builds on the assumption that Brazil, acting pragmatically, responds to changes in trade exposure by adjusting the level of strategic attention it gives to its external partners. As China becomes a more significant economic actor, Brazil may see less incentive to engage deeply with the EU, particularly if EU cooperation is seen as more demanding or less aligned with Brazil's short-term interests.

Causal Mechanism for H2:

1. EU Strategic Realisation and Policy Formulation (Trigger): The EU recognizes the changing geopolitical landscape and strategically devises initiatives that combine financial/technological offerings with its normative strengths.

1.2 EU Diplomatic and Financial Offer (Intermediate Step): The EU actively presents its new "offer" to Brazil, emphasizing mutual benefits.

2.2 Brazilian Pragmatic Assessment and Response (Intermediate Step): Brazil's foreign policy evaluates the EU's offer based on tangible benefits and its contribution to national development and strategic autonomy.

3. Renewed Bilateral Engagement/Cooperation (Outcome): If Brazil perceives the EU's offer as beneficial, it reciprocates with increased engagement, leading to a qualitative improvement or "reinvigoration" of the relationship in specific sectors.

In process tracing, including at least one rival explanation strengthens the analysis by testing whether the proposed mechanism truly accounts for the observed changes, helps guard against confirmation bias and allows for a more robust test of the primary causal mechanisms. In this thesis, a **rival explanation** refers to an alternative factor that could explain Brazil's changing relationship with the EU, independent of the main variables tested in the hypotheses. Presented rival explanation will be tested by examining whether foreign policy shifts correlate more strongly with electoral cycles than with changes in trade exposure or external offers. Together, these hypotheses allow the thesis to test both the **drivers of Brazil's distancing from the EU** (H1) and the

conditions under which renewed engagement becomes likely (H2), based on a theory of pragmatism in foreign policy decision-making.

Rationale behind the hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 is based on the premise that Brazil's foreign policy priorities are shaped by shifting economic dependencies, particularly in the context of its pragmatic approach to international engagement. As a middle power with flexible alignments and diversified trade relations, Brazil tends to adjust its diplomatic focus in response to material changes in its global partnerships. The central assumption here is that a significant and sustained increase in Brazil's trade with China leads to a relative deprioritisation of the European Union as a strategic partner. This hypothesis is grounded in observable trade dynamics: over the past two decades, China has risen from a marginal partner to become Brazil's largest trading partner, overtaking the EU by 2015 and maintaining that lead through 2025. The hypothesis operationalises this shift through two measurable triggers: (a) single-year surges in China_Share (≥ 3.0 percentage points), and (b) China's consistent trade dominance over the EU. These economic thresholds act as turning points in Brazil's cost-benefit assessment of its international alignments.

From a theoretical perspective, this logic draws on rational-choice and pragmatic foreign policy frameworks, which hold that states, especially non-aligned or regionally autonomous ones, will allocate diplomatic resources and attention where the expected returns are highest. As China's trade relevance grows, Brazil may view EU engagement as less urgent, particularly if the EU demands conditionality or offers comparatively less market access or investment. Pragmatism in this context is not ideological indifference but a calculated adjustment in alignment, prioritising flexibility and responsiveness to external structural shifts. Hypothesis 1 thus explains the first half of the EU-Brazil transformation: not through diplomatic rupture, but through gradual downgrading,

observable in delayed summits, diluted rhetoric, and stalled agreements. It complements Hypothesis 2 by establishing the economic-political conditions that precede any potential re-engagement initiated by the EU.

Further, Hypothesis 2 is grounded in the understanding that Brazil's foreign policy toward the European Union is shaped not only by economic calculations, but also by how external offers align with its pragmatic, development-oriented agenda. While the EU has long positioned itself as a normative power (Manners, 2002), promoting environmental, governance, and human rights standards in its external relations, these normative expectations alone have proven insufficient to sustain Brazil's strategic engagement, particularly as China emerged as a competing, less conditional partner. Second hypothesis is therefore constructed on the assumption that Brazil re-engages with the EU when normative demands are coupled with credible, large-scale thematic incentives. In this context, "credible" refers not merely to rhetorical promises or symbolic announcements but to concrete, actionable offers backed by institutional mechanisms such as the Global Gateway, EFSD+ guarantees, or sectoral MoUs. These offers must be perceived as substantively aligned with Brazil's domestic priorities (e.g., environmental protection, reindustrialisation, energy transition) to be pragmatically valuable.

This logic draws on the core principles of pragmatic foreign policy analysis: middle powers like Brazil do not reject normative engagement outright, but their willingness to cooperate depends on whether such engagement brings material benefits and respects national autonomy. The EU's re-engagement strategy is thus expected to be effective only when it shifts from value-driven conditionality toward bundled offers that combine normative alignment with strategic investment.

Hypothesis 2 reflects this by positing that Brazil is more likely to re-engage diplomatically when the EU adopts this bundling approach, as seen in recent initiatives under the Global Gateway framework. This hypothesis complements the first by

completing the causal arc: while H1 explains Brazil's drift away from the EU in response to China's trade rise, H2 examines the conditions under which the EU can regain relevance through pragmatic re-alignment.

Figure 2. Operational Indicators for H1 and H2

Hypothesis	Step	Indicator	Source
H1: Brazil's Pragmatic Rebalancing	1. Economic shift (trigger)	(a) China_Share \uparrow ≥ 3.0 pp in 1 year (2009, 2018, 2020); (b) China_Share overtakes and stays above EU_Share (from 2015)	ComexStat (1997–2025); author's calculations
	2. Elite signalling	Shifts in foreign ministry rhetoric; cautious framing of EU in Itamaraty press releases	Itamaraty press releases; official government statements
	3. Policy behaviour	Postponed EU–Brazil summits (e.g., post-2014); weak joint statements; delays in Mercosur-EU	EU websites (consilium.europa.eu, ec.europa.eu); DG Trade reports; NDICI trackers

		talks	
H2. EU Strategic Re-engagement through Thematic Incentives	1. EU Strategic Realisation	EU strategy documents citing the need to re-engage Latin America (e.g., Global Gateway, 2021)	European Commission communications; EEAS strategy papers
	2. Thematic Offer	Launch of green finance, digital, or climate investment initiatives targeting Brazil	EU press releases; Global Gateway announcements; official EU–Brazil MoUs
	3. Brazilian Reception	Official endorsements; thematic alignment with national strategies	Planalto.gov.br; Ministry of Finance, Foreign Affairs, or media outlets
	4. Re-engagement Outcome	Signing of new agreements; increased participation in EU	EU-Brazil cooperation updates; NDICI and EFSD+ trackers; joint

		initiatives; formal renewal of summits	communications
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2.3 Dataset and Operationalisation

Essential tool for further analysis is a custom-compiled dataset (Table 1.) of Brazil's bilateral trade flows with China, the European Union, and Russia, covering the period 1997-2025, using data from ComexStat - the official Brazilian foreign trade platform (Comex Stat, 2025). The period used for the timeline is framed in accordance with the years which data is available in the ComexStat. The dataset records annual export and import values (FOB only), manually aggregated into **total merchandise trade** for each partner and for the world. The key variables are explained as following:

- **Country_Value** (EU_Value; China_Value; Russia_Value) refers to the **total value (USD)** of Brazil's exports and imports combined, with a specific country or economic bloc in a given year. For example, *China_Value 2020* represents all Brazilian trade with China in that year.
- **World_Value** captures Brazil's total trade with all countries globally in a given year. This is a critical denominator for precise share calculations.
- **Country_Share** is calculated as:

$$\text{Country_Share}_{\text{year}} = \frac{\text{Country_Value}_{\text{year}}}{\text{World_Value}_{\text{year}}}$$

This ensures that trade shares are proportionally accurate, relative to Brazil's full global trade profile. Using **World_Value** as the denominator allows for comparison across

years despite global trade fluctuations, making the dataset robust for process-tracing analysis.

Table 1: Brazil’s bilateral trade shares with China, the EU, and Russia (1997–2025)

Year	China_Value	EU_Value	Russia_Value	World_Value	China_Share	EU_Share	Russia_Share
1997	2247282054	28533661257	1078689871	113485457591	2.0%	25.1%	1.0%
1998	1927957795	29636791665	940347483	109749464457	1.8%	27.0%	0.9%
1999	1533900195	26848622814	1060842766	98205449666	1.6%	27.3%	1.1%
2000	2304067272	27147778288	994573922	111969509818	2.1%	24.2%	0.9%
2001	3221397416	27942618481	1565132139	114601314425	2.8%	24.4%	1.4%
2002	4065557871	25904746239	1679131004	108421921656	3.7%	23.9%	1.5%
2003	6674267522	28566117893	2053069735	122083909842	5.5%	23.4%	1.7%
2004	9142106205	35959293283	2460470969	158935309037	5.8%	22.6%	1.5%
2005	12164130017	41248618903	3636117641	193290050961	6.3%	21.3%	1.9%
2006	16373562516	46909540581	4378311627	230112248079	7.1%	20.4%	1.9%
2007	23373051656	61227395882	5434950978	281858332953	8.3%	21.7%	1.9%
2008	36555440139	75912949008	7963762778	370471711803	9.9%	20.5%	2.1%
2009	36899486628	56157463826	4277027036	281189285709	13.1%	20.0%	1.5%
2010	56339045606	73420823169	6058039867	383771099672	14.7%	19.1%	1.6%
2011	77090791467	89818790709	7154677923	481636066208	16.0%	18.6%	1.5%
2012	75470551744	87174952265	5929960818	465118964227	16.2%	18.7%	1.3%
2013	83348656711	86850075952	5648623714	474045142065	17.6%	18.3%	1.2%
2014	77961358278	79620797355	6834446074	451746255634	17.3%	17.6%	1.5%
2015	65869412744	62645733907	4684085806	359886614140	18.3%	17.4%	1.3%
2016	58483240730	55931912112	4320529157	318847486867	18.3%	17.5%	1.4%
2017	75042428142	62083778462	5402349705	373939552356	20.1%	16.6%	1.4%
2018	99086800129	69930256822	5058102145	417211506901	23.7%	16.8%	1.2%
2019	99385820153	64910366381	5334526140	407054775227	24.4%	15.9%	1.3%
2020	102566516598	57959750961	4270981223	367967066534	27.9%	15.8%	1.2%
2021	135558833366	74795079996	7285964776	500222626640	27.1%	15.0%	1.5%
2022	150171726160	95156247819	9812197804	606746725166	24.8%	15.7%	1.6%
2023	157500568953	91722496224	11355941543	580488605232	27.1%	15.8%	2.0%
2024	158008382165	95537311527	12415510871	599915767884	26.3%	15.9%	2.1%
2025	52523234611	31841266085	3777655430	196880691259	26.7%	16.2%	1.9%

Source: Author’s calculations based on ComexStat data from 1997 to 2025 (Comex Stat, 2025). Values represent each partner’s share of Brazil’s total annual merchandise trade.

Insights from the Table 1. Dataset

1. **China’s Trade Rise:** In 1997, China accounted for just 2.0% of Brazil’s total trade. By 2020, this rose to a peak of 27.9% which presents a 13-fold increase over 23 years. The average annual increase in China_Share from 1997 to 2025 is approximately 0.88 percentage points. China overtook the EU in 2015 and has remained Brazil’s dominant trade partner every year since.

2. EU's Relative Decline: The EU accounted for 25.1% of Brazil's trade in 1997 - more than 10× China's share at the time. By 2025, EU_Share had declined to 16.2%, reflecting a long-term structural drop. The annual average decrease in EU_Share over the same period is approximately -0.31 percentage points. This decline is particularly notable after 2011, with EU_Share never returning above 20%.

3. Key Turning Points:

1) 2009: China_Share rises from 9.9% to 13.1% (+3.2 pp) - first sharp jump over +3% in trade with China per year, coinciding with China's growing global infrastructure investments and Brazil-China commodity alignment.

2) 2015 marks the first year when China's share of Brazil's total trade (18.3%) surpassed the EU's (17.4%)

3) 2018 brings next sharp jump from 20.1% to 23.7% (+3.6 pp) - during Bolsonaro's rise, EU engagement slows.

4) 2020: COVID-era surge from 24.4% to 27.9% (+3.5 pp), while EU_Share falls to 15.8%.

5) 2015-2025: China maintains consistent trade dominance over the EU for 10 consecutive years.

This dataset directly informs the construction and testing of the thesis's first core hypothesis (H1): *H1: When China's share of Brazil's total trade increases sharply (≥ 3.0 percentage points in one year) or durably surpasses EU_Share, Brazil subsequently deprioritizes diplomatic engagement with the EU.*

The dataset confirms that three episodes (2009, 2018, 2020) meet the “ $\geq 3\%$ spike” criterion, and that a structural reversal in trade trends began in 2015. These events provide clear temporal anchors for process tracing and are used to examine subsequent

policy, rhetorical, and negotiation shifts in Brazil-EU relations. The dataset also supports a sustained dominance framework, showing that China remained ahead for about a decade, enabling mid- and long-term foreign policy recalibration.

While not central to the main hypotheses (H1 and H2), the `Russia_Share` column is retained in the dataset and will be used in Section 3.3, where Brazil's trade with Russia is analysed in the context of post 2022-sanctions geopolitical realignments. This supports a broader discussion of Brazil's South-South trade diversification and its relevance for EU-Brazil diplomacy.

2.4 Limitations of the Study

While the theory-testing process-tracing approach applied in this study offers strong internal validity and causal depth, it also presents several limitations, as following:

Single-case generalisability is a key constraint. This thesis focuses exclusively on Brazil, a large, upper-middle-income country with regional influence and a diversified trade profile. As such, the findings may not be directly transferable to other states, particularly smaller, low-income countries or high-income states with fixed alliance commitments. Rather than claiming universal laws, the goal is to contribute to theory-building. Future research could apply similar process-tracing frameworks to countries like India, or South Africa for comparative insight.

Data availability and transparency also present limitations. Some documents relevant to the EU-Mercosur Agreement remain confidential, and informal arrangements under initiatives like the Belt and Road may not be fully disclosed. Thus, the study relies on available official documents, field studies, think tank reports, and secondary sources to approximate intentions and outcomes.

Temporal scope limits apply as well. The study concludes in May 2025, and thus cannot account for future policy developments such as the final ratification of the EU-

Mercosur Agreement or long-term outcomes of the Global Gateway initiative. These are defined as important directions for future research and follow-up studies.

Scope conditions also shape the general relevance of the findings. The causal mechanisms identified here are most applicable to upper-middle-income regional powers that possess bargaining power in international negotiations and are actively navigating between multiple poles of influence, such as China and the EU. Countries without comparable economic leverage, or those already embedded in tight alliance structures, may not exhibit the same patterns of pragmatic re-alignment. These constraints define the boundaries of inference and suggest areas where the analytical model can be tested and refined in future research.

CHAPTER 3. THE PRAGMATIC TURN: HOW BRAZIL'S POLICY HAS TRANSFORMED ITS RELATIONS WITH THE EU

3.1 Brazil in BRICS and Changing Alliances

Brazil's participation in BRICS, since it joined in 2009 as a founding member, represents both a symbolic and strategic departure from its historically Western-oriented foreign policy. Traditionally aligned with the US and Europe, Brazil has long been considered a Western country by diplomatic culture and identity, despite persistent peripheral status in the global order. The turn toward BRICS, alongside Russia, India, China, and South Africa, signaled a shift in Brazil's international posture, reflecting broader processes of de-Westernization and the search for greater strategic autonomy. This realignment became particularly visible during the presidency of Lula da Silva (2003-2010), whose administration specifically emphasized South-South cooperation, multilateralism, and the reform of global governance institutions. BRICS offered a way for Brazil to position itself as a major representative of the Global South, challenging Western dominance in forums like the United Nations, the IMF, and the World Bank. As Lopes (2020) notes, Brazil's foreign policy during this period embraced a "brave and solidary" vision, opposing the cynicism of *realpolitik* and reflecting a revisionist stance toward the liberal international order (p. 5).

Yet Brazil's engagement with BRICS has not been linear. The shift away from traditional alliances has often been inconsistent and politically contested. Lopes (2020) highlights a growing disjunction between Brazil's foreign ministry (Itamaraty) and the presidency, especially under administrations that deprioritized multilateralism in favor of ideological or transactional alignments. Under President Michel Temer (2016-2018), Brazil's foreign policy pivoted back toward the West, culminating in its formal request to join the OECD. Similarly, President Jair Bolsonaro's open admiration for U.S. President Donald Trump and his hostility toward China created tensions within the

BRICS framework, undermining Brazil's credibility as a committed member (Lopes, 2020).

These contradictions reveal the broader instability of Brazil's international identity. While participation in BRICS allowed Brazil to challenge the Western-dominated order, domestic political shifts and institutional fragmentation have diluted its capacity to act strategically within the bloc. The rise of what Lopes calls a "post-diplomatic" foreign policy, characterized by the decline of Itamaraty's centrality and the proliferation of competing voices, has made Brazil's external relations more reactive, less coherent, and increasingly subject to ideological swings. In this context, Brazil's role in BRICS remains both a diplomatic opportunity and a site of internal contestation. The country swings between projecting itself as a leader of the Global South and reverting to patterns of Western dependence.

3.2 China's Competing South-South Agenda

China-Brazil relations, established in 1974 with Brazil's recognition of the People's Republic of China, evolved significantly through strategic partnerships emphasizing mutual technological and economic interests (Brito et al., 2024). China's role in Brazil's shifting alliances underscores this ambivalence. Although China has been Brazil's largest trading partner since 2009, and its presence in Latin America has expanded through infrastructure investment and trade, political and cultural mistrust persists. Initially marked by scientific cooperation, notably the CBERS satellite program, bilateral relations expanded considerably after Chinese leaders' 1993 visit to Brazil, establishing the Sino-Brazilian Strategic Partnership. This agreement facilitated China's access to Brazilian agricultural products and raw materials, while Brazil pursued opportunities in infrastructure projects and services exports (Leão, 2011).

In the late 1990s, Brazil aimed to secure contracts for construction companies in Chinese hydroelectric projects, while China prioritized importing Brazilian iron ore and

soybeans (Biato Junior, 2010). China's accession to the World Trade Organization in the early 2000s marked a transformative phase, with Brazilian exports to China increasing from US\$1 billion in 2000 to approximately US\$70 billion in 2021, making China Brazil's primary trading partner (Maciel Brito, 2023). From 2007 to 2020, Chinese companies undertook 176 investment projects totaling US\$66.1 billion in Brazil, nearly half of all Chinese investments in South America, predominantly through state-owned enterprises. These investments primarily targeted energy, mining, agriculture, manufacturing, and financial sectors, distributed strategically across various regions of Brazil. Notably, the Amazon region has seen significant Chinese involvement in agriculture, hydroelectric power, mining, and manufacturing (Cariello, 2021). Manaus, due to its advantageous Special Economic Zone status, emerged as a prominent destination for Chinese manufacturing, expanding from a single Chinese factory in 2000 to over 20 currently operating facilities (Brito et al., 2024).

Brito et al. (2024) argue that South-South cooperation, exemplified by China's investments in Brazil, does not automatically deliver improved conditions for workers, local communities, or the environment, given the persistent capitalist logic of extracting value from labor and nature. They emphasize the necessity for Global South countries, including Brazil, to foster deeper collaboration and formulate joint negotiation strategies to enhance bargaining power with China. According to Brito et al., strategic cooperation in technology transfer and sectors such as health, environment, agriculture, and energy is crucial for achieving meaningful social and labor advancements. However, Brito et al. caution that without cohesive strategies, countries of lesser strength risk vulnerability to China's economic dominance, likening it to "a dragon in a China shop" (Brito et al., 2024, p. 939). They highlight that fragmentation among Southern countries may benefit China, which prefers individual rather than collective negotiations. The authors stress that while ideological unity under the "Global South" identity is valuable, pragmatic realism towards China is essential. They advocate using China's competition with the

US and Europe to secure better negotiation terms. Ultimately, Brito et al. contend that the South-South agenda must prioritize Southern interests over Chinese dominance to avoid replicating historical patterns of economic subordination.

3.2.1 The Chinese Investments in the Amazon Rainforest

Chinese factories operating in Manaus exhibit distinctive management practices, primarily characterized by significant expatriate participation and stringent cost-cutting measures. Chinese expatriates represent around 5% of the workforce in private factories and approximately 10% in state-owned ones, which is much higher compared to Western and Japanese companies, which typically use fewer expatriates (Brito et al., 2024; Lee, 2009; Cooke, 2012). Expatriates occupy managerial and supervisory roles, enabling Chinese-controlled oversight across all production stages (Brito et al., 2024). Cost reduction strategies include paying Chinese expatriates wages 20-30% lower than their Brazilian counterparts and housing them collectively, further decreasing overhead costs. Expatriate residences function as "controlled dormitories," reinforcing continuous oversight by managers in China, thus extending workplace control beyond factories (Marciel Brito, 2023). Chinese factories in Manaus import approximately 90% of production inputs from China, creating minimal local value-added production. This model contributes to regional deindustrialization, with limited development of skilled employment, innovation, or long-term economic benefits in the Amazon region. Unlike cases in Africa where strategic needs prompted flexibility, Chinese factories in Manaus exhibit rigid organizational structures closely integrated with their Chinese headquarters, limiting local economic integration and potential industrialization benefits (Brito et al., 2024, p. 935).

Chinese investments in the Amazon rainforest significantly increased between 2007 and 2020, totaling over \$66 billion, primarily concentrated in energy, agriculture, mining, and infrastructure sectors (Milani, 2023, p. 37). Early investments were heavily

geared toward non-renewable energy resources but recently shifted toward renewable energies and strategic infrastructure projects, notably railway networks, essential for efficient transportation of raw materials to China. A major infrastructure initiative is the Ferrogrão railway project, financed by Chinese firms China Three Gorges Corporation and the State Grid Corporation of China. Intended to stretch 1,142 km from Mato Grosso to Pará, Ferrogrão aims to expedite commodity exports, particularly grain, enhancing logistical efficiency and reducing carbon emissions (Brandford & Torres, 2017; Climate Policy Initiative, 2020). Despite economic advantages, the project faces severe criticism due to significant environmental and social implications. It threatens numerous indigenous communities and biodiversity hotspots, violating Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization, which mandates prior consent from indigenous groups affected by external projects (Milani, 2023).

These investments and their environmental implications have drawn criticism from the European Union, which also imports raw materials from the Amazon. Under the European Green Deal, the EU has introduced regulations, such as the Deforestation-Free Supply Chain and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, aiming to ensure environmental sustainability and protect human rights in trade practices, indirectly pressuring Brazil and Chinese investors to adhere to higher sustainability standards (Milani, 2023, p. 44).

3.2.2 The Belt and Road Initiative

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), introduced by President Xi Jinping in 2013, is widely regarded as the nation's most far-reaching economic and geopolitical undertaking. The initiative aims to expand global trade connectivity through major infrastructure projects that link China with key regions across the globe, including Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. Although Chinese officials consistently frame the BRI as a mutually beneficial plan for international development, emphasizing

the construction of essential infrastructure like ports, transportation networks, and energy systems, many Western analysts interpret it as a strategic effort to reposition China at the center of a reconfigured global order (Callahan, 2016). Inspired by the historical Silk Road, the BRI is primarily funded through Chinese financial institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRICS New Development Bank, and the Silk Road Fund. By 2023, nearly 150 countries had signed onto BRI-linked projects, including 21 in Latin America and the Caribbean (Nedopil, 2023). Among these are Uruguay and Argentina, both of which are part of the Mercosur trade bloc, alongside Brazil and Paraguay.

This growing alignment with China has not been without consequence. Diverging views within Mercosur have sparked internal tensions. Brazil, while never formally joining the BRI, particularly under the administration of President Jair Bolsonaro, who distanced himself from China, has nonetheless engaged with Chinese infrastructure financing to a significant extent (Trinkunas, 2020). Despite its non-membership, Brazil has attracted the lion's share of Chinese infrastructure investment in Latin America, accounting for nearly half of all Chinese FDI in the region since 2010 (Milani, 2023).

This suggests that alignment with the BRI's formal framework is not always necessary for nations to benefit from China's global economic outreach. Ultimately, the BRI underscores Beijing's long-term goal of reducing its own reliance on external markets while increasing global dependence on its economic networks. As European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen noted, the initiative tilts global dynamics to make "*the world more dependent on Beijing, and Beijing less dependent on the world*" (Von der Leyen, 2023).

3.3 Brazil's Relationship with Russia after the Invasion of Ukraine: Pragmatism and Economic Weaponisation

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Brazil's position has drawn intense international scrutiny for what many perceive as a morally ambivalent or strategically evasive foreign policy stance. As a country historically committed to the principles of international law, sovereignty, and multilateralism, Brazil was expected to condemn the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Yet, as a Global South power with deep commercial and political ties to Russia, Brazil has instead adopted a position of calculated neutrality. Such ambiguity reveals the core tension within Brazil's diplomatic approach: reconciling its traditional normative commitments with the material imperatives and strategic logics of its pragmatic foreign policy tradition.

Brazil's position reflects what Lopes and Vázquez (2024) term the "sovereignty paradox." On the one hand, Brazil voted in favor of the UN General Assembly resolution on March 2, 2022, condemning Russia's invasion and demanding the withdrawal of troops, an act that signals normative adherence to international law and the UN Charter. On the other hand, Brazil simultaneously rejected the imposition of sanctions, abstained from votes to suspend Russia from key UN bodies, and opposed the provision of weapons to Ukraine, citing concerns over the escalation of conflict and the disruption of global supply chains (Lopes & Vázquez, 2024; Zarur et al., 2022). This dual-track diplomacy reflects Brazil's broader strategic orientation: seeking to position itself as a neutral mediator while avoiding alienation from a key BRICS partner and major supplier of fertilizers and hydrocarbons.

President Jair Bolsonaro's visit to Moscow just days before the invasion in February 2022 was widely criticized. During the visit, Bolsonaro proclaimed Brazil's "solidarity with the Russian people," refraining from condemning Moscow even after hostilities began. President Lula da Silva, despite being more critical of Russia, has also maintained Brazil's neutrality in practical terms. His public statements oscillated

between recognizing Russia's violation of international norms and blaming both Kyiv and Moscow for the escalation. For instance, Lula stated in January 2023 that Russia was at fault for the invasion but later claimed that "when one doesn't want [a war], two don't fight" (G1, 2023). In April 2023, Lula reiterated this moral equivalence by blaming both sides and accusing NATO and the US of "feeding the war" through continued arms deliveries to Ukraine (Lopes & Vázquez, 2024). This ambivalence has provoked criticism not only abroad but also domestically. Public opinion in Brazil has consistently leaned toward supporting Ukraine and condemning Russia. A 2022 Morning Consult poll revealed that 62% of Brazilians viewed Russia as primarily responsible for the war, while 67% believed Vladimir Putin should be tried for war crimes. Despite this, the government has held firm to its non-aligned posture, justifying it through the rhetoric of peacebuilding and autonomy in foreign policy (G1, 2023; Lopes & Vázquez, 2024).

This approach is closely tied to Brazil's principled rejection of sanctions. During an official meeting in Brasília with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in April 2023, Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira criticized Western sanctions, arguing they lacked UN Security Council approval and caused disproportionate economic harm to developing nations. "The sanctions," he asserted, "have a negative impact on world economies, especially in developing countries" (G1, 2023). Nonetheless, Brazilian public opinion has diverged markedly from this cautious diplomacy. A Morning Consult poll conducted in April 2023 showed that 62% of Brazilians blamed Russia for the war, and 67% believed President Putin should be tried for war crimes. Despite the government's opposition to sanctions, 41% of respondents supported maintaining them until Russian forces withdraw from Ukraine, and another 24% until Putin is removed from power (G1, 2023).

Reflecting Brazil's aspiration to position itself as a more influential actor in global politics, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has consistently emphasized the country's role as a potential mediator in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Central to this effort is the

so-called “peace club” initiative, an informal diplomatic proposal advocating for a group of non-belligerent states, including Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, and Mexico, to facilitate negotiations between the parties to the war (Belém Lopes & Vázquez, 2024). This initiative is grounded in the premise that states uninvolved in the conflict are best placed to broker impartial dialogue. In May 2025, Lula reinforced this ambition through a state visit to Moscow, during which he formally offered Brazil’s services as a mediator to Putin. This gesture, following earlier diplomatic engagement with Ukraine and Western governments, exemplifies Lula’s broader strategic but also pragmatic vision: to reassert Brazil’s diplomatic agency as a bridge-builder between the Global North and South. Brazil has crafted an ambivalent but strategically advantageous stance condemning violations of sovereignty in words, avoiding sanctions in deeds, and benefiting economically from the resulting environment.

Economic weaponization: Brazil taking advantage of sanctions

Economically, Brazil’s relationship with Russia has intensified considerably since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine. While Brazil’s rhetoric remained neutral and critical of sanctions, trade data reveals a distinct pattern of post-2022 deepening of economic ties. As shown in Table 1, Brazilian imports from Russia rose sharply from approximately USD 7.29 billion in 2021 to USD 9.81 billion in 2022, and further to USD 11.36 billion in 2024. This marks a total increase of over 55% in trade volume with Russia within just three years, a striking development considering the widespread international effort to isolate Russia economically (Brazilian Ministry of Development, Foreign Trade, and Services, 2024; Neiva, 202). The steep rise in trade was driven primarily by Brazil’s continued and even expanded importation of fertilizers, which alone accounted for over 70% of imports from Russia in 2022, as well as petroleum derivatives and energy-related goods (Brazilian government portal, 2025). These are essential sectors for Brazil’s agricultural economy and energy diversification, and they

remained shielded from restrictions precisely because Brazil opted out of the sanctions regime. As Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira emphasized in 2023, “The sanctions, in addition to not having the approval of the United Nations Security Council, have a negative impact on world economies, especially in developing countries” (G1, 2023).

However, despite this sharp rise in absolute trade volume, Russia’s share in Brazil’s total trade has remained largely stable. In 2021, Russia accounted for 1.5% of Brazil’s global trade; in 2022, despite the surge in volume, the share increased only marginally to 1.6%, and by 2024 it had reached 2.1% (Table 1.). These levels are comparable to trade proportions observed during earlier periods of economic alignment, such as the late 2000s commodity boom, and do not indicate a major structural shift in Brazil’s trade orientation. This divergence between volume and proportion points to what may be termed a strategy of selective intensification. Brazil has deepened trade with Russia in sectors of strategic dependence, particularly in agriculture and energy, without restructuring its overall trade portfolio or reducing its engagement with other key partners. The figures presented in Table 1 confirm that Brazil’s global trade also expanded during this period, preventing Russia’s share from rising significantly despite the growing bilateral figures.

The data therefore reinforces the view that Brazil’s economic engagement with Russia post-2022 is fundamentally pragmatic, rooted in sectoral needs and opportunities created by Western sanctions. It exemplifies Brazil’s broader foreign policy logic of active non-alignment: safeguarding national economic interests while maintaining a formally neutral and multilateral diplomatic stance (Belém Lopes & Vázquez, 2024; Fortín et al., 2023). A methodological verification of the data supports these conclusions. The calculated share of Russian trade in Brazil’s total trade ($\text{Russia_Value} \div \text{World_Value}$) closely matches the reported “Russia Share” values in Table 1, with only minimal discrepancies, confirming the internal consistency of the dataset. The only outlier is 1999, likely due to a transcription error, and has no bearing on the post-2022

trend under analysis. In sum, while Brazil has clearly capitalized on the new trade opportunities created by global sanctions, this economic intensification has not translated into a structural realignment. Rather, it has allowed Brazil to reap economic benefits while keeping its strategic and diplomatic options open, reinforcing the image of Brazil as a selective participant in global crises - engaged, but not entangled.

CHAPTER 4. EU'S RESPONSE AS COMPETITION FOR INFLUENCE

4.1 Overview of Brazil-EU Institutional and Economic Relations

Relations between Brazil and the EU have evolved considerably over the decades, reflecting a pragmatic foreign policy approach pursued by Brazil and the EU's own strategic interests in Latin America. The relationship has historically operated on two primary levels, bilateral and interregional, and has been shaped by significant agreements and strategic interactions, each carrying political and economic implications. Brazil was notably the first South American nation to recognize the European Economic Community (EEC), exchanging permanent diplomatic missions as early as 1960. The political relationship strengthened significantly following Brazil's democratic consolidation in the 1980s, culminating in the landmark EEC-Brazil Framework Cooperation Agreement of 1992, which set up structured political dialogue, trade cooperation, and facilitated development assistance (Di Lodovico, 2024). This "third-generation agreement" notably encouraged European investments in Brazil, which increased tenfold between 1995 and 2000 (Di Lodovico, 2024).

In parallel, throughout the 1990s, the EU prioritized an interregional strategy, particularly engaging Brazil through Mercosur, the Southern Common Market, as evidenced by the EU-Mercosur Interregional Cooperation Agreement (ICA) of 1992, and the EU-Mercosur Interregional Framework Cooperation Agreement (IFCA) of 1995, which entered into force in 1999 (Malamud, 2020; Di Lodovico, 2024). These interregional frameworks aimed at eventually leading to a comprehensive Association Agreement (AA), a process deeply influenced by broader geopolitical contexts such as the EU-US rivalry following the end of the Cold War (Malamud, 2020).

A significant shift towards direct bilateral engagement occurred in 2007 with the establishment of the EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership, reflecting Brazil's growing global stature and the EU's strategic interest in deepening direct ties with emerging global

powers (Di Lodovico, 2024). The Strategic Partnership institutionalized political dialogues on global, regional, and bilateral issues through structured Joint Action Plans (JAPs) and established 33 bilateral sectoral dialogues managed by a Joint Committee, enhancing cooperation across a wide spectrum of issues (Di Lodovico, 2024). Despite initial enthusiasm, the Strategic Partnership yielded limited concrete outcomes, entering a period of stagnation post-2014 due to diverging international agendas and political priorities.

Following nearly a decade of stalled cooperation, a reinvigoration occurred with the 8th Brazil-EU Summit in May 2023, and was further highlighted by the visit of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to Brasília in June 2023. These events underscored a renewed commitment to finalize the long-pending EU-Mercosur Association Agreement and to implement the EU's Global Gateway initiative in Latin America (Di Lodovico, 2024).

Economically, Brazil-EU relations remain robust yet below their potential. Bilateral trade reached €90.5 billion in 2023, with the EU positioned as Brazil's second-largest trading partner and Brazil being the EU's largest agricultural exporter. Investment links are equally significant, with the EU being Brazil's primary source of foreign direct investments (FDI), accounting for over €77 billion in stock, and Brazil emerging as the fifth-largest investor in the EU (Di Lodovico, 2024). The economic relationship has evolved from a historically asymmetric dynamic towards mutual partnership, although global disruptions and geopolitical tensions have constrained its full potential.

In the absence of significant progress in interregional trade discussions, Brazil strategically diversified its economic relationships, notably strengthening ties with China and India, and attracting investments from the Gulf states. Concurrently, the EU shifted towards bilateral agreements with other third countries, partially abandoning its previous exclusive interregional approach (Di Lodovico, 2024). China's ascension,

characterized by extensive investments in Brazilian infrastructure and technology, has particularly challenged the EU's historical economic prominence in the region, reshaping the competitive landscape and prompting concerns over Brazil's industrial and economic resilience (Di Lodovico, 2024).

In response, initiatives like the Global Gateway and the prospective EU-Mercosur Association Agreement have gained renewed strategic importance. These agreements promise significant economic and geopolitical benefits, promoting sustainable development, climate neutrality, and diversified supply chains, potentially revitalizing the economic and institutional partnership to counterbalance Chinese influence effectively (Di Lodovico, 2024). Both parties increasingly recognize the necessity of reducing economic dependencies through enhanced cooperation, aligning with broader strategic interests and mutual benefits (Di Lodovico, 2024).

4.2 Global Gateway as a Strategic Response

The Global Gateway (GG), introduced by the European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen's leadership, represents the EU's most ambitious investment strategy to date. Designed as a values-based alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the GG prioritizes sustainable infrastructure, green energy, and digital connectivity projects in regions like Africa, Southeast Asia, the Western Balkans, and Latin America. The initiative emphasizes mutual benefit, transparency, and democratic values, focusing on building trust with partner countries while also advancing the EU's global strategic interests (European Commission, 2021).

Latin America has been identified as a key partner under the GG. The EU has pledged €10 billion to support digital transitions, renewable energy, and green growth in the region. Within this framework, Brazil emerges as a central focus, especially due to its economic weight and strategic importance. Although Brazil is not a formal BRI participant, it has long attracted substantial Chinese investments, particularly in

infrastructure and energy. These investments, largely driven by Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs), give Beijing significant influence in the region. In contrast, the EU's model relies heavily on private sector participation and partnerships with national governments and local stakeholders, which aims to empower domestic industries while upholding high labor, environmental, and governance standards.

In Brazil specifically, the EU has committed around €2 billion toward the development of green hydrogen and decarbonization projects, reflecting shared climate objectives and aligning with the EU's Green Deal goals for 2050. These investments also seek to combat deforestation in the Amazon, a region of global ecological significance. Unlike China's centralized and government-controlled project execution, the EU's strategy invites a broader set of actors into the investment process, including private companies and civil society, which enhances legitimacy but may also introduce coordination challenges and slower implementation timelines (Milani, 2023).

The EU's approach through the GG reflects a clear intent to rebalance global influence in Latin America. While China began its BRI outreach over a decade earlier, establishing a strong footprint in over 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries, the EU positions its initiative as a more equitable and sustainable model. Brazil, although wary of overly close alignment with either bloc, has remained open to economic cooperation. During the Bolsonaro administration, Brazil kept its distance from formal BRI engagement, even as it continued to benefit from Chinese-funded projects. Today, the EU sees an opportunity to expand its role by offering development pathways that respect environmental protection and democratic governance, areas where China's model has drawn criticism. However, several hurdles remain for the Global Gateway to succeed. The EU plans to mobilize €300 billion globally, but nearly half must come from national governments and private European investors. This raises concerns about the speed and reliability of funding. Additionally, lingering distrust rooted in Europe's colonial legacy, especially in Latin America, could impact how the initiative is

perceived. The EU will need to demonstrate not just financial commitment but also cultural sensitivity and long-term engagement if it hopes to establish meaningful partnerships.

4.3 Brazil in the EU-MERCOSUR Agreement

The EU has spent decades attempting to finalize a free trade agreement with the Mercosur bloc, which includes Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. This agreement was envisioned as a significant step forward in deepening economic relations between the two regions, with goals such as eliminating trade barriers, ensuring subsidies to help industries remain competitive, easing customs controls at borders, and establishing new international norms that reflect EU economic standards (Van den Berghe, 2021).

Negotiations officially began in 1999 and stretched over two decades. Despite sustained efforts, no definitive agreement was achieved due to the complexity of aligning the interests of 31 involved countries, each with distinct priorities. While the proposed deal aimed to enhance trade, it also sparked significant controversy. Critics argued that market liberalization could disproportionately harm small and medium-sized enterprises in vulnerable sectors by exposing them to intensified competition. Furthermore, environmental and social concerns were raised by both Latin American and European observers. A key issue was the potential for increased deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, driven by European demand for raw materials and the absence of strict environmental safeguards. Such outcomes could undermine indigenous rights and worsen ecological degradation (Milani, 2023). Although no formal agreement has been finalized, a breakthrough occurred at the 2019 G20 summit in Japan, where the EU and Mercosur reached a preliminary consensus. However, the EU has yet to incorporate all the environmental provisions outlined in its Sustainable Impact Assessments (SIA), which are critical for ensuring transparency and inclusive decision-making in

international trade agreements (Van den Berghe, 2021). The provisional agreement has also faced backlash for not aligning with the EU Green Deal - a policy framework launched the same year aimed at promoting sustainability and environmental responsibility. Additionally, it lacked explicit references to commitments made under the Paris Climate Agreement, exposing gaps in the treaty's environmental and social dimensions (Milani, 2023).

Many critics argue that the preliminary deal disproportionately favors large agribusiness interests, particularly those aligned with Brazil's former president, Jair Bolsonaro. Despite attempts by the EU to revise and strengthen the deal's environmental and regulatory components, the agreement remains unresolved. In response, the EU has begun exploring alternative investment strategies to reinforce ties with Latin America and counterbalance China's growing influence in the region.

CHAPTER 5. COMPARATIVE PROCESS-TRACING RESULTS

This chapter tests the two central hypotheses (H1 and H2) and the rival explanation (R1) using a theory-testing process-tracing method. By applying structured evidence tests, smoking-gun, hoop, straw-in-the-wind, and double-decisive, to empirical traces, it assesses the causal strength of each explanation in accounting for shifts in Brazil-EU diplomatic engagement between 2009 and 2025. The evidence matrix built in Chapter 2 was populated with data from primary sources including ComexStat, official press releases, summit communiqués, and verified media reports.

5.1 Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 (H1) posits that when China's share of Brazil's total merchandise trade (China_Share) either (a) increases by ≥ 3.0 percentage points in a single year, or (b) consistently surpasses the EU's share (EU_Share), Brazil deprioritises diplomatic engagement with the EU. The mechanism unfolds in three steps: a trade shift (S1), followed by elite perception adjustment (S2), and resulting in measurable policy downgrading (S3).

Three sharp trade surges - 2009 (+3.2pp), 2018 (+3.6pp), and 2020 (+3.5pp) - are identified as smoking-gun triggers. In 2015, China_Share structurally surpassed EU_Share (18.3% vs. 17.4%), and remained higher through 2025, confirming the long-term trade reorientation. Each trigger is matched by rhetorical or elite-level signals. For example, the 2010 Itamaraty communiqué named China as Brazil's "foremost strategic partner," and the 2016 White Paper placed China at the center of Brazil's external economic strategy – both hoop tests that passed.

Policy downgrading is evidenced in the 9-year gap between EU–Brazil summits (2014–2023), Brazil's stagnation in sectoral dialogues, and the 2020 formal pausing of EU–Mercosur negotiations. These actions are coded as straw-in-the-wind and hoop

tests, collectively confirming that diplomatic prioritisation shifted away from the EU in periods following trade realignment with China. No falsifying traces were observed, and the narrative coherence across all steps supports H1 with high confidence.

The process-tracing tests confirm not only the presence of the hypothesised mechanism, but its temporal sequencing and internal coherence. Each of the four economic triggers was followed by elite discursive adjustment and a measurable slowdown or freeze in diplomatic engagement. These observations pass the basic requirements of causal process tracing: the independent variable (trade shift) precedes and plausibly explains the dependent variable (EU deprioritisation). The empirical traces are distributed across different presidencies, Lula, Rousseff, and Bolsonaro, strengthening the generalisability of the pattern and weakening the rival ideological hypothesis (R1).

Taken together, the evidence in support of H1 is strong and consistent. The hypothesis passes all required test types across multiple steps. While individual traces vary in strength, their cumulative sequencing and alignment affirm that Brazil's diplomatic posture toward the EU was repeatedly recalibrated following China-induced trade reorientations. This confirms H1's theoretical proposition that Brazil's pragmatism translates economic asymmetries into strategic behaviour, with direct consequences for its partnership with the European Union.

Figure 3. Indicator table for Hypothesis 1

Hyp.	Step #	Year	Evidence Trace	Test Type	Result
H1	S1	2009	China_Share jumps +3.2 pp (9.9% →13.1%)	Smoking-gun	Pass
H1	S2	2010	RPC president visits Brazil and takes part in the 2nd BRICS Summit in Brasília. Signing of the Brazil-China Joint Action Plan 2010-2014 (Joint Communiqué, 2023)	Hoop	Pass
H1	S3	2014	7th Brazil-EU Summit held - last full summit before the 9-year freeze until 2023 (European Union, 2021).	Straw	Pass
H1	S1	2015	China_Share 18.3 % > EU_Share 17.4 %	Smoking-gun	Pass
H1	S2	2016	Since 2015, the Strategic Partnership was put on hold when the 3rd Joint Action Plan was shelved and the annual summit was cancelled (Saraiva, 2017).	Hoop	Pass
H1	S1	2018	China_Share jumps +3.6 pp (20.1% → 23.7%)	Straw	Pass

H1	S2	2019	Over 340 civil society organisations demanded that the EU immediately halt agreement negotiations with the Mercosur on the grounds of deteriorating human rights and environmental conditions in Brazil caused by Bolsonaro's policies (Sullivan, 2019).	Hoop	Pass
H1	S1	2020	China_Share jumps +3.5 pp (24.4% → 27.9%)	Straw	Pass
H1	S3	2020	EU's strong dissatisfaction over Brazil's destructive environmental policies and rapidly rising deforestation rate under President Jair Bolsonaro causes delay in trade agreement between the European Union and Mercosur (Scherer, 2020).	Straw	Pass

5.2 Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 (H2) holds that Brazil re-engages with the EU when normative expectations (e.g., environmental standards, ESG clauses) are bundled with credible, large-scale thematic incentives, particularly in the form of green finance under the Global Gateway (GG) and EFSD+ guarantees. The mechanism comprises four steps:

strategic realisation by the EU (S1), issuance of an offer (S2), Brazilian reception (S3), and observable policy re-engagement (S4).

The EU's awareness of its declining influence and the rise of China in Latin America is explicitly acknowledged in its 2021 Global Gateway strategy. The Communication named Brazil as a target partner for green infrastructure, digital connectivity, and energy transition projects (European Commission, 2021). This strategic framing marks the EU's shift from rhetorical appeals to a competitive, offer-based diplomacy. As a straw-in-the-wind test, this trace is weakly confirmatory - but necessary to preserve the logic of H2's first step. A critical turning point occurred in mid-2022, when the EU pledged €2 billion in guarantees under the EFSD+ mechanism, with funding directed to the Amazon Fund, green hydrogen partnerships, and climate finance initiatives. According to EU press releases and external reporting, Brazil was a major beneficiary in the Latin American tranche (Boadle, 2023). This constitutes a smoking-gun test, as the thematic offer matches Brazil's developmental needs and appears directly intended to recalibrate diplomatic alignment. No equivalent offer was extended during the 2014–2020 freeze period, making the 2022 offer uniquely significant.

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva responded to these offers by publicly endorsing the EU's green investment framework. In a June 2023 speech, Lula praised the convergence between Brazil's domestic re-industrialisation goals and the EU's climate agenda, noting that Brazil was "ready to become a global green economy leader" (Planalto, 2023). This rhetorical alignment passes the hoop test for Step 3, providing evidence that Brazil perceived the EU's offer as credible and in line with its strategic interests. This discursive shift is particularly important given the prior decade of stagnation. It suggests that Brazil's leadership did not return to the EU based solely on ideology or historical ties, but in response to tangible strategic incentives.

The culmination of the re-engagement process came in May 2023, when Brazil

and the EU held their first summit in nearly a decade: the 8th Brazil-EU High-Level Dialogue. During the summit, both parties signed new MoUs on green hydrogen, digital connectivity, and thematic cooperation, marking a clear return to strategic alignment. The EU explicitly framed the event as part of its Global Gateway outreach, and Brazil's commitments reflected mutual investment in the initiative (Ministério Das Relações Exteriores, 2023). This trace qualifies as a double-decisive test: it confirms H2's predicted outcome while undermining the rival explanation (R1), as it followed an EU incentive package, not merely a change in government. Furthermore, a 2025 NDICI progress report confirmed that at least five Global Gateway projects in Brazil were operational and "on track," including green energy parks and digital inclusion programs (Council of the European Union, 2024). These continued outcomes strengthen the final step of H2's causal mechanism.

The evidence for H2 is causally coherent, sequentially valid, and multi-sourced. It passes all required test types and provides a compelling explanation for Brazil's return to strategic cooperation with the EU. Notably, the thematic offers were large enough in scale, aligned with national goals, and bundled with long-term partnership tools. Rhetorical alignment and policy outcomes followed logically, reinforcing H2's claim that the EU's influence depends on the quality, not just the presence, of its normative engagement.

Figure. 4 Indicator table for Hypothesis 2

Hyp.	Step #	Year	Evidence Trace	Test Type	Result
H2	S1 EU Strategic Realisation	2021	Global Gateway Communication cites Brazil as priority for green-hydrogen corridor (Brazil, 2021)	Straw	Pass
H2	S2 Thematic Offer	2022	EU announces €2 bn EFSD+ guarantee for Amazon Fund, carbon-credit platform (Boadle, 2023)	Smoking-gun	Pass
H2	S3 Brazilian Reception	2023	Lula: “EU green investment aligns with our re-industrialisation plan” (Planalto, 2023)	Hoop	Pass
H2	S4 Re-engagement Outcome	2023	8th EU-Brazil Summit resumes; MoU on green hydrogen + digital signed (VIII Brazil-European Union Meeting of the High Level Political Dialogue, 2023)	Double-decisive	Pass
H2	S4 Re-engagement Outcome	2025	EU–Brazil Joint Steering Group reports 5 GG projects “on track”; new summit date set (Council of the European	Hoop	Pass

		Union, 2024)		
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5.3 Rival Explanation

To rigorously evaluate the plausibility of the rival explanation (R1), this section applies a theory-testing process-tracing logic to examine whether Brazil’s foreign policy oscillations toward the European Union and China can be primarily attributed to changes in leadership ideology. Specifically, R1 posits that Bolsonaro’s nationalist-populist orientation should result in distancing from China and the EU, while Lula’s left-leaning, multilateralist agenda would reinvigorate Brazil–EU relations. Four key empirical traces were tested using hoop tests, as leadership ideology is conceptualised here as a necessary but not sufficient condition: if ideological orientation were decisive, evidence of corresponding behavioural shifts (e.g., diplomatic distancing or alignment) should be present during each administration.

The first trace, a 2018 campaign statement by Jair Bolsonaro warning that “China is not buying in Brazil, China is buying Brazil” (Spring, 2018), supports the R1 expectation rhetorically. However, this test passes only marginally: it reflects a public ideological stance but does not by itself explain subsequent policy behaviour.

The second and third traces undermine R1’s explanatory power. In 2019, despite his ideological stance, President Bolsonaro conducted a state visit to China to expand trade and investment cooperation, and his government hosted the 6th Brazil-EU High-Level Political Dialogue (Planalto, 2019). Both tests fail under process-tracing logic: if ideology were decisive, these cooperative initiatives would be unexpected. The evidence instead suggests pragmatic continuity in diplomatic and economic engagement with both powers.

The fourth trace tests Lula’s return to office in 2023. Consistent with expectations, Brazil revived its high-level dialogue with the EU through the 8th Brazil–EU Summit,

reaffirming strategic cooperation (VIII Brazil-European Union Meeting of the High Level Political Dialogue, 2023). However, the structural conditions surrounding this re-engagement, specifically the EU's Global Gateway offers and China's sustained trade dominance, suggest that Lula's actions are better understood as pragmatic alignment rather than purely ideologically driven. This trace thus also fails the hoop test for R1.

In sum, out of four hoop tests applied to R1, three fail and one passes weakly. Leadership ideology may colour rhetorical framing but does not sufficiently explain Brazil's strategic behaviour toward either the EU or China. The pattern of cooperation under both Bolsonaro and Lula, despite their ideological differences, points instead to the greater causal weight of the economic incentives and strategic offers assessed in Hypotheses 1 and 2. R1 is therefore empirically weak and lacks inferential strength in accounting for the transformations in Brazil-EU relations.

Figure 5. Indicator table for Rival Explanation

R.	Step #	Year	Evidence Trace	Test Type	Result
R1	Ideology	2018	Bolsonaro warns “China is buying Brazil”; tone described as anti-China by press (Spring, 2018)	Hoop	Pass
R1	Ideology	2019	6th High-Level Political Dialogue Joint Declaration. Held under Bolsonaro. HLPD continues even under nationalist leadership → weakens pure-ideology claim (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, 2021).	Hoop	Fail
R1	Ideology	2019	Bolsonaro state visit to China; trade cooperation deepened (Ibid.).	Hoop	Fail
R1	Ideology	2023	Lula revives EU summit in May 2023. 8th Brazil-EU Summit held, reaffirming commitment to the Strategic Partnership (Joint Communiqué, 2023).	Hoop	Fail

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis examined how Brazil's pragmatic foreign policy approach transformed its diplomatic relationship with the European Union between 1997 and 2025. The central research question addressed the extent to which external economic incentives and strategic frameworks shaped Brazil's foreign policy toward the EU. Using a theory-testing process-tracing methodology and structured case study analysis, the paper traced the transformation of bilateral ties across multiple political administrations and economic contexts. Findings are presented along two analytical axes: theoretical contributions and empirical insights derived from the five core chapters.

a) Theoretically, the research introduced and applied the concept of "principled pragmatism" to interpret Brazil's foreign policy as a balancing act between material interests and normative alignment. Built on neoclassical realism and foreign policy analysis, this framework allowed for a differentiated understanding of Brazil's behaviour as a middle power navigating between major global poles. This conceptual tool helped move beyond binary interpretations based solely on ideology or economics.

b) Chapter 1 established the theoretical and conceptual foundation. It defined pragmatic foreign policy and positioned Brazil's behaviour within broader debates about middle powers and global realignment. The chapter clarified how Brazil's engagement with external actors is guided less by consistent ideological preferences and more by shifting cost-benefit assessments in a changing international environment.

c) Chapter 2 elaborated the methodological design. It operationalised the study's key variables, introduced the dataset, consisting of ComexStat trade figures, policy documents, and elite political statements, and justified the use of process tracing. The chapter framed the hypotheses: H1 (that increasing trade dependence on China reduces Brazil's diplomatic prioritization of the EU), H2 (that Brazil re-engages with the EU when normative appeals are paired with credible material incentives), and the rival hypothesis R1 (that shifts are best explained by changes in leadership ideology).

d) Chapter 3 provided empirical support for H1. It demonstrated that during key turning points: 2009, 2015, 2018, and 2020, China's rising trade share directly correlated with Brazil's diplomatic distancing from the EU. This included reduced summit participation, stalled EU-Mercosur negotiations, and limited bilateral engagement. The chapter also examined Brazil's alignment within BRICS and its diplomatic stance during Russia's invasion of Ukraine, showing that Brazil prioritised strategic ambiguity and economic diversification over ideologically motivated alignment.

e) Chapter 4 addressed H2 and the EU's strategic response. It showed how new EU instruments, particularly the Global Gateway and EFSD+, offered material incentives linked to green energy and digital development. These initiatives were effective in prompting renewed diplomatic cooperation from Brazil in the post-2022 period. The findings reinforced that EU relevance depended on its capacity to align material incentives with Brazil's evolving priorities.

f) Chapter 5 tested the hypotheses comparatively. Both H1 and H2 were supported by the empirical record. Brazil's foreign policy decisions aligned consistently with pragmatic logics rather than ideological shifts. Empirical tests conclusively demonstrated that ideological factors alone were insufficient to explain Brazil's diplomatic behaviour comprehensively. The rival ideological explanation (R1) was not supported: pragmatic economic incentives and strategic considerations consistently outweighed ideological rhetoric, suggesting that material determinants significantly dominated Brazil's foreign policy decision-making across different political administrations.

g) Methodologically, the study contributed by demonstrating how theory-testing process tracing, when combined with primary economic data and policy analysis, offers a robust approach for examining foreign policy behaviour. The method enabled the identification of timing, sequencing, and intervening variables critical for understanding pragmatic diplomacy.

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that relations between Brazil and the EU over the past three decades were shaped less by ideological alignment and more by Brazil's evolving cost-benefit assessment of international partnerships. China's growing economic role and the relative decline of normative-only EU strategies required the EU to strengthen its strategies. Thus, this thesis states that for the EU to maintain strategic influence in Brazil, its initiatives must consistently align material incentives with Brazil's national interests.

The findings of this thesis contribute by addressing significant theoretical and empirical gaps in the study of Brazil-EU relations. It explains dynamics underpinning pragmatic foreign policy behaviour, providing insights for scholars and policymakers seeking to understand and anticipate diplomatic strategies in evolving pragmatic global policies, as well as contributing to broader debates on middle-power behaviour, pragmatic foreign policy, and strategic diplomacy in an era of multipolar competition.

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ANNOTATION

BACHELOR'S THESIS

Topic: Transformation of Brazil-EU Relations Under Brazil's Pragmatic Foreign Policy Approach

Author: Yevheniia Mikhnovska

Year of study, faculty: 4th year of study, Faculty of social sciences and social technologies, BA Political Science.

Thesis supervisor: senior lecturer Serhii Shapovalov

Reviewer: PhD in Political Science, Associate Professor Hanna H. Taranenko

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Short Summary: The aim of this research is to analyze the transformation of Brazil-EU foreign relations from 1997 to 2025 through the lens of Brazil's pragmatic foreign policy. The study employs process tracing hypothesis testing combined with case study methodology and focuses on key factors that shaped bilateral dynamics: China's growing economic importance to Brazil, Brazil's involvement in BRICS, and the EU's strategic initiatives. Two hypotheses were developed and tested: H1 suggests that increased trade dependence on China leads to reduced diplomatic interest in the EU; H2 argues that Brazil strategically re-engages with the EU when normative expectations are paired with substantial material incentives. The research draws on ComexStat trade data, foreign ministry documents, and public statements by political elites. The findings indicate that in the context of China's and BRICS's growing influence, the EU must complement normative messaging with concrete economic offers aligned with Brazil's interests to remain politically relevant.

АНОТАЦІЯ КВАЛІФІКАЦІЙНОЇ РОБОТИ

Тема: Трансформація відносин Бразилія-ЄС під впливом прагматичної зовнішньої політики Бразилії

Студентка: Міхновська Євгенія Михайлівна

Рік навчання, факультет: 4 рік навчання, факультет соціальних наук та соціальних технологій

Науковий керівник: старший викладач Шаповалов С. А.

Рецензентка: кандидат політичних наук, доцент, Тараненко Г. Г.

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Короткий зміст: Метою даного дослідження є аналіз трансформації зовнішньополітичних відносин між Бразилією та ЄС з 1997 по 2025 рік крізь призму прагматичного підходу до зовнішньої політики Бразилії. Робота ґрунтується на методі process tracing hypothesis testing у поєднанні з кейс-стаді та охоплює ключові чинники, що вплинули на динаміку двосторонніх відносин: зростання економічного значення Китаю для Бразилії, участь Бразилії в альянсі БРІКС, а також стратегічні ініціативи ЄС. У рамках дослідження були перевірені дві гіпотези: H1 передбачає, що зростання торгівельної залежності Бразилії від Китаю призводить до зниження дипломатичної зацікавленості в ЄС. Друга (H2) стверджує, що Бразилія стратегічно переорієнтовується на ЄС, коли той поєднує нормативні очікування з вагомими матеріальними стимулами. Для перевірки гіпотез було використано дані торгівлі ComexStat, офіційні документи МЗС країн, а також публічні виступи політичних еліт. Результати дослідження підтвердили, що для підтримання політичної релевантності у відносинах з Бразилією, в умовах зростаючого впливу Китаю та БРІКС, ЄС необхідно доповнювати нормативні ініціативи конкретними економічними пропозиціями, що відповідають інтересам Бразилії.