

Chapter 11

Food Policy: Examining the Influence of Brazilian Coalitions

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The Latin American and Caribbean region has made significant progress in food security since the late 1990s. However, recent years have been marked by setbacks that are abruptly changing this scenario. In 2018, 42.5 million people were undernourished in this region, representing 6.5 of the total population and an increase of 4.5 million from 2014 (FAO et al., 2020). In South America, the post-2014 economic slowdown, continued high levels of social inequality, and the dismantling of redistributive food policies under right and far-right presidents are among the key causes of this situation (Sabourin et al. 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened these socioeconomic outcomes.

In this context, food and nutritional security hinge not only on food quantity but on guaranteeing impoverished populations' access to healthy diets. Achieving this necessitates cross-sectoral public policies that not only promote increased domestic food supply but also minimize socioeconomic inequalities and endorse new agricultural and consumption habits (FAO et al., 2020; Preiss et al., 2020). Since the late 1990s, Brazil has pioneered policy innovations in this field, emerging as a hub for regional cooperation (Sabourin & Grisa, 2018).

This chapter sheds light on the driving forces behind this cross-border collaboration. It delves into how both state and non-state actors participating in the development and implementation of Brazilian food policies have introduced novel issues and pragmatic solutions to their regional counterparts, thereby shaping food and nutritional security paradigms. Our study relies on multiple research projects undertaken between 2012 and 2019, employing documentary analysis, interviews with key integration process players, and firsthand observation in regional and international forums. This comprehensive approach includes the insights gleaned from 280 interviews conducted with policymakers, social leaders, and diplomatic personnel. The sections proceed chronologically, providing an analytical narrative of three periods: first, the 1990s rise of a food security coalition within Brazil and its diffusion via elite coalition-building within Mercosur itself; second, the broader promotion of the social norm of the virtues of family-farming and food security within the Mercosur member countries, the region, and elsewhere in the world, a period extending roughly to 2016; and third, a post-2016 downturn in the reach of the food security movement as first Brazil, and then many of its South American neighbors, struggled with governments that had moved sharply to the political right. The chapter's conclusions highlight the theoretical analysis.

The chapter thus integrates a constructivist approach, showcasing the role of policy norm entrepreneurs and innovative ideas in promoting normative changes within these governance arenas in South America, with an awareness of larger political and economic conditions that set the parameters within which transnational political organizing operated.

1. Emerging Ideas for Food Security and Regional Integration

This section narrates the rise in the 1990s of a coalition advocating the recognition of family farming as a valued social ideal and policy focus which would in turn foster improved food security among the population. Originating with activists in Southern Brazil, while also benefitting from interactions with United Nations agencies and other global actors, this coalition of norm entrepreneurs helped establish Brazil's Zero Hunger strategy. The strategy embodied a cross-sectoral and participatory approach to food and nutritional security.

1.1. Coalition-building within Brazil, 1990-2003

Latin America experienced a “lost decade” during the 1980s, the consequence of a foreign debt crisis that was not resolved until the very end of the subsequent decade, and then in a fashion that prioritized salvaging the health of advanced country banks, not Latin American debtor governments (Felix 1990). In the 1990s the creation of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) coincided with neoliberal market liberalization implemented by the administrations of center-right presidents such as Carlos Menem in Argentina; Fernando Collor, Itamar Franco, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso in Brazil; and their counterparts in Uruguay and Paraguay. Efforts to achieve macroeconomic stabilization led to reduced public spending in social services, widespread dislocations, and eventual political dissent by left and center-leftist civil society actors advocating for their view of social justice and new approaches to democratic governance (Riggirozzi & Tussie, 2017).

International financial institutions based in North America and Europe pressed South American debtor governments to restore their “credibility” with global investors by reducing the “twin deficits” of their balance of payments and public finances (see, for example, Touchton, 2016). The external payments deficit could be narrowed by increasing exports, encouraging national governments to expand support for big agribusiness. Thus, all four of the Southern region’s national governments promoted large-scale production of commercial crops such as soybeans, beef, and grain for export. Moreover, beginning in the 1990s, the United States began to press for a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA, or ALCA in Spanish and Portuguese), building on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which entered into effect in January 1995.

These policy shifts almost ruined smallholders’ food production, which was suddenly expected to compete with large export-oriented agribusiness benefiting from economies of scale, access to modern technologies, lower production costs, and better access to markets and credit (Niederle & Wesz 2020). Although the social consequences of these processes were felt in all countries, they were particularly prominent in Brazil, as small family-owned and managed farms were a numerous and spatially-concentrated group in several of Brazil’s Southern states. This social category in Brazil represents 4.4 million farms (77 percent of all Brazilian farms), occupying 23 of the agricultural land. Moreover, they are the main suppliers to the national market of basic foods, such as vegetables, fruits, beans, milk, pork, rice, manioc, and so on. The Brazilian states such as Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Paraná gradually became the epicenter of large social demonstrations advocating for public policies specifically designed for family farmers (Grisa & Schneider 2015; Niederle et al. 2014; Niederle & Wesz 2020; Sabourin et al. 2015).

As a result, a family farm movement emerged in Southern Brazil, presenting a cohesive ideological challenge to the prevailing neoliberal focus on economic growth through an export-oriented agribusiness. Starting in the mid-1990s, efforts advocating for family farming policies began to bear fruit. These efforts led to the implementation of registration mechanisms, food distribution instruments, targeted rural credit, and capacity-building initiatives (Sabourin et al., 2014). Left-wing governments across the continent predominantly supported this suite of state-intervened policies (Schneider, 2016). These policies collectively were significant concerns for rural social movements in all of the Mercosur founding states (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) (Delgado, 2001). Later, a coalition advocating for these policies expanded in South America. Operating within both the institutional framework of Mercosur and as a transnational movement, this coalition coordinated social groups across the subregion's four countries, aligning them with similar policy preferences.

Simultaneously, the early 1990s' Citizens' Action against Hunger and Poverty campaign paved the way for Brazil's ensuing national "Zero Hunger" strategy. The initial anti-hunger program, drafted by NGO representatives, research institutes, and social movements, acknowledged food and nutritional security as a multidimensional, fundamental right requiring state protection. This understanding, developed in concert with debates promoted by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other international organizations in the region, conferred legitimacy upon the project (Takagi, 2006).

Advocates of Zero Hunger in Brazil contended that hunger stemmed not from inadequate food production but from insufficient income to purchase quality food in necessary quantities. Structural issues like unemployment, low wages, income disparity, exclusion of smallholder farmers from food markets, and rising food prices undermined traditional compensatory policies such as food donations or cash transfers. The refined strategy sought to boost incomes, broaden social protection, incorporate family farmers into food markets, and guarantee access to nutritious food, supplemented by emergency food provisions, food reserves, and school meal initiatives (Silva et al., 2011).

Several factors have brought policies supporting family farming to the forefront of food security discussions. Firstly, family farms are principal suppliers of essential foods like vegetables, fruits, beans, milk, pork, rice, and manioc to national markets. Secondly, due to the high poverty and food insecurity levels among these farms, there is a need for policies aiding production for own consumption. Thirdly, the diverse and fresh produce from family farms is vital for combating malnutrition and obesity, significant health concerns in Latin America (HLPE, 2020; Swinburn et al., 2019; Willett et al., 2019). It's also crucial to note the link between the rise in monocropping and increased consumption of ultra-processed foods (Monteiro et al., 2019), leading to growing resistance against the notion that export-driven agribusiness is the primary solution for food security (Sencébé et al., 2020).

In late 2002 Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers' Party became the country's first ever president elected from the political left. On assuming office in 2003, President Lula da Silva strengthened the food security agenda, allowing the former leaders of social (and academic) movements to occupy strategic positions in the state. Thus, in his government the influence of the traditional Ministry of Agriculture (MAPA), long dominated by representatives of corporate agribusiness engaged in monocrop agriculture and ranching for the export market, was in part countered by creation of two new ministries, the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) and the Ministry of Social Development and the Fight against Hunger (MDS). These two ministries began opposing the neoliberal view of food security prevailing in MAPA. Led by a long-time Zero Hunger activist, José Graziano da Silva, the MDS fought to reestablish the National Food Security Council (CONSEA)¹ as a governance mechanism coordinating state and civil society actors.

1.2. Coalition Building within Mercosur, 2004-2006

The Brazilian food security coalition, which with the Lula da Silva government had a foothold within the state in the MDA and MDS, also worked to establish links throughout the subregion and even all of Latin America, ultimately making presentations and connections in a multitude of other forums, such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Community of Portuguese-Language Countries (CPLP), and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), as well as with peak multilateral organizations at the international level, including the United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), and the World Food Program (WFP). The international activities of the MDA in particular were unusual for a small ministry, but served to expose the dissensus within Brazil itself around food market regulations.

¹ CONSEA was first created in 1994, but then dissolved in 1995 by then-President Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

Important international links were built with the four Mercosur countries. Founded in 1994, the Confederation of Family Farmers' Organizations of Mercosur (COPROFAM) united some of South America's most prominent rural unions. These include the Brazilian Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG), the Argentinean Agrarian Federation (FAA), the Uruguayan National Commission of Rural Promotion (CNFR), and the Paraguayan Peasant National Federation (FNC). COPROFAM's primary objective was to advocate for the adoption of family farming policies by governments and to renegotiate regional trade agreements. COPROFAM members' advocacy agenda prioritized establishing cross-sectoral public policies based on developed through civil society participation (the COPROFAM Declaration of 1999). Interestingly, COPROFAM had been founded at a meeting in the Southern city of Porto Alegre, one of the first Brazilian regional capitals governed by the Workers' Party. In fact, the majority of senior MDA officials during Lula da Silva's administration came from this region, including ministers Miguel Rosseto (2003–2006), Guilherme Cassel (2006–2010), and Pepe Vargas (2012–2014). Embodying the above-mentioned “internationalist” perspective, these actors also helped organize the first two World Social Forums (2001 and 2002), explicitly conceived to counter the pro-liberalization agenda of the World Economic Forum, held annually since 1971 in Davos, Switzerland. The World Social Forum, also annual, brought together social movements from all over the world and became a crucial venue for transnational activism against the proposed FTAA in the early 2000s.

The first window of opportunity for transnational activism opened up due to changes in the political orientation of several South American countries—in Venezuela (1998), Brazil (2003), Argentina (2003), Uruguay (2004), Bolivia (2005), and Ecuador (2006). This led to the reconfiguration of the regional project, which became a means of supporting post-neoliberal practices and rebuilding inter-American relations rather than being driven by Washington-based institutions (Riggirozzi & Wylde, 2017). The intensity of resistance to neoliberal governance varied across the region. However, the pursuit of a new balance between states and markets and concerted regional action in areas beyond trade redefined the purpose and terms of regional governance. One of the first steps in this direction was taken in 2003 when Brazilian President Lula da Silva and his Argentine President counterpart Nestor Kirchner signed agreements indicating their joint commitment to “re-building” Mercosur (Riggirozzi & Tussie, 2017).

Coordination among Mercosur's social organizations was expected to strengthen these actors' influence on the regional development model and to promote a convergent approach to their respective countries' public policy design². COPROFAM first tried to intervene in Mercosur's agriculture subgroup (SGT8); however, this space remained largely influenced by agribusinesses representatives advocating for the liberalization policies criticized by the confederation. It then proposed establishing an ad hoc group to align measures for family farmers.

Despite the political alignment among the Mercosur governments for approximately the next decade, the patterns of interaction between the state and civil society varied across countries. For instance, in Argentina, the interactions among the Kirchner administration, the FAA, and other agrarian movements were often marked by disagreements on policy options, in contrast to the strong collaboration between Brazil's MDA and the Contag. This was one reason why, in 2004, COPROFAM asked the Brazilian government to assume the task of formally requesting a special forum for family farming during the Mercosur ministers' general meeting. As a result, following discussions that involved the MDA and COPROFAM, Mercosur requested the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE) to establish the Mercosur Specialized Meeting for Family Farming (REAF) in the same year (Niederle 2016). The REAF operates as an auxiliary and advisory agent whose deliberations are nonbinding recommendations. Nonetheless, it represents a space within Mercosur for COPROFAM and other family farming, peasant, and indigenous organizations convened by the respective governments to participate, and a way to shift discussions away from the bloc's initial strict focus on liberal trade agreements.

2. Processes and Drivers of Change: Norm Entrepreneurs and Policy Diffusion

Subsequently, the Brazilian movement forged links to similar social groups in neighboring countries. This alternative regional agriculture policy agenda stood in opposition to the policies of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), perceived by family farm unions' activists as excessively neoliberal and captured by transnational agribusiness. Among the transnational coalition's most significant and politically-potent ideas was the conceptual link it forged in citizens' minds between, on the one hand, small family-owned farms producing for local markets, and on the other hand, secure supplies of healthy, nutritious food for local consumers. The regionally-based coalition also became a platform for collective action promoting new ideas for the global food policy agenda.

² For further information on the evolution of agricultural policies in South American countries and the detailed mechanisms of policy diffusion, please see: Craviotti (2014a), Sabourin, Samper and Sotomayor (2015), Sabourin and Grisa (2018), and Le Coq et al. (2021).

2.1. *Integrating Family Farming and Social Participation into REAF and Mercosur Countries, 2006-2008*

The Mercosur Specialized Meeting for Family Farming (REAF) offered a platform for diffusing family farming policies throughout the region and reinforcing its significance in countries' food and nutritional security. However, COPROFAM and the Brazilian coalition's stance met with both political and conceptual resistance. For example, the government of Argentina, with an economy a fourth the size of Brazil's, feared that stepping away from a unified national stance by allowing separate representation of export-oriented corporate agribusiness would put Argentina at a disadvantage in negotiations with its larger neighbor. Yet, even among social movements, there was hesitancy to accept "family farming" as a unified category. Many worried that this label might overshadow the vast diversity among rural populations in South America. Consider, for example, that Garner and De La O Campo (2014) identified 12 distinct definitions of "family farming" in the region, accounting for almost 17 million units, 60 million people, and broad cultural diversity (ECLAC et al., 2013).

Promoting trust and conceptual alignment among REAF members, especially governments, posed the initial challenge. Past interactions in the 1990s between individual actors and political groups facilitated this process. The IFAD Mercosur Program, under the direction of Alvaro Ramos — former Uruguayan chancellor and Minister of Agriculture — played a crucial role as an independent mediator between governments and civil society organizations. Moreover, from 2004 to 2012, IFAD Mercosur not only provided financial resources to encourage social participation but also agreed to manage the REAF Technical Secretariat.

In its early years, REAF focused on establishing *national registries for family farming* in Mercosur countries, but unsurprisingly encountered numerous preferences with respect to who would be included. The Brazilians preferred relatively strict rules about maximum farm size and income to access public policies, while countries like Argentina and Uruguay preferred a more flexible definition based on identifying as a "peasant" or "indigenous" groups (Niederle 2017). Consequently, Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Uruguay all established family farming registries (Grisa et al., 2018).

- In Argentina, the concept of “family farming” gained prominence in the 2000s, following Kirchner's election and the FAA's consolidation. This fueled the Mercosur-level debate on this topic, with the parliament’s discussion being shaped by the acknowledged contributions of family farming to food security and sovereignty (Goulet, 2020). This dialogue informed policies such as the Support Program for Small and Medium Producers, the National Forum of Family Farming (FONAF), and other institutions advocating for family farms. Craviotti (2014b) highlights REAF debates' influence and state mechanisms like FONAF facilitating regional group activities. In 2007, the Argentine National Registry of Family Farming, co-developed by the state and social entities, became a prerequisite for accessing various programs.
- Uruguay's family farming policymaking has been influenced by neighboring countries since REAF's inception (Álvarez et al., 2014). REAF revitalized collective action, especially after CNFR's political relevance diminished in the 1990s, with momentum growing under the progressive *Frente Amplia* government in 2005. Acknowledging CNFR as a political partner, the government incorporated family farming into various initiatives (Riella & Angulo, 2014), including the General Directorate for Rural Development, a family producer registry, the Rural Development Roundtable, and public purchasing programs. This policymaking approach was bolstered by introducing a research focus on family farming within the Cooperative Program for the Development of Agrifood and Agroindustrial Technology in the Southern Cone (PROCISUR).
- Since the 1990s, Paraguay's national programs have supported small-scale farmers, with the term “family farming” entering the official agenda in the 2000s due to REAF, IICA, and FAO’s influence (Wesz Junior et al., 2018). National Law 1.863/2001 acknowledged family farming's importance to national development. The 2002 Agrarian Statute and the National Institute for Rural and Land Development (INDERT), founded in 2004, further supported peasant family farming. Besides providing recognition, the government enacted policies like PPA (Programa de Fomento para la Producción de Alimentos), PRONAF (Programa Nacional de Apoyo a la Agricultura Familiar), PAEI (Program for Indigenous Peoples’ Economy and Agriculture), and the IFAD-supported Paraguay Rural Project to integrate family farming into value chains. However, initial engagement and participation of regional social organizations in policy debates were not straightforward, with the Ministry of Agriculture and peasant organizations collaborating occasionally on specific demands.

The REAF's model of social participation also involved extended battles within Mercosur. Brazil did not want to see civil society groups sidelined or the multifunctional framing of "food security and family farms" broken up. However, many Mercosur delegates resisted including various social movements in discussions with authorities. Initial mistrust among participants was high, with fears of REAF promoting "hidden" foreign trade agendas. This mistrust led to protracted initial meetings, marked by contentious discussions lasting until dawn over minor details. Following strong negotiation, representatives agreed, aligning with left-wing governments' aim to rebuild the bloc through a project later named "Social and Participatory Mercosur" (Mesquita & Belém Lopes, 2018). The Uruguayan delegate to REAF from the *Frente Amplia* left-leaning government that came to power in 2005, put it like this:

Ten years ago, I joined it [REAF]. The minister at that time was Pepe Mujica, who sent me for a purpose I didn't know. [...] Initially, we were unable to take a position because we were somewhat critical of Mercosur. But at the same time, we had a strategic view for building political allies in South America. So, we said that Mercosur could become the tool that we wanted it to be, not the one that neoliberalism wanted. Then, we understood. [...] Then came the great finding: The delegations of each country had two columns, one of the official representatives and the other of representatives of the peasant delegations. For me, this moment was very good. I saw this as a very positive thing, and, when I came back, I said that something had happened that, for me, was revolutionary: The debate table, in a democratic way, provided freedom of speech to peasant organizations.... It was a significant fact. This, we have to support! (in Niederle, 2016).

The collaboration between state and nonstate actors enabled the establishment of REAF as both a political forum within a trade bloc and a platform to influence regional and global arenas, including CELAC, FAO, and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) (Fraundorfer 2018). Civil society networks linking family farming to food and nutritional security, supported by domestic governments or multilateral organizations, significantly impacted food policy diffusion. However, this innovation did not alter Mercosur's decision-making; final agreements still required national government approval. Due to the intergovernmental nature of these negotiations, the political status of nonstate actors limited their global activism (Milhorance, 2018; Sabourin, Grisa, Lopes Filho, et al., 2020).

2.2. Expanding the Food Security Agenda to the Hemisphere and the World, 2008-2016

The most significant innovations arising from Brazilian civil society organizations was the elaboration of a conceptual link between the goal of supporting family-owned farms, on the one hand, and the goal of ensuring food security for low-income groups, on the other hand. The Brazilian and Mercosur models also diffused because they provided practical policy solutions for food security challenges, such as tying public procurement from local family farms to social protection systems, such as schools, via the Food Purchase Program (PAA) and School Feeding Program (PNAE). These initiatives attracted attention and granted the coalition legitimacy and support, propelling their regional agenda. They also garnered interest from international bodies like the FAO, IFAD, and World Bank (Milhorance 2018; Fraundorfer 2013 and 2015; Takagi 2011).

Advocacy efforts spurred key regional processes. First, Mercosur recognized the food purchase as a central policy instrument. Enhanced by a project from the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, this initiative shared Brazil's PAA and PNAE implementation experiences with officials and civil representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Ecuador, and others (Grisa & Niederle, 2018). The PAA, addressing the need for ample food supply and acknowledging the crucial role of impoverished family farmers, procured food stocks from them (Menezes 2011). The PNAE's homegrown meals philosophy diverges from traditional food aid, typically dependent on international cereal and processed food procurement. Advocating for local purchases, the PNAE supports the economy, enhances social protection, and diversifies student diets, providing essential nutritious meals to vulnerable children (Milhorance, 2018).

UN agencies backed the idea of integrating homegrown school feeding into national policies, with the WFP producing reports that spotlighted Brazil as a prime example (Bundy et al., 2009; WFP, 2013). Moreover, with operational and financial aid from FAO and WFP, initiatives inspired by Brazil's case were adopted in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, all under the oversight of former Brazilian officers and diplomatic bodies (Caldas & Ávila, 2018; Lopes Filho 2018; Sabourin et al. 2020; Milhorance 2018).

Countries like Colombia, Chile, Haiti, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Paraguay formally incorporated food purchases from family farmers. However, the outcomes varied, with the instruments promoted by REAF being translated by local and international actors, with Brazil influencing indirectly through international organizations (Grisa & Niederle 2018; Caldas & Avila 2018). For instance, in Paraguay, the process led by the Parliamentary Front against Hunger referenced the REAF in public procurement decrees (3000/2015 and 1056/2013). These highlighted the importance of regional coordination for local food commercialization and the inclusion of family farming in public food purchases, despite facing implementation challenges due to conflicts among sectoral bodies and the involvement of private intermediaries (Caldas & Ávila 2018). Likewise, Colombia's adoption of the initiative was hampered by the minimal engagement of state actors, weak institutionalization, and reliance on international donors, with local social movements participating without institutional backing (Calderón, 2018; Ortiz et al., 2018).

Furthermore, dialogue on food security expanded regionally, with campaigns like Hunger Free Latin America and the Caribbean 2025 drawing interest from governments in Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile towards Brazil's food policy experiments (Takagi, 2006). The REAF model also influenced the CELAC the multilateral organization established in late 2011 to bring together all of the hemisphere's countries except the United States and Canada. Thus, the 2014 CELAC's Plan for Food Security, Nutrition, and Hunger Eradication aligned with REAF, including coordination of regional food security, support for family farming, nutritional wellness through school feeding programs, and food reserves.

Transnational activism earned REAF recognition within the UN and Global South. For instance, REAF elevated food and nutrition security agendas within governments and the CPLP, enhancing social participation and emphasizing family farming's policy importance in 2011. This led to a dedicated civil society network for food and nutritional security (Milhorange, 2020). Globally, these discussions informed the Committee on World Food Security's reform, facilitating social participation and establishing a High-Level Panel on Food Security and Nutrition (Lopes Filho, 2018; Milhorange, 2018; Zanella & Duncan, 2015). In 2012, when the Mercosur governments approved the Family Farming Fund (FAF) to support REAF activities, the FAO became responsible for managing the resources. This led to further involvement of the REAF in the food-security agenda.

In 2014, the FAO produced several reports and events with the participation of over 700 global organizations, including the launch of the Family Farming Knowledge Platform as part of the UN's International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). The Global Dialogue on Family Farming commissioned the REAF to coordinate a global working group to identify common criteria for establishing family farming typologies. In general, as Brazilian and South America-initiated food policies were broadcast to the larger global community, their regional effect also was reinforced. Brazilian actors were not alone in promoting the IYFF, which was subject to several years of transnational activism; however, they integrated into the movement very strongly. Moreover, Graziano da Silva's role as FAO's Director-General (2012-2019) was crucial in promoting these initiatives (Milhorce, 2018). As a "policy ambassador," Graziano promoted specific policy ideas at various governance levels, aligning with the concept of a norm entrepreneur (Porto Oliveira, 2019).

Additionally, IYFF fostered coordination among REAF, FAO, and CELAC, providing a platform to address new policy issues. For instance, the IYFF offered an opportunity to introduce agroecology into FAO's discussions on food security (Loconto & Fouilleux, 2019). The 2015 Regional Seminar for Agroecology was held in Brazil and funded and organized by the Brazilian government, CELAC, REAF, and the Alliance for Food Sovereignty of Latin America's Peoples.

Finally, in addition to the Brazilian coalition's multilateral efforts—enhanced by alliances with state actors and expert circulation—the 2007–2008 global food and financial crises were significant in elevating their ideas internationally. These crises, marked by food shortages and rising prices, spotlighted the fight against hunger (Peck & Theodore, 2015). They also challenged established development approaches and the perceived efficacy of various UN agencies, eroding trust in their mandates (Fouilleux, 2009; Milhorce & Soulé-Kohndou, 2017). This opened doors for alternative global governance and development ideas (Hernando et al., 2018; Peck & Theodore, 2015), amplifying the global influence of Brazil's food policies.

3. National Politics, Food Security, and the Future, 2016-2022

Although only hinted at in this chapter thus far, the ideological complexion of national governments in South American countries has been an important factor influencing regional cooperation in the early 21st century. The Brazilian civil society and administrations of left-leaning Workers' Party Presidents Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) were a high point for Brazilian and South American global influence, including around the linked issues of food and nutritional security and family farming. During the Workers Party presidents' terms in office, Brazilian diplomats closely monitored these international food security activities, seen as beneficial for raising the country's status as a global thought leader.

However, the period from 2015 onwards was economically difficult for Brazil and most of the rest of South America, as international prices for agricultural and mineral commodities, which had been high from about 2004 through 2014, drifted downwards. Moreover, between the mid- and late-2010s, global opposition to social democracy and multilateralism reached the continent (Riggirozzi & Tussie, 2017). This broader context challenged the foundations of social democracy and several principles inherent in food policies (Sabourin, Craviotti, et al., 2020). Toward the close of the 2010s family farming and food nutritional security agenda lost space, funds, and political weight, leading to a gradual (and sometimes radical) dismantling of supportive policies and the rapid regrowth of food insecurity.

In Brazil, Rousseff's 2016 impeachment reinforced opposition to family farming development, leading to increased conflict and reduced public investment in the sector (Niederle et al., 2019; Sabourin, Grisa, Niederle, et al., 2020). Presidents Michel Temer (2016-2018) and Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) showed little enthusiasm for enhancing food security for low-income Brazilians and international development cooperation. Temer, taking office in October 2016, rapidly dismantled food policies, social engagement, and Brazil's South-South cooperation approach in foreign policy. One of his initial actions was dissolving the MDA, transferring family farming policy responsibilities to other ministries. In 2018, Bolsonaro escalated this dismantling process, discontinuing most programs and abolishing participation councils, including the CONSEA, through presidential decrees. High-ranking Bolsonaro administration officials accused family farmers and indigenous communities of hindering development and collaborating with foreign entities in their official speeches (Sabourin, Craviotti, et al., 2020). This period witnessed a return to the narrative of a unified agricultural sector comprising small, medium, and large farms with shared interests, echoing the situation of the 1980s. In Paraguay, President Lugo's removal in 2012 had shifted policy direction and resulted in Mercosur suspension. Argentina elected center-right leader Mauricio Macri in (2015-2019) who prioritized fiscal stabilization and resolving the country's sovereign debt crisis, aligning with business community interests.

Despite this political shift, the activists promoting these views have not disappeared, and the ideas they have articulated continue to be influent in the region. Various food-security policy instruments were incorporated into FAO initiatives, persisting even after the end of Graziano da Silva's tenure as head in 2019. For REAF, CELAC, and CPLP, the influence of Brazilian actors in crafting best practices has remained robust in the short term, albeit hindered by the deceleration of Brazil's international activism. These processes of dismantlement and disengagement have not impeded transnational activism by civil society networks. For example, civil society organizations in Paraguay maintained their participation in REAF even after the country's Mercosur suspension in 2012. Initiatives promoting family farming within UNASUR and CELAC also stayed active (Niederle, 2019).

Moreover, some UN-affiliated agencies even engaged in creative re-branding in order to continue support for family farm activities in South America. With conservative governments in Brazil no longer funding family farming projects, international agencies like IFAD, IICA, and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) began to relabel their strategies and raise funds for the promotion of "regional development" and "technological innovation," allowing them to continue support for some of the same civil society actors in Brazil, Argentina, El Salvador, and elsewhere who had spearheaded the family farm movement (González, 2020).

Both Macri in Argentina and Bolsonaro in Brazil later lost their bids for reelection, but their successors, Alberto Fernandez (inaugurated in 2020) and Lula da Silva (inaugurated in 2023) confronted high levels of political polarization, as have other left-leaning South American presidents who took office during the global pandemic, which hit Latin America disproportionately hard, especially during 2020-2021. This leaves us with the question of which norms or policies have been sufficiently institutionalized that we can anticipate that they will endure, and which are likely to be unable to continue in the face of presidential disinterest or outright opposition. To some degree, international allies can assist civil society actors to maintain their activist networks even when the national government is controlled by a president who is indifferent or even actively hostile to their agenda.

4. Conclusions

This chapter has drawn upon a view of “regionalism” that considers it both a strategy pursued by subnational and international actors and a political space for regulating certain policy domains. Policies and projects emerge from interactions between different state and nonstate actors, and regionalism enables complex policy processes wherein distinct regional projects and modes of governance unfold. Unpacking these forms of cooperation and governance allows us to question how these political spaces are built and prioritized by certain advocacy coalitions; how these coalitions influence policymaking; how norms are defined, contested, and translated; and how broader contextual factors or new directions in leadership can influence regionalism as a whole.

The study analyzed the role of an advocacy coalition born in Brazil that mobilized international recognition of the “family farming” category, connected the type of production these farms engaged in to the issue of food and nutritional security (previously viewed as a separate policy domain), and helped disseminate these policy ideas within the country, the subregion, the hemisphere, and the larger global anti-poverty community of activists centered around the United Nations and its many affiliated agencies, commissions, and groups. The coalition’s international ambitions became stronger following its rise to power in Brazil in the early 2000s. Conditions that supported the rise of this transnational network included support from the Brazilian government, opportunities emerging from significant events like South America's leftward political shift in the early 2000s and the 2008 global food crisis, and assistance from UN agencies in the early 21st century, which helped the diffusion of new policy solutions.

Norm entrepreneurs, both Brazilian and from other countries, were crucial throughout this process. The once novel idea of tightly associating family farms with food and nutritional security is now a permanent part of how agricultural policy is perceived in many venues, including both by many transnational civil society organizations and within the United Nations itself. Moreover, this chapter's narrative of the food security movement has provided an illustration of a virtuous feedback loop. Latin American nonstate actors introduced fresh ideas and political mobilization, earning legitimacy and formal resources from their governments, which eased access to multilateral forums. UN agencies in the region appointed Brazilian scholars and activists to key positions, who then moved among universities, government spaces, and international agencies. Moreover, the global food crisis revealed the international community's need to find new practical solutions to global challenges. In this context, the international projection of these groups added scope, renown, and legitimacy that reinforced their agenda at the regional level, beyond Mercosur.

As a larger message, this chapter shows that ideas, which may be wielded by actors who are weak in hard power resources, can have significant effects on policy choices and eventually on issue arena outcomes.

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