ABSTRACT

Over the past ten years, Brazil's foreign policy elites have made economic, political, and military cooperation with Africa one of the country's top priorities, as part of Brazil's emphasis on expanding relations within the Global South. While growing research literature has sought to analyze the norms and practices this cooperation entails, little of the current scholarship has examined its relevance to African politics. In this article, we consider the implications of Brazilian cooperation for democracy and human rights in Africa along three lines: the scope and content of Brazil's democracy promotion programs; the implications of its cooperation (official and non-official) for democracy and human rights; and its responses to political crises in Africa.

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BRAZIL’S DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION
WITH AFRICA: WHAT ROLE FOR DEMOCRACY
AND HUMAN RIGHTS?

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1 Introduction

Over the past decade, Brazil’s foreign policy elites have made economic, political, and military cooperation with Africa one of the country’s top priorities abroad, as part of Brazil’s emphasis on expanding relations within the Global South. Not only does the government view the continent as a promising market for Brazilian investments and exports, but it also sees to African States as key political partners in Brazil’s quest to become a global player. Efforts to strengthen economic, political, and defense partnerships with Africa include a fast-growing South-South cooperation program whose discourse stresses solidarity and horizontality, as well as the promotion of Brazilian public policy experiments in areas such as agriculture, education, and health.

While growing academic and policy literature has sought to analyze the norms and practices that this cooperation entails, little of the current scholarship has examined its relevance to African politics. In this article, we consider the political implications of Brazilian cooperation for democracy and human rights in Africa along three lines: the scope and content of Brazil’s democracy promotion programs; the implications of its cooperation (official and non-official) for democracy and human rights; and its responses to events in Africa that threaten democracy and human rights. The paper is exploratory in that it maps out some of the key patterns in Brazilian cooperation so as to guide a more long-term research agenda on the relevance of Brazilian cooperation to Africa’s democracy and human rights landscape.

Notes to this text start on page 34.
Examining Brazilian cooperation in light of African politics is important not only because Brazil’s role in Africa has grown substantially over the past decade, but also because this engagement raises new questions regarding the norms and principles underpinning Brazilian cooperation. For instance, some analysts question why a democratic country with a formal commitment to human rights within its foreign policy has sought closer ties with regimes that are strongly condemned for human rights violations perpetrated by Northern States and civil society entities. Analysts also tend to stress the contrast between this foreign policy approach and the government’s recent human rights efforts at home, including the creation of a Truth Commission (approved in September 2011) devoted to uncovering human rights violations perpetrated during the military period (1946–1988). Others adopt a pragmatic perspective according to which, despite Brazil’s democratic identity, in foreign affairs “business is business,” suggesting a willingness to subordinate non-economic principles such as democracy and human rights to the desire to broaden Brazil’s economic relations. This last perspective also emphasizes that, despite their strong rhetoric stressing democracy and human rights, liberal democracies have supported authoritarian regimes when politically or economically convenient (including Brazil’s past military government).

Other defenders of Brazil’s recent foreign policy orientation also insist that Brazil deals with these countries by promoting dialogue rather than through “naming and shaming,” often associated with the strategies of American and European NGOs, and that through engagement rather than isolation, it is possible to nudge authoritarian regimes in the direction of democracy and human rights. While some Northern donors adopt a similar approach, the Brazilian government has stressed the need for diplomatic resolution of conflicts before multilateral intervention (FRAYSINET, F. 2011), noting that such interventions often yield regime change with uncertain results, or outcomes that primarily benefit NATO countries, as in the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan. This debate, sparked in part by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s (2003–2011) active presidential diplomacy in Africa, reemerged as President Dilma Rousseff (2011-present) continued to boost relations with countries whose governments were associated with human rights violations and as Brazil began to more openly question military intervention, including through UN Security Council (UNSC) votes in the Libyan and Syrian crises.

Our analysis suggests that Brazil’s democracy and human rights initiatives abroad, carried out under a foreign policy discourse that stresses non-intervention, are restricted to transitional regimes that have explicitly requested assistance with governance matters, and to fellow members of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), an organization premised in part on its members’ commitment to democracy and governance cooperation. More broadly, our analysis suggests that Brazil’s cooperation in Africa does have implications for local political systems, whether by boosting democratic institutions or, conversely, by supporting authoritarian regimes. In addition, Brazilian cooperation with Africa has begun attracting the attention of Brazilian civil society entities,
including those that collaborate with African counterparts, leading to increasing contestation of some Brazilian cooperation practices abroad.

The article is structured as follows. After providing a background on the intersection between development cooperation and democracy promotion, including Brazil’s role, we analyze the Brazilian official discourse on democracy and human rights as it pertains to Brazil’s foreign policy, including with respect to Africa. Second, we examine some of the practices of Brazilian cooperation with Africa, analyzing the extent to which they adhere to those principles. Finally, we consider the Brazilian government’s positions on key political crises in Africa, and how they relate to its cooperation practices and approach to democracy and human rights. In the conclusion, we consider some of the implications of Brazil’s cooperation for African politics.

2 Brazilian cooperation with Africa, democracy, and human rights

2.1 Democracy and development cooperation in Africa

Although there are diverging definitions of “democracy promotion,” here we draw on Carothers’ (2009) view of democracy promotion as cooperation programs that contain an element that seeks to support the spread of democracy within a given country, region, or other geographic context. Although transition to democracy is largely endogenous, international relations can affect this process – towards democracy, or away from it (BROWN, 2005). In Africa, the scope and diversity of aid and cooperation (from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD donors and other partners) means that complex international elements influence regime types. The Arab Spring also shows the importance of international factors in democracy promotion at several levels, including state-led processes, civil society, and social networks that cross boundaries, and with a wide range of outcomes. Although the literature on democracy promotion focuses on Northern aid, there is a growing need to analyze the role of emerging powers. While many of these countries stress national sovereignty and non-intervention in their foreign policies, democratic emerging powers often incorporate state-building within their cooperation efforts. While these initiatives are not necessarily labeled as democracy promotion initiatives, they disseminate norms, technologies, and practices that are politically relevant.

During the Cold War, American foreign aid was more anti-communist and anti-revolutionary than it was pro-democratic (LOWENTHAL, 1991). In the post-Cold War period, US and European donors began to attach more political conditionalities to aid, and they invested significantly in programs specifically designed to promote democracy – with highly variable results (BROWN, 2005 and BRATTON; VAN DE WALLE, 1997). As Africa underwent a partial wave of democratization in the 1990s, democracy promotions yielded steps forward as well as reversals; Lynch and Crawford (2011) conclude that, “typically, though not universally, sub-Saharan African countries are more democratic today than
in the late 1980s.” However, Africa still suffers significant economic, social, and political obstacles to democratization, including colonial legacies, clientelist politics, and complex ethno-political dynamics. Since 2001, the US and Europe’s security interests have weighed more heavily in their aid design and allocation, with increased support for countries that agreed to cooperate in the ‘war on terror,’ independently of regime type. Over the past decade, the growing role of emerging powers, particularly China, in Africa has rendered the landscape of aid and cooperation even more complex. Although the literature on South-South cooperation has examined some of the effects that Chinese cooperation is having on African democracy (ESTEBAN, 2009), little has been written so far on the political implications of Brazil’s growing cooperation ties with Africa. Such analysis is necessary not only because of Brazil’s increasing role in Africa, but also because Brazil’s current Foreign Minister, Luiz Alberto Figueiredo, has signaled his intention to give human rights greater space within Brazil’s foreign policy.

2.2 Brazilian foreign policy and human rights

Understanding the relevance of Brazilian cooperation to democracy and human rights in Africa requires taking into account the country’s own experiences with democracy. First, Brazil has received both aid that promoted autocratic rule and aid that promoted democracy—in the case of US, from the same provider. This may help to explain the cautious tone of Brazilian foreign policy elites when addressing democracy and human rights abroad.3 Second, Brazil’s own political experiences, including the gradual transition from military rule (1964-1985) back to democracy, had profound and lingering effects on Brazil’s foreign policy making (SANTORO, 2012). For instance, the role of civil society (local and international) in Brazil’s return to democracy helps to explain the emphasis placed on public policy councils at different levels of government, from federal to municipal, as well as recurring calls for broadened civil society participation. Moreover, Brazilian civil society has become an important part of Brazil-Africa cooperation, both through collaboration with official cooperation, and by contesting cooperation initiatives. The Brazilian government has acknowledged the importance of non-state actors’ connections to Africa; for instance, former Foreign Minister Antonio Patriota asserted that Africa is of genuine interest not only to the Brazilian government but also to private companies and civil society organizations (BRASIL, 2011a). Although civil society entities such as NGOs, labor unions, and trade associations have often struggled to expand the space available to them in Brazil’s foreign policy sphere, they have played a growing role in international cooperation, both through participation and through contestation of that cooperation.

The transition from military back to civilian rule also yielded a formal commitment to democracy and human rights, within and beyond Brazil’s borders. Brazil’s 1988 Constitution establishes the principles that should guide the country’s foreign policy: national independence; prevalence of human rights; self-determination of the peoples; non-intervention; equality among States;
defense of peace; peaceful settlement of conflicts; repudiation of terrorism and racism; cooperation; and granting of political asylum. Within foreign policy, Brazil’s commitment to human rights has been most clearly visible in regional initiatives such as the Organization of American States, which imposes sanctions on member States where democracy is endangered (for instance, through a coup) (SANTISO, 2002 and CAROTHERS; YOUNGS, 2011).

Within its bilateral relations, Brazil has often upheld democratic principles. For example, Brazilian diplomats played a crucial role in the Paraguay crisis of April 1996, helping to maintain Paraguay’s democracy (SANTISO, 2002). However, following Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s resignation in 2004, Brazil provided a veneer of legitimacy to an intervention that “had more to do with political expediency than with the protection of democracy” (BURGES; DAUDELIN, 2007). Such ambiguities and inconsistencies have often cast doubts on Brazilian foreign policy’s commitment to democracy and human rights.

In 2003, when Lula began his first mandate, the government presented an additional concept that would guide Brazilian foreign policy: the idea of non-indifference. Non-indifference was meant to balance non-intervention, meaning Brazil would intervene abroad only when it was invited by the parties involved and if it believed it could play a positive role. This principle has since been evoked to justify development cooperation with African nations, as well as Brazil’s involvement as a troop contributor to the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) in 2004.4

President Rousseff’s inauguration in January 2010 raised expectations regarding the role of human rights in Brazil’s foreign policy, especially in light of Rousseff’s personal history as a militant against the military regime, including her experience under arrest and her subjection to torture. In 2011, Foreign Minister Antonio Patriota cast Brazil’s poverty reduction achievements as a success in terms of Brazil’s domestic human rights situation, but he also recognized areas that needed improvement, including urban violence, women’s rights, education, and the incarcerated population.5 On other occasions, the Brazilian government has rejected what it views as the stigmatization of poor nations as the only human rights violators, stressing that developed countries sometimes commit serious violations themselves. This leads to a reluctance to single out States for human right violations, although within the UN Human Rights Council, Brazil has often backed resolutions condemning States that systematically abuse human rights.

In January 2011, Patriota stated that the government would denounce all human rights violations, no matter where they had taken place,6 and Foreign Policy Advisor Marco Aurelio Garcia asserted that Rousseff’s government would emphasize human rights both domestically and abroad, in part due to the president’s own history.7 In February 2011, Brazil, playing the role of facilitator within the UN Human Rights Council, presented a proposal in which human rights violations should be investigated without special treatment and ideological considerations. Civil society organizations called the proposal the first concrete step on the part of the Rousseff administration to make human rights a central theme within Brazilian foreign policy.8 However, in evaluating Rousseff’s human
rights policy, some analysts argue that the potential for Brazil’s contribution towards human rights remained underexplored in Rousseff’s first year as president, and that her government’s foreign policy has generally focused on the economic and commercial aspects of Brazil’s international relations to the detriment of its commitment to democracy and human rights.

Brazil’s redemocratization has also shaped its foreign policy by enhancing the prominence of social policy issues within the Brazilian conception of democracy, as well as throughout its international cooperation agenda. For instance, in addition to establishing the principles meant to guide Brazil’s foreign policy, the 1988 Constitution enshrined health, education, and social security as citizen rights, boosting public education and leading to the creation of institutions such as Brazil’s publicly funded health care system, the Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS). In the mid-1990s, the creation of an electronic voting system (drawing on technological innovations by Brazilian and foreign companies) broadened political participation of illiterate and handicapped citizens during elections – another hallmark of the country’s concern with accessibility as a key component of democracy.

Despite their less than adequate implementation, the rights stipulated in Brazilian legislation represented significant accomplishments in that they formally acknowledge the rights of individuals regarding access to areas such as health and education (CARDOSO JR., 2009). The expansion of income redistribution schemes (such as the conditional cash transfer program Bolsa Família, which started under President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and was broadened under President Lula) and the approaches developed to tackle food security and public health became hallmarks of Brazil’s social development, and later of its international cooperation (SANTORO, 2012 and ABDENUR; SOUZA NETO, 2013). Thus, over the past ten years, reductions in poverty and social inequality, driven by higher economic growth and by redistributive policies, have also highlighted social and economic aspects of Brazil’s democracy. Moreover, the creation (in 2011) of a Truth Commission and the Supreme Court corruption trials of high-ranking government officials are part of the efforts to consolidate Brazilian democracy. Brazil’s capacity to produce fair economic results for its population is an important source of legitimacy for the Brazilian government, which helps to explain why its foreign policy tends to mention democracy alongside social and economic rights.

Examining Brazil’s democracy promotion in Africa is necessary for a variety of reasons. First, this type of analysis sheds light on the extent to which rising powers contest the dominant principles of Northern development assistance. US and European governments have urged rising democracies to take a more active role in human rights and democracy promotion, as have some civil society entities within and outside States where South-South cooperation is undertaken. Second, questions about Brazil’s impact on African politics have increased with Brazil’s recent voting pattern in the UN Security Council. While holding a non-permanent seat, Brazil aligned with most of its fellow BRICS countries (South Africa supported resolution 1973 on Libya, but later expressed regret at having done so) and abstained on the 2011 resolution supporting military action in Libya,
although it supported the expulsion of Libya from the Human Rights Council. Explaining Brazil’s behavior in issues of democracy and human rights within different spheres calls for analysis of its concrete cooperation ties.

Finally, the diversity of Brazilian actors participating in development cooperation in Africa needs further analysis, including in terms of their impact on local politics. In addition to civil society organizations, Brazilian multinationals operate in several African nations, especially in mining and infrastructure, sometimes backed by the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES). Many such companies have reinforced their corporate social responsibility guidelines, yet in some contexts their operations have generated local tensions. Moreover, the Brazilian government’s efforts to expand Brazil’s defense industry, including towards Africa, may help boost non-democratic regimes. Brazil has become the Western Hemisphere’s second largest exporter of small arms, whose use and movement, both within and across borders, are difficult to track (Brazilian-manufactured non-lethal weapons such as tear gas canisters were used against Arab Spring protesters in Bahrain).

2.3 Brazil’s democracy and human rights initiatives

Projects that openly seek to promote democracy and human rights are not always a highly visible part of Brazil’s official cooperation efforts. Among the projects listed in the Brazilian Cooperation Agency’s (ABC) project database, none mention democracy in their titles, and only one explicitly refers to human rights: a partnership between the Brazilian Human Rights Secretariat (SDH) and the ABC to collaborate in the fight against child and teenage exploitation in Togo. However, democracy and human rights sometimes appear as components of broader cooperation programs, often through the involvement of human rights-related institutions in Brazil, especially SDH. For instance, SDH and the Ministry of Justice joined efforts to strengthen human rights-related institutions such as civil registries in Guinea-Bissau. There are also broader programs related to democracy and human rights that involve agreements with countries in disparate areas of the world through South-South multilateral arrangements.

Many of these efforts target sub-national level state units, especially cities. This focus reflects the decentralized dimension of Brazil’s own experience with democratization, in which municipal governments and communities played a pioneering role. Cities have also been the site of important democratic experiments, including the Participatory Budget model implemented in Porto Alegre, which was adapted in some form by 1,500 municipal governments around the world (GANUZA; BAIIOCCHI, 2012 and AVRITZER, 2002). The World Social Forums, initially held in Porto Alegre, have been a crucial catalyst, enabling civil society entities and activists from around the world to receive information about Brazil’s participatory budget experiences. In addition, international organizations such as the World Bank, UNDP, and UN Habitat promoted participatory budget models as a way to encourage more socially equitable forms of spending. The ABC has coordinated several projects aimed at promoting participatory budgets.
abroad, including through a partnership with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (ABC, 2013). Several South African cities have adapted parts of this model, inspired by the Porto Alegre case.

In addition to the role of cities, Brazilian cooperation in democracy and human rights often includes civil society entities such as NGOs, trade unions, and professional associations. These organizations have participated in projects related to Brazil’s negotiations on the external debt, the creation of Mercosur, and free trade agreements. UN conferences devoted to social issues also generated new incentives for the involvement of feminists, environmental activists, and indigenous peoples movements (ALVES, 2002). More recently, civil society entities in Brazil have begun questioning Brazil’s role in groupings such as the G-20 and the BRICS, including the latter’s plans to finance large-scale infrastructure in Africa through the planned BRICS Development Bank.

The project’s database maintained by ABC reveals that most official Brazilian cooperation programs in Africa referring to democracy or human rights focus on electoral or judicial cooperation. Brazil has helped several African countries with their elections, with the Superior Electoral Court (SEC) actively promoting the country’s electronic voting system abroad. In Africa, Brazilian experts have visited Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Tunisia, and Guinea-Bissau, and a recent workshop in Cape Town introduced the Brazilian voting system to representatives from South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Madagascar. The exact impact of this cooperation is difficult to ascertain, since the technology that is promoted is not always adopted by the cooperation partners, sometimes due to lack of resources or insufficient confidence in the integrity of the system. Nonetheless, through these exchanges, Brazil may help to spur discussions in Africa about the procedural aspects of electoral democracy.

Such exchanges have also taken place in Brazil. Cooperation with Sudan, for example, has been intense since 2010. It has included visits by officials from the Sudanese Parliament to Brazil’s Superior Court (TSE) and also an agreement between the Brazilian Bar Association and its Sudanese counterpart to promote the protection of human rights; the protection of lawyers’ rights; and professional exchanges between lawyers of both countries, including professional qualification activities and a joint collaboration on guaranteeing respect for human rights legislation both domestically and internationally.

Brazilian promotion of electronic voting is also carried out through multilateral channels. On October 3, 2011, authorities of electoral courts from Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde Islands, São Tomé and Príncipe, East Timor, and Portugal signed the “Carta de Brasília,” which reaffirmed the States’ common “commitment to democracy and their confidence in the free, just democratic process based on the norms established through their legal systems and universally accepted human rights.” Through the agreement, those countries also expressed their intent to improve the management and administration of their electoral systems through cooperation programs covering civic education, capacity building for judges and electoral officials, media coverage for elections, electoral legislation, guaranteeing accountability of political parties, and electronic voting.
2.4 Brazilian development cooperation

Although democracy and human rights remain niche topics in Brazil’s cooperation with Africa, Brazil’s broader impact on African politics may come out of cooperation programs that lack any overt reference to those principles. Within its official cooperation programs, the Brazilian government claims that it actively contributed to improving the lives of Africans, especially through the sharing of social program models that were essential in stabilizing Brazil’s own democracy. The ABC’s project portfolio in Africa includes dozens of projects under the rubric “Social Development,” many of which are intended to boost governance and institutions. Some of these projects are carried out in collaboration with non-state actors that played a defining role in widening human and social rights in Brazil, such as the Pastoral da Criança (Pastoral Care for Children), a division of the Brazilian National Conference of Bishops dedicated to children’s rights and well-being.

Beyond official cooperation, there are attempts to draw on Brazil’s own experience with democratization, including the emergence of a robust and well-articulated civil society, to cooperate on political and social issues. Brazilian NGOs have analyzed the impact of technical cooperation projects as well as the role of Brazilian mining and construction multinationals in Africa. For example, FASE has partnered with Mozambican entities, including the National Union of Mozambican Peasants (UNAC), to question the implementation of the Triangular Cooperation Program for the Agricultural Development of Tropical Savannah (Pro-SAVANA), which Brazil is undertaking with Japan to boost agricultural productivity in Mozambique’s Nacala Corridor (MELLO, 2013). Also in Mozambique, Brazilian trade unions have been collaborating with local counterparts to monitor allegations of human rights violations by Brazilian multinationals, and the São Paulo-based human rights NGO Conectas is collaborating with South African and Nigerian NGOs to strengthen their positions on human rights and foreign policy debates. In addition, there is increasing domestic scrutiny of Brazilian development cooperation by leading human rights NGOs, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

2.5 Brazilian positions on political issues in Africa

Finally, Brazil has an indirect effect on democracy and human rights in Africa through the official positions that the Brazilian government adopts regarding key issues and political crises in Africa, and through the use of development cooperation (its continuation or suspension) as leverage with local authorities. In 2007, Brazil had expressed concern regarding the Zimbabwean government’s lack of respect for fundamental rights, arguing that all parties should dialogue in order to guarantee the respect for the rule of law and the harmonious development of Zimbabwean society (SITUAÇÃO..., 2007, p. 284). In 2008, former Foreign Minister Amorim was one of the first foreign dignitaries to visit Zimbabwe at the
time of the political crisis (VISITA..., 2008, p. 247), meeting with President Mugabe and representatives of political parties, including the opposition (Brazil had participated in an observer electoral mission during the first electoral round, in March 2008 and also in July 2013, by invitation of the Zimbabwean government). Through the visit, the Brazilian government proved willing to engage with Mugabe even as he was being ostracized by the international community. Brazil’s attitude contrasted sharply with those of the US and the EU, which imposed sanctions that included the termination of all grants and loans to Zimbabwe’s government made through bilateral and multilateral channels.17

The Brazilian government also assumed official positions regarding the Arab Spring events that took place in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. In February 2011, with respect to Egypt, President Rousseff stated that Brazil could not have a say on the internal affairs of another country.18 The Brazilian government expressed its hopes that the crisis would end through a democratic solution involving greater social inclusion and prosperity, and former Foreign Minister Patriota noted that Egypt was an important trade partner and that, in the eyes of the Brazilian government, protests in Egypt emerged due to frustration regarding the economic situation and inadequate social inclusion (GODOY, 2011). Shortly afterwards, during the 16th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Brazilian Human Rights Minister Maria do Rosário openly criticized Middle Eastern and North African regimes for their authoritarian practices, singling out the use of force against civilian populations (O GLOBO, 2011). As of 2011, the United Nations Development Program – UNDP (2012) supported a visit by Egyptian politicians and businessman to Brazil and Chile, identifying the two countries as examples of transitions to democracy, including constitutional reform, which could inspire Egypt. During a May 2013 visit by former President Morsi to Brazil, Brazil and Egypt agreed to cooperate towards economic development in a democratic and socially just environment (BRASIL, 2013a). Brazil expressed concern after the overthrow of Morsi in early July 2013 and cooperation projects negotiated during Morsi’s visit are yet to be implemented.19

In addition, Brazilian authorities have repeatedly made references to democracy in statements related to the African continent. In 2009, Lula condemned the assassination of Guinea-Bissau’s president, João Bernardo “Nino” Vieira, and of the head of its Armed Forces, General Tagme Na Waié, stating that Brazil could not “remain silent before another attack against an incipient democracy that was building itself” (LUSA, 2009). During a 2011 state visit to Angola, Rousseff gave a speech at the National Assembly mentioning a future of economic progress, social justice, peace, and democracy for Angola, and cited Angola’s new constitution as a key step towards deepening the country’s democracy. Rousseff (BRASIL, 2011b) also referred to the joint efforts by Angola and Brazil to the stabilization process in Guinea-Bissau, praising Angola as an example of national reconstruction with democratic liberties — a very positive assessment compared to the EU’s evaluation (EUROPEAN UNION, 2010). Other Brazilian government officials have openly supported democracy and human
rights in Africa. During the 50th anniversary of the African Union, in 2013, Brazilian diplomats praised the AU’s contributions towards democracy in Africa, especially its zero-tolerance policy regarding coups d’etat.  

However, in its bilateral relations Brazil has often proven reluctant to directly condemn or single out human rights violators, expanding cooperation as well as commercial relations with these regimes. Under Lula and Rousseff, Brazil has deepened ties with Equatorial Guinea, selling Brazilian defense equipment, importing oil, and helping Brazilian construction companies to participate in the construction of the country’s new capital. Brazil also supported the country’s bid to obtain full membership within the CPLP – a decision highly contested by civil society movements due to Equatorial Guinea’s poor democratic and human rights credentials. In refraining from antagonizing certain countries as human rights violators, the Brazilian government has argued that violations are committed by all countries, developed and developing. As a result, the Brazilian government has refused to accept human rights reports conducted by individual countries, including those that evaluate Brazil’s domestic human rights record, arguing that the UN is the only legitimate entity for monitoring and reporting on human rights.  

Brazil has also strongly favored responses to crises by local and regional actors, including during crises in the Ivory Coast, Sudan, and Mali — as long as these actions are complementary, rather than contradictory, to the UN security system. For instance, Brazil has argued that the AU can legitimately deal with crises on the continent, and that the international community should work jointly with the AU. Regarding peacekeeping missions in Africa, Brazil’s most recent troop contributions were in Mozambique and Angola in the mid-1990s, but the country has observers in almost all UN missions in the continent, and in 2013 Brazilian General Santos Cruz, a former Force Commander of the mission in Haiti, was appointed force commander of the MONUC mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.  

In early 2003, Brazil participated in the Brazzaville Group, an initiative organized by African nations and the CPLP regarding political instability in São Tomé and Príncipe. The effort led to a memorandum of understanding, signed in July 2003 between the president of STP and the leader of the Armed Forces group that had rebelled, so that the country could return to democratic government. In November 2003, during a stop in São Tomé and Príncipe as part of his first visit to Africa, Lula offered Brazilian support for the efforts to consolidate its democracy.  

The ways in which these positions and Brazil’s concrete engagement in Africa intersect are illustrated by the case of Guinea-Bissau. Brazil has long sought to bring attention to Guinea-Bissau’s recurring political instability, and in 2007, Brazil became the chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration in the UN Peacebuilding Commission. Through this position and its membership in the CPLP, Brazil has implemented a variety of cooperation initiatives to strengthen institutions in the country, for instance by training the country’s police, boosting its judicial system, and supporting its parliament (ABDENUR; SOUZA NETO,
In 2008, Brazil condemned an attempt by members of the Armed Forces to destabilize the government in Guinea-Bissau, reiterating its support to the elected government. A coup in April 2012 led to an interruption of Brazilian cooperation programs in the country, and Brazil has made the return to democratic normalcy a condition for the resumption of its cooperation initiatives. In June 2013, Brazil joined other CPLP member States in calling for free and fair elections so as to restore democracy in Guinea-Bissau (BRASIL, 2013c). Although not all of Brazil’s official positions on African political crises are directly linked to Brazilian cooperation programs, as in the case of Guinea-Bissau, the example shows Brazil’s willingness to engage with democracy and human rights promotion in Africa by combining discursive support/condemnation with concrete actions.

3 Conclusion

As Brazil’s ties with Africa intensify, its development cooperation has increasing implications for local politics, whether the cooperation partner is a democracy or an authoritarian regime with a record of human rights violations. In this article, we have analyzed three emerging routes for this impact: democracy and human rights promotion programs, development cooperation in general, and official positions on key political issues in Africa. The analysis suggests that, despite adopting a strong rhetoric of non-interference in its foreign policy, the Brazilian government has actively engaged with issues of democracy and human rights in Africa, directly and indirectly. The Brazilian government addresses democracy and human rights directly only when there is a clearly identifiable demand from the African partner government on such issues, or when a coup occurs in a country bound by a CPLP mechanism that stresses the importance of democracy, as in the case of Guinea-Bissau. At the same time, even when democracy and human rights are not explicit themes of cooperation, Brazil’s growing role on the continent—propelled not only by the Brazilian government, but also by civil society and private sector actors—has political consequences, whether by contributing to democracy via institution-building or (in the case of Equatorial Guinea) by boosting authoritarian regimes through expanded economic cooperation.

Brazil’s greater visibility in the international arena has prompted calls for greater involvement by Brazil in the promotion of democracy and human rights abroad – by both Northern donors and actors from the Global South (PATRICK, 2010). This is particularly important in Brazil’s relations with Africa, because in that continent Brazil often promotes its image as a model of economic and social justice. Yet the Brazilian government’s preferred mode of democracy and human rights promotion in Africa – based predominantly on discreet, back-stage diplomacy — is still marked by a cautiousness that may be disproportionate in light of Brazil’s own experience with democracy. In trying to balance its commitment to human rights and the principle of non-intervention, Brazil has raised concerns not only about the coherence of its approach, but also regarding its future positions on democracy and human rights abroad. Some analysts have
voiced concerns that Brazil’s growing ties with non-democratic emerging powers, particularly through the BRICS grouping, may push its foreign policy in the direction of defending unconditional sovereignty (CASTAÑEDA, 2010). Although this position may overestimate the importance attached by Brazilian foreign policy to the BRICS, it calls attention to the need for Brazil to forge a more consistent path. While a Brazilian approach to human rights and development is unlikely to entail an uncritical acceptance of American and European positions on democracy and human rights, it should also not mean siding by default with regimes that overlook those principles altogether. In the case of Africa, there are pragmatic reasons why Brazil might signal a greater willingness to support democracy and human rights, including the fact that the rupture of democratic order in African states could generate instability to the detriment of Brazilian economic interests and cooperation initiatives.

Brazil can also provide stronger support for democracy and human rights in Africa by cooperating with third parties. South Africa has provided a model for such an initiative hosting the first EU-South Africa dialogue forum on democracy and human rights. Cross-regional summits such as the Africa-South America and the Arab-South America initiatives could also become relevant spaces for a positive Brazilian influence in African nations regarding democracy and human rights.

At the multilateral level, the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA), in contrast to the BRICS, is premised on the common identity of these countries as large, diverse democracies. Brazil has demonstrated a willingness to use this platform to discuss issues related to democracy, such as in the April 2013 “Deepening Democracy through Local Governance” Forum held in New Delhi. At the Forum, the three IBSA nations acknowledged their common role as representing a “unique democratic alliance of the Global South.” Within the BRICS, although discussions of human rights and democracy are hampered by the inclusion of authoritarian Russia and China, Brazil could push for norms and practices, for instance via the BRICS Development Bank initiative, that prioritize poverty and inequality reduction rather than simply infrastructure and industrial policy.

Finally, Brazil’s potential to learn from African countries about democracy and human rights should not be underestimated, including reconciliation initiatives in countries such as Rwanda and South Africa. Brazil’s National Truth Commission may learn from South Africa’s experience addressing the role of State and non-state agents in human rights violations and memory-building. By opening up to the possibility of learning about democracy and human rights from African countries’ own experiences — positive or negative — Brazil might refine its own approach to democracy and human rights, both at home and in Africa.
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NOTES

1. This was the argument used to base Brazil’s support for Equatorial Guinea to become a member of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Nations in spite of criticism by civil society organizations from Brazil and Portugal that the government of Equatorial Guinea was not democratic and violated human rights. At the moment, EG still remains an observer state of the CPLP and has not obtained full membership status.

2. See O Globo (2013, p. 8)

3. Although democracy and human rights are not coterminous, Brazil’s stance towards human rights overlaps significantly with its positions and discourse on democracy abroad.

4. Brazil’s involvement in Haiti was also justified by Brazilian authorities as part of a shared African heritage. Brazilian authorities argued that, since Brazil was already being non-indifferent towards African nations, it could not abstain from doing the same with Haiti.

5. See interview with Antonio Patriota published at O Estado de São Paulo (Nogueira; Paraguassu, 2011).


7. On this subject see Interview with Professor Marco Aurélio Garcia entitled “O que muda e o que não muda na política externa com Dilma” (2011) published at Revista de Ciências Sociais Aplicadas do CCJE/UFRJ.

8. On this subject see article signed by Eliane Oliveira (2011) published at O Globo.


10. Rousseff’s intentions to focus on the economic and commercial aspects of Brazil’s foreign policy agenda can be exemplified by Foreign Minister Patriota’s announcement that more diplomats and resources from the ministry would be concentrated on issues such as commercial disputes and the creation of new markets for Brazilian products. Patriota announced that Brazil would double the number of diplomats allocated to the Commercial Disputes Section of the Foreign Ministry as well as the creation of training opportunities at Brazil’s Mission to the WTO and seminars and studies on economic and commercial dispute. See: “Onde o Itamaraty acerta”, O Estado de São Paulo (2011).

11. Brazilian mining company Vale and the Mozambican government have been criticized by Human Rights Watch and local actors for its actions in the Tete region of Mozambique, especially regarding resettlement policies (Human Rights Watch, 2013).


14. About the Brazilian voting system see Brasil (2013d).

15. For the full text of the agreement see Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil – OAB (2010).

16. Ibid.

17. On this subject see Foley (2011).

18. On this subject see Figueiredo and Fabrini (2011) on article entitled “Dilma: Brasil não pode ter opinião sobre tudo” published at O Globo.


20. On this subject see article by Adriana Giraldi (2013).


RESUMO

Nos últimos dez anos, as elites responsáveis pela política externa brasileira puseram cooperação econômica, política e militar com a África entre as prioridades máximas do país, como parte da política de estreitar suas relações com o Sul Global. Embora uma crescente literatura especializada tenha tentado analisar as normas e práticas que esta cooperação implica, apenas uma pequena parcela da literatura atual tem escrutinado a relevância desta cooperação para a política africana. Neste artigo, consideramos os efeitos da cooperação brasileira para a democracia e os direitos humanos na África em três aspectos: o alcance e o conteúdo dos programas brasileiros para promoção da democracia; as consequências desta cooperação (oficial e não-oficial) para a democracia e para os direitos humanos; e as respostas do Brasil a crises políticas na África.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Brasil – África – Cooperação – Política externa – Democracia – Direitos humanos

RESUMEN

En los últimos diez años, las élites de la política exterior de Brasil le dieron un lugar prioritario a la cooperación económica, política y militar con África, como parte del énfasis puesto por Brasil en la expansión de las relaciones dentro del Sur Global. Si bien hay cada vez más estudios que analizan las normas y prácticas que implica esta cooperación, es poca la investigación que actualmente se centra en examinar su relevancia para la política africana. En el presente artículo, consideramos las implicancias que tiene la cooperación de Brasil para la democracia y los derechos humanos en África haciendo eje en tres aspectos: el alcance y contenido de los programas brasileños de promoción de la democracia; las implicancias de la cooperación (oficial y no oficial) de Brasil para la democracia y los derechos humanos; y sus respuestas a las crisis políticas de África.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Brasil – África – Cooperación – Política exterior – Democracia – Derechos humanos