CHAPTER FOUR

THE OCEAN AGENDA IN ACADEMIC AND POLICY DEBATES IN BRAZIL: CONNECTIONS WITH THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

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INTRODUCTION

The geopolitics and governance of the oceans are undergoing significant changes. In the Atlantic Ocean, these transformations are driven by two main trends: (a) the renewed regionalisation of initiatives in the Atlantic Ocean, led by intermediate and regional powers such as Brazil, Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa, but also by regional organisations such as the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); (b) an emerging 'pan-Atlantic'

perspective, developed in response to an increasing role of extra-regional powers [13] in Africa, particularly China and, to a lesser extent, Russia. North Atlantic powers have supported the latter approach: the USA with its Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation and Portugal with its Atlantic Centre. Several North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies, such as Canada, the UK, France, Spain, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland and Norway have actively participated in both initiatives, thus leading to the establishment of new forums and multilateral agreements involving countries from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Considering that the South Atlantic is an integral part of Brazil's strategic surroundings and a priority in its foreign policy, it is essential to analyse the country's current stance on these two somehow contradictory trends. In addition, understanding Brazil's role in the South Atlantic is relevant for African ocean politics: the South American giant has had long-standing interests in African countries; since the Second World War, it has developed historical connections in the South Atlantic, particularly but not exclusively with Portuguese-speaking countries. The Brazilian Navy's Blue Amazon programme has since 2004 stressed the geographical proximity between the two coasts and the strategic importance of the resources found in this extensive ocean-region. The Blue Amazon has inspired cooperation projects, for instance, with Namibia and Angola in the assessment of strategic minerals in their respective continental shelves. Finally, Brazil's cooperation initiatives within the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) and the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS) also explain why Brazil's stance is relevant for the politics of the ocean in general and the politics of the African ocean in particular.

Against this broader backdrop, this chapter addresses the following research question: how has Brazil positioned itself in response to transformations in South Atlantic Ocean governance, especially in relation to regionalisation and pan-Atlantic trends? The chapter is organised into three sections. The first sets the context by examining the shift in ocean governance from a sovereignty-based legal regime under UNCLOS to a sustainability-oriented framework shaped by the climate emergency. The second analyses the ocean agenda in Brazil's recent foreign policy, focusing on the main features of its official narratives and strategies. Both sections draw on content analysis of official documents and a general review of the literature. The third section adopts a different methodological approach, combining bibliometric analysis with a scoping review of Brazilian academic

[13] The ZOPACAS was established in 1986 via UN General Assembly Resolution 41/11, with 124 votes in favour, eight abstentions (mainly European states) and opposition from the US. A Brazilian-led initiative post-Falklands/Malvinas War, it countered NATO and apartheid-era South Africa's proposed South Atlantic Treaty Organization, SATO (Carvalho and Nunes 2014).

literature on ocean governance in the South Atlantic since Brazil's democratisation in the late 1980s. It maps the current state of scholarly knowledge production in Brazil on the South Atlantic and its relevance for Brazil–Africa connections. We argue that Brazil's position on ocean governance actively shapes the shared vision of the South Atlantic as an ocean-region, given its geopolitical interests, long-standing ties with African countries and diplomatic efforts to connect ocean governance with the climate emergency.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE ATLANTIC AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF OCEAN GOVERNANCE

Since the end of the Cold War, the governance of the oceans has undergone significant changes driven by legal frameworks that were internationally agreed upon. This evolution can be summarised in two phases: the 'Constitution of the Seas regime' (1982–1994) and the 'Sustainable Development Ocean regime' (1992–present). When analysing them, we focus on contexts, legal frameworks and shifts in ocean governance, considering how they progressively connect with sustainability and the current climate emergency.

Significant power asymmetries and political tensions between major powers, rising states and developing countries characterise the transition between the two phases. During the 'Constitution of the Seas regime', ocean governance was dominated by state-centric legalism anchored in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) negotiations. Adopted in 1982 and entering into force in 1994, UNCLOS was the result of three conferences: UNCLOS I (1958), UNCLOS II (1960) and UNCLOS III (1973–1982). It established maritime zones (territorial seas, exclusive economic zones and the high seas), clarified rights and obligations and created institutions such as the International Seabed Authority. However, power relations have significantly influenced UNCLOS provisions, most often favouring the Global North and only sometimes benefiting countries from the South, thus constraining UNCLOS as an agent of justice (Schandorf 2024).

This first phase emphasised sovereignty and economic exploitation by coastal states, focusing on discrete jurisdictional regimes and resource access rather than environmental stewardship (Parthenay and Mesquita 2025). Starting in the early 1990s, global environmental concerns—especially climate change and ecosystem degradation—began reframing ocean governance. The 1992 Rio Earth Summit institutionalised the concept of sustainable development, ushering in policies centred on ecosystem health and the interconnections between oceans,

biodiversity and human well-being. Since the twentieth anniversary of UNCLOS, ocean governance has shifted from territorial claims to safeguarding the 'health of the oceans' and aligning with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14, Life Below Water (Parthenay and Mesquita 2025).

Parthenay and Mesquita (2025) identify a significant shift in the discourse of United Nations General Assembly resolutions on ocean governance. While UNCLOS-related resolutions taken between 1984 and 1995 primarily focused on treaty implementation and resource exploitation, the language used after 2000 has increasingly emphasised sustainability, ecosystem preservation, marine pollution mitigation and biodiversity protection. This evolution reflects a broader normative transformation in global ocean governance, culminating in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. SDG 14 calls for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources, illustrating a growing need to align international maritime policy with environmental sustainability across the ocean-regions.

The First World Ocean Assessment, conducted by the United Nations in 2016, emphasised the urgent need for sustainable management of ocean activities. In response, the UN declared 2021—2030 the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development in 2017. This global initiative aims to mobilise action to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda, with a particular focus on SDG 14 and related targets. It brings together scientists, governments, NGOs and civil society in a collective effort to tackle ocean-related challenges, promote sustainable development and safeguard marine ecosystems. International coordination of the Decade has been entrusted to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO. The initiative aims to expand scientific knowledge, strengthen infrastructure and foster partnerships to support a healthy and sustainable ocean. Its key expected outcomes include a clean, safe, healthy, resilient, productive and sustainably used ocean—one that is predictable, transparent, well-understood and highly valued (Santos and Beirão 2021).

Such perspectives dialogue with several on-going climate debates within other UN organisations, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), since the systemic conception of a planetary climate supposes interdependence between land-use, atmosphere and oceans, and these interactions are driven by energy, water and carbon exchanges. Oceans represent approximately 95% of the Earth's biosphere and contribute to climate regulation thanks to the fact that they absorb roughly 25% of anthropogenic CO2

emissions. In addition, they are a key wildlife habitat for an extremely rich (and largely unknown) biodiversity and also serve as a source of animal protein for humankind (IPCC 2019).

As Santos and Beirão (2021:1) point out, it is noteworthy that discussions about the Ocean Decade consistently refer to 'the ocean' in the singular. This conceptual choice underscores the importance of international cooperation in advancing ocean science and developing innovative technologies that respond to twenty-first-century human needs. Beyond its diplomatic utility, this choice is also relevant from an ecosystemic perspective, acknowledging that there is only one ocean and therefore its many regions are highly interconnected and interdependent. This view is made even more evident when dealing with environmental and climate issues, which are systemic and transboundary, as opposed to the cleavages imposed by state sovereign views of the ocean. Hence, the ocean in the singular generates a tension that is of great relevance for the actual ideational and political construction of the ocean-regions as concept and practice.

This reconceptualisation involves reimagining the ocean as a primary space of agency and power. As Marggraff (2025) demonstrates, actors historically regarded as peripheral and passive have rejected labels centred on terrestrial scarcity in favour of identifying themselves as 'Large Ocean States'. This reconfiguration challenges traditional metrics of influence and highlights how the maritime space actively shapes the emerging architecture of global ocean governance. In the context of the proposed framing periods of ocean governance, Table 4.1 below summarises the core principles, key agenda themes and the legal international frameworks that guided each period.

It goes without saying that diplomatic clashes and North-South tensions defined key moments of the UNCLOS negotiations during both periods. Countries from the South, particularly those in the African group and landlocked developing states, stressed the existing normative disputes between state-centric territoriality and the equitable management of the global commons. Having been excluded from early debates on ocean governance due to colonialism and wars for independence, Africa became quite active by the time of UNCLOS III, pushing, for instance, for relevant debates on the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and Continental Shelf (CS) (Egede 2023).

Table 4.1: Framing periods of ocean governance. Source: The authors, based on Parthenay and Mesquita (2025) and Schandorf (2024).

Period	Core Principle	Key Themes	Lead Frameworks	Main tensions
1958–1994	Sovereignty & Jurisdiction	Maritime zones, resource rights, navigation	UNCLOS (1982, entered in force 1994)	Capacity Gap: Sovereignty on paper vs. inability of Global South to monitor/exploit EEZs
1992–present	Sustainability & Biodiversity	Ocean health, SDGs, marine biodiversity, climate change	Rio Summit (1992), SDG 14 (2015), BBNJ (2023)	Equity vs. Conservation: Risk of 'ocean grabbing' and contested access to marine genetic resources

As highlighted by Sebuliba (2024), a primary point of contention was the perceived neglect of the Common Heritage Principle (CHP), which many developing nations argued should underpin the governance of areas beyond national jurisdiction to ensure that marine resources would not be monopolised by technologically advanced states. Disagreements also concerned the 'landed ontology' of the convention, which would favour coastal states by linking maritime rights to physical coastlines, thereby marginalising Landlocked States (LLSs) and creating a dynamic form of 'landlockedness' that excludes them from the socio-economic benefits of the ocean. Furthermore, Global South state actors resisted the privatisation of scientific knowledge and Marine Genetic Resources (MGR), contending that a singular, interconnected ocean model should not be used to mask a divided world where access to technology determines who truly governs the sea (Drankier et al. 2012). They were often seconded by non-state actors, particularly the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and international legal experts from the Global North (Worm et al. 2021).

In this regard, the more recent negotiations within the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) treaty (signed in 2023) have also witnessed political clashes of the same sort. During its pre-negotiation round, representatives of developing countries were instrumental in demanding equitable benefit-sharing of Marine Genetic Resources (MGRs). Their arguments reproduced similar ideas about avoiding the privatisation of knowledge. This resistance highlights that international maritime policy remains a site of contested normativity and political conflicts, where the Global South seeks to re-centre equity within the sustainability discourse and global public good debates.

These structural asymmetries have increasingly driven diverse diplomatic initiatives, with South–South cooperation emerging as an important strategy in the pursuit of more equitable forms of ocean governance. Against this backdrop, the next section analyses Brazil's diplomacy on ocean governance since democratisation and the new 1988 constitution.

OCEAN GOVERNANCE IN BRAZIL'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

Since 1988, but especially in the early twenty-first century, Brazil's defence and foreign policies officially expanded the concept of 'strategic surroundings' to include the South Atlantic and the West African coast. This shift was followed by high-level institutional and diplomatic efforts, such as the revitalisation of ZOPACAS in 2007, seeking to maintain the region as a nuclear-free zone and a collective good protected from the influence of extra-regional powers. Domestically, the administrations of presidents Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) played a pivotal role in strengthening the ocean agenda—specifically in the South Atlantic—within Brazil's foreign policy. They not only supported the expansion of the country's strategic surroundings, but also championed the idea of the Brazilian maritime domain, officially called the Blue Amazon. Thus, the ocean is operationalised as a central geopolitical instrument for shaping strategic narratives and consolidating the South Atlantic as Brazil's ocean region of influence.

In 2005, the National Defence Policy (NDP) formally broadened the geographic scope of Brazil's strategic interests beyond South America to include the South Atlantic and coastal African countries. The NDP emphasised the importance of fostering South-South relations through diplomacy, trade, defence partnerships and technical cooperation projects, stressing the role of ZOPACAS in this process (Brazil 2005). This maritime projection was further consolidated in the 2008

National Defence Strategy (NDS), highlighting that the South Atlantic was not only a space to safeguard but also as an opportunity to build strategic alliances, particularly with Portuguese-Speaking African countries with which Brazil has long-standing political, economic and social relations, particularly Angola, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. The NDS proposed expanding partnerships and military exchanges in the South Atlantic, and reflected a clear alignment between defence planning and foreign policy goals rooted in maritime governance and regional leadership (Brazil 2008).

The Rousseff administration reaffirmed and deepened this strategic shift. The 2012 National Defence White Paper explicitly recognised the South Atlantic and the western coast of Africa as part of Brazil's 'immediate geopolitical surroundings,' integrating oceanic concerns into both defence strategy and foreign policy (Brazil 2012). This orientation towards the African continent was a policy change that also influenced the development of an extensive network of bilateral and multilateral technical cooperation agreements and projects. If Lula had opened many windows of cooperation, Rousseff had the responsibility to fund many of them, and the reality of budget constraints, also associated with the impact of the financial crisis in Brazil, finally imposed cuts in key areas. Despite these constraints, under Rousseff Brazil engaged in defence cooperation with several African nations—including Angola, Namibia, Nigeria and Cape Verde—by training military personnel, transferring naval technology and conducting scientific-military research. These partnerships, often facilitated through CPLP, supported building local capacities to address common maritime threats, thereby ensuring that the governance of the South Atlantic remains primarily in the hands of its local rather than external actors (da Costa 2022).

The administrations of both da Silva and Rousseff confirmed that ocean governance, maritime security and the promotion of cooperation across the South Atlantic were not peripheral, but central to Brazil's regional diplomacy and strategic posture. Both institutionalised the ocean—particularly the South Atlantic—as a core dimension of Brazil's external action, linking it to broader goals of regional stability, autonomy and the country's international relations through South-South cooperation (da Costa 2022).

In the aftermath of Rousseff's controversial impeachment in 2016, the Temer transition government and the Bolsonaro administration disrupted this trajectory. The South Atlantic lost its strategic prominence as both a foreign policy priority and a focal point for other governmental policies. As Brazil's diplomacy decisively shifted its interests towards the United States (particularly

under the Trump administration), partnerships with the Global South were significantly downgraded and ultimately undermined Brazil's influence within its own strategic surroundings, weakening long-standing diplomatic ties and regional cooperation frameworks (Gonçalves de Oliveira 2023: 14).

The Bolsonaro administration was very efficient in undoing existing collaborative initiatives in several policy areas, from environment and climate change to military-civil relations, from education and culture to human rights (Buarque de Hollanda et al 2024; Milani and Duarte 2024). More than neglect, it was a policy of actively undermining incremental constructions in all these agendas (Milani and Duarte 2024). Regarding Africa, for instance, Brazil's diplomatic footprint was scaled back through the closure of embassies in countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. This withdrawal led to a decline in both political representation and agency, particularly affecting Brazil's standing among fellow members of the ZOPACAS (Gonçalves de Oliveira 2023: 15).

Going a step further and examining the current Lula administration (2023–present) offers a valuable yet risky (as it is on-going) opportunity to analyse how Brazil stands in the face of the current geopolitical and regime changes in ocean governance, as it increasingly intertwines its foreign policy and climate diplomacy. Global geopolitics is not the same in 2025 as it was at the turn of the twenty-first century: the China-US rivalry has reached unprecedented levels and rising tensions have led governments around the globe to spend more on national defence; wars have continued in the Middle-East and Africa, then expanded to Ukraine and Yemen; with Washington's support, Israel has perpetrated a genocide in Gaza (which has not stopped); the USA, under the Trump administration, has invaded Venezuela to kidnap its controversial president, Nicolas Maduro, and attacked Iran; far-right movements and leaderships have gained increased power in Global North and South countries; Big Tech companies are currently key anti-democratic motors, as their business model fuels and monetises disinformation; anthropogenic climate change, extreme events, biodiversity loss, *inter alia*, have become part and parcel of the polycrisis in which we live (Morin and Kern 1993; Swilling 2019; see also Bizos et al., Chapter 2, Part I).

Such geopolitical tensions have drastically eroded the capacity and the legitimacy of multilateral organisations, which have already faced crises for decades. Under such circumstances, an intermediate power such as Brazil is confronted with major challenges in navigating power politics. From this perspective, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay attempted to renew the concept of Southern Atlanticism, by reactivating ZOPACAS. This was evidenced by

the group's eighth ministerial meeting in 2023 (Cape Verde) and its ninth ministerial meeting, to be hosted by Brazil in 2026. Isbell (2024) argues that such a reinvigorated version of Southern Atlanticism could be an important step, rooted in sub-basin regional cooperation, to strengthen strategic autonomy of South Atlantic countries before engaging in full basin-wide pan-Atlanticism, on the one hand, and collaborating with BRICS+ countries, on the other. Due to the geopolitical tensions mentioned and their impact on the domestic politics of South America and Brazil, the Lula administration cannot (and does not seem to be willing to) step up as a provider of public goods in the South Atlantic in the absence of a clear multilateral shelter.

Given the normative shift of the ocean governance regime towards sustainability, safeguarding of the ecosystem and conservation of the biodiversity, the current administration, relying on ministers such as Marina Silva (a global environmental leader) and Sonia Guajajara (the first ever minister of Indigenous peoples), has, since 2023, established environmental protection and climate action as central focus areas of federal public policies. Brazil has taken a leadership role in linking the defence for sustainable development with respect for the oceans as part of an integrated and planetary ecosystem at key international fora, such as UNFCCC COP 30, held at the heart of the Amazon rainforest in November 2025, and the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC III), held in Nice, France, in June 2025.

At COP 30, Brazil played the double role of hosting the event and presiding over the negotiations, on the one hand aiming at the highest level of consensus possible, and, on the other, defending its own stakes through its climate diplomacy, despite the domestic cleavages between ministries and constituencies. According to official numbers, COP 30 brought together delegations from 195 countries, with more than 500,000 entries recorded over twelve days across the Blue and the Green Zones. In the Blue Zone, there were 42,582 participants, with a peak attendance of 23,006 people on 11 November. In the Green Zone, there were 294,262 visitors, with a peak attendance of 37,206 people on 21 November[14].

COP 30 represented an opportunity for expanding the presence and role of Amazonian players, such as climate experts, civil society organisations, local governments, Indigenous and traditional communities and the private sector. It was an opportunity for world leaders and negotiators to listen to the voices of the Amazonian territory and to strengthen climate narratives and interests

[14] Our analysis is partly based on our own notes taken during the COP 30. Carlos Milani was an over-flow member of the Brazilian delegation. For more details on participants in Belém, see https://cop30.br/en/news-about-cop30/the-amazon-takes-center-stage-in-the-global-climate-agenda-with-over-500-000-cop30-entries-1

grounded in a very diverse context, both biologically and socially. No less meaningful is the fact that these encounters did not avoid conflicts between world visions and economic priorities, the main conflict pitting agriculture and mining stakes against environmental protection, ambitious climate policies and the rights of Indigenous peoples. Indeed, the old zero-sum game between short-term economic interests and the respect for long-term planetary needs and social rights was, once again, at the table of multilateral negotiations in Belém.

The oceans agenda was also present at COP 30. For instance, the opening thematic session of the Belém Climate Summit focused on 'Climate and Nature: Forests and Oceans'. In Belém, UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, reasserted that the protection of forests and oceans is essential to ensuring climate stability, preserving biodiversity and safeguarding the survival of millions of people. The fact that the approach to oceans and climate remains fragmented is significant. As Special Envoy for Oceania Jacinda Ardern stated, there is an urgent need to integrate this 71% of the Earth's surface into the official COP agenda. The ocean is the planet's main carbon sink, and thus plays a key role in environmental stabilisation. During a high-level ministerial meeting at COP 30, Brazil and France, in response, announced the establishment of the Task Force on Oceans, an initiative that builds on the work of the Blue Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) Challenge, calling on UN member-states to set ocean protection targets and to adopt marine solutions in their respective national climate plans[15].

The COP 30 ocean-related outcomes, though modest when compared to the current emergency, are important. The Blue Package includes five lines of action: marine conservation, aquatic food production, ocean renewable energy development, shipping decarbonizing and coastal tourism expansion. The blue economy, an equivalent to green capitalism when it comes to the ocean agenda, promises investments to accelerate regenerative ocean action, with pledges of approximately US $20 billion across the ocean-climate nexus, including the Mangrove Breakthrough[16]. Nationally, Brazil has decided to include ocean-based solutions in its National Climate Plan and updated NDC. In addition, the Climate Plan, which serves as a roadmap for Brazil's climate policy until 2035, foresees the participation of traditional communities in the sustainable management of the ocean.

[15] https://cop30.br/en/news-about-cop30/at-climate-summit-lula-highlights-that-cop30-proposes-a-pact-for-the-life-of-forests-oceans-and-humanity

[16] https://cop30.br/en/news-about-cop30/cop30-evening-summary-november-18

President Lula's speech at UNOC III also serves as a clear expression of how Brazil strategically integrates ocean governance into its broader diplomatic and environmental agenda. The 2025 UNOC marked a significant milestone in advancing the global ocean agenda, with a particular emphasis on accelerating the implementation of SDG 14. Co-hosted by France and Costa Rica, the conference adopted a pragmatic, action-oriented approach, aimed at transforming political commitments into tangible outcomes through broad-based stakeholder engagement and cross-sector collaboration (Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations 2025).

The UNOC III gave Brazil—led by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva—a spotlight to reaffirm Brazil's high-level political engagement and its commitment to advancing ocean protection through a series of strategic initiatives. He highlighted Brazil's intention to align national efforts with global sustainability goals, particularly those outlined in the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the High Seas Treaty (BBNJ) (Brazil 2025). Using Lula's speech at the 2025 UN Ocean Conference, we summarise the main themes in Table 4.2, along with Brazil's respective positioning.

Table 4.2: Brazil's official stances in the 2025 UN Ocean Conference. Source: Authors, based on Brazil (2025).

Theme	Brazil's Stance
Ocean-Climate Nexus	Ocean health is inseparable from sustainable development and climate mitigation.
Multilateral Legal Order	Strong endorsement of UNCLOS, ISA, and BBNJ as core frameworks
Resisting Unilateralism	Calls to keep oceans out of spheres of geopolitical competition
Biodiversity and BBNJ	Pledge to ratify the High Seas Treaty and support transparent governance beyond national jurisdictions
National Actions	Commitment to expand marine protected areas, combat plastic pollution, promote sustainable fisheries and encourage ocean education

Brazil presented a range of national actions centred on marine spatial planning, sustainable fisheries, ocean science and education. Notably, the country pledged to expand its marine protected areas from 26 per cent to 30 per cent, in line

with international targets. It also committed to ratifying the High Seas Treaty, reinforcing its support for the conservation of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. On education, Brazil announced that it would integrate ocean literacy into formal curricula through the Blue Curriculum and capacity building for teachers and educators. Furthermore, Brazil has launched initiatives to preserve mangroves and coral reefs, developed a national strategy to combat plastic pollution and enhanced scientific data collection through an Integrated Monitoring System. In addition, the government emphasised its investment in the blue economy, prioritising conservation-driven financing, marine spatial planning, coastal protection and the decarbonisation of port infrastructure and naval fleets (Brazil 2025).

Through President Lula's speech at the 2025 UNOC in Nice, Brazil presents itself as a proactive oceanic nation—committed to multilateral, rule-based governance, the advancement of international agreements and the implementation of ambitious domestic policies to safeguard ocean health in the context of the climate emergency. Ocean governance is framed as a strategic and multidimensional priority, closely linked to climate action, biodiversity protection and sustainable development.

This positioning is further reinforced by Brazil's discursive strategy. Lula's speech underscored UNCLOS as the 'Constitution of the Seas', while simultaneously warning against the dangers of unilateralism and geopolitical rivalry in ocean spaces. The symbolic framing of the South Atlantic as the 'Blue Amazon' reflects Brazil's effort to project normative leadership and assert its identity as both a coastal and an oceanic nation. Through this narrative and its announced policies, Brazil attempts to place the ocean at the heart of its foreign policy and environmental diplomacy.

Taken together, the transformation of ocean governance regimes and the reconfiguration of Atlantic geopolitics provide the broader structural and normative context within which Brazil's contemporary ocean agenda must be understood. From the consolidation of UNCLOS as the 'Constitution of the Seas' to the emergence of a sustainability-oriented regime and the Ocean Decade, the oceans have become a central arena where legal norms, geopolitical competition, environmental concerns, corporate power and development strategies intersect. In the South Atlantic, these dynamics are further shaped by renewed regionalism, the growing presence of extra-regional powers and Brazil's self-positioning as a maritime and diplomatic actor linking South America, Africa and global governance forums.

Against this backdrop, understanding Brazil's role in ocean governance requires not only an analysis of official policies, diplomatic initiatives and presidential discourse, but also a systematic examination of how these issues have been interpreted, framed and debated in Brazil by scholars. Therefore, the following section moves from the geopolitical and normative discussion to a structured scoping review of academic production on the ocean agenda in Brazil since 1988.

THE OCEAN AGENDA IN POST–1988 BRAZIL: MAPPING THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

This section is based on the following methodological steps: (i) a bibliometric analysis to visualise key metrics of the collected works through graphs[17], the objective of which is to briefly provide a macro-level overview of the academic literature related to oceans in social sciences in Brazil; (ii) a qualitative assessment organised around five analytical categories—policy, cooperation and strategy, security and defence, international law and energy—which refers to the main themes and keywords identified in the whole set of scholarly papers. This categorisation allows us to elucidate the diverse approaches to a common theme (the ocean), but also to map the evolution, emphases and blind spots in the field, setting the empirical and conceptual foundation for future research development.

[17] Three research strategies were employed. Firstly, we collected peer-reviewed academic papers in English and Portuguese published between 1988 and 2025 using Publish or Perish software. Secondly, we conducted a bibliometric analysis through R software, aiming to identify patterns and to classify the literature in frameworks. Third, we conducted a scoping review to map the prevailing debates in the literature, highlighting the main analytical approaches and points of criticism. The objective here is to provide a macro-level overview of the literature and highlight some general trends and directions. To conduct the literature search, we used a set of descriptors combined with Boolean operators in both English and Portuguese: ("oceans" OR "ocean decade") AND ("law of the sea" OR "UNCLOS" OR "ZPCSA" OR "maritime security") OR ("blue economy" OR "blue justice" OR "blue amazon") AND "Brazil". This search string was applied to the Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar and SciELO repositories. We proceeded by applying seven screening procedures: (i) removal of duplicates; (ii) removal of articles with missing values; (iii) temporal criterion (works published after 1988); (iv) publication type (only articles, books, book chapters, and conference papers); (v) thematic area (only works in the humanities and social sciences); (vi) geographic criterion (exclusion of articles that do not analyse the Atlantic context); and (vii) quality criterion (manual analysis of each work to reinforce the preceding criteria). The dataset with the R script, images, scoping review report, database and more are available in a dataverse through this link: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/FYTXX2

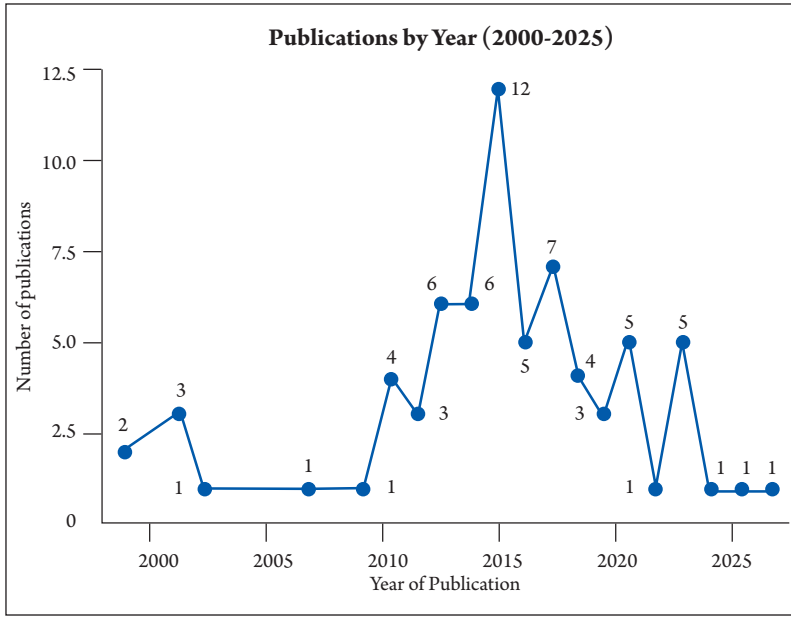

Figure 4.1: Publications by Year (2000-2025). Source: The authors (2025).

The output of scholarly literature regarding ocean-related policies in Brazil went through a noticeable increase between 2010 and 2016, peaking in 2014 with 12 publications (Figure 4.1). During this period alone, 42 of the total publication output (71) were published. The earliest publications date back to 1999, both of which fall under the theme of 'cooperation and strategy' (Carvalho 1999; Ashe, Van Lierop and Cherian 1999). Each analytical framework exhibits distinct periods of expansion and contraction, although the year 2014 shows the highest overall density of publications. Among the frameworks, 'security and defence' account for the largest number of publications, followed by 'cooperation and strategy', 'policy', 'international law' and 'energy' (Figure 4.2).

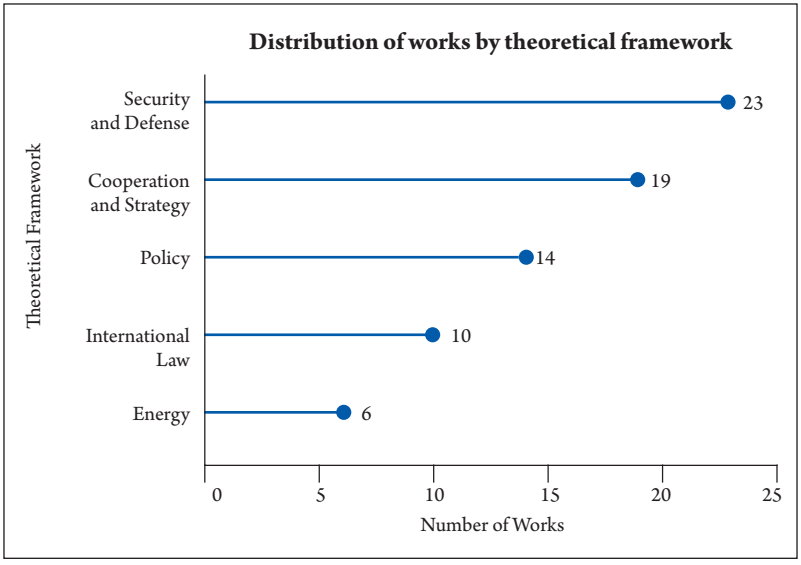

Figure 4.2: Distribution of works by theoretical framework. Source: The authors (2025).

In terms of citation count, the works published in 2014 received the highest number of citations overall (395 citations). This is likely due to 2014 being the year with the greatest number of publications (12) and including two of the ten most-cited studies: Abdenur and Souza Neto (2014b), with 87 citations, and Abdenur and Souza Neto (2014a), with 69 citations (Figure 4.3). The year 2011 ranks second in total citations (189), primarily due to the most-cited article in the dataset: Gerhardinger et al. (2011), which received 146 citations (Figure 4.4).

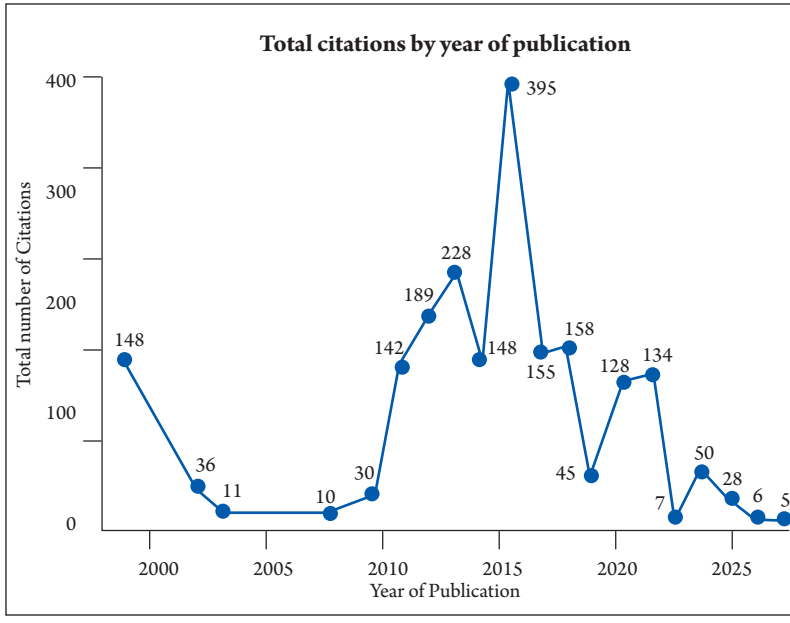

Figure 4.3: Total citations by year of publication. Source: The authors (2025).

As can be seen, apart from Ashe, Van Lierop and Cherian (1999), the top ten most cited works were all published in the second decade of the twenty-first century. At the beginning of 2008, the government launched the second phase of the Brazilian Continental Shelf Survey Plan (LEPLAC, in Portuguese), conducted by the Brazilian Navy and aimed at extending the country's CS beyond 200 nautical miles. Between 2015 and 2019, Brazilian diplomacy succeeded in obtaining approval from the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) for the expansion of its CS over more than 170 000 km^2. Such governmental moves related to the ocean agenda may explain the increasing academic interest reflected in the production and citation of articles.

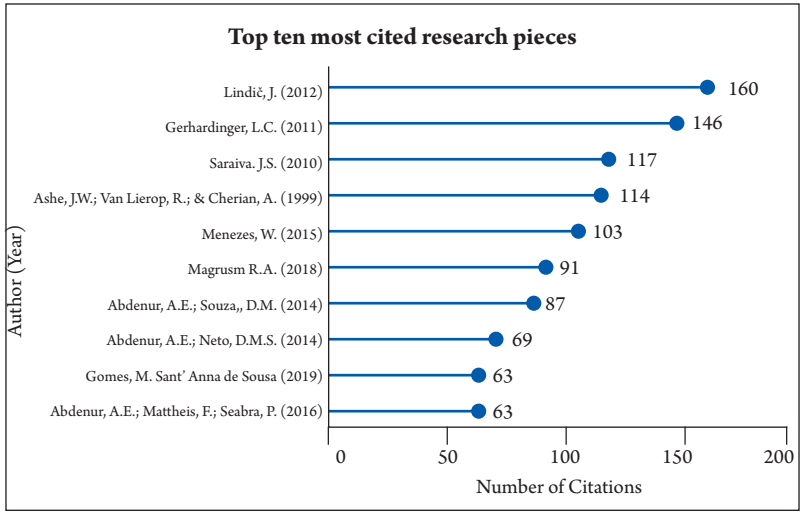

Figure 4.4: Top ten most cited research pieces. Source: The authors (2025).

Further to this bibliometric analysis, we then move to the word-cluster analysis[18]. In the first cluster, the most prominent words are *Atlântico* and *sul* (Atlantic and south), which interact closely with terms such as *Brasil* (Brazil), *África* (Africa), *cooperação* (cooperation), *defesa* (defence), *segurança* (security) and *geopolítica* (geopolitics). This suggests that research pieces focusing on the South Atlantic often address issues of defence and security cooperation between Brazil and the African continent. The second cluster is structured around the word 'Brazil', which connects with terms such as 'South Atlantic', 'energy', 'coast', 'ocean', 'decade', and 'development'. This interaction indicates that publications discussing Brazil in the context of the Ocean Decade tend to focus on the country's potential to develop a clean energy matrix and promote development along its oceanic coast. These pieces of research are primarily aligned with the energy framework. A third major cluster consists of a dense network of interactions among its terms, with no single word occupying a central position in the structure. Words such as 'sea', 'convention', 'nations', 'united', and 'law' characterise this group, which comprises works within the international law framework focused on in-depth analyses of UNCLOS (Figure 4.5).

[18] Methodologically, we used R software to identify six word-clusters based on the titles of the selected publications. These clusters are formed by word co-occurrence patterns, where the size of each node represents the frequency of the word in the titles. Words grouped within the same cluster tend to co-occur more frequently across the 71 works analysed.

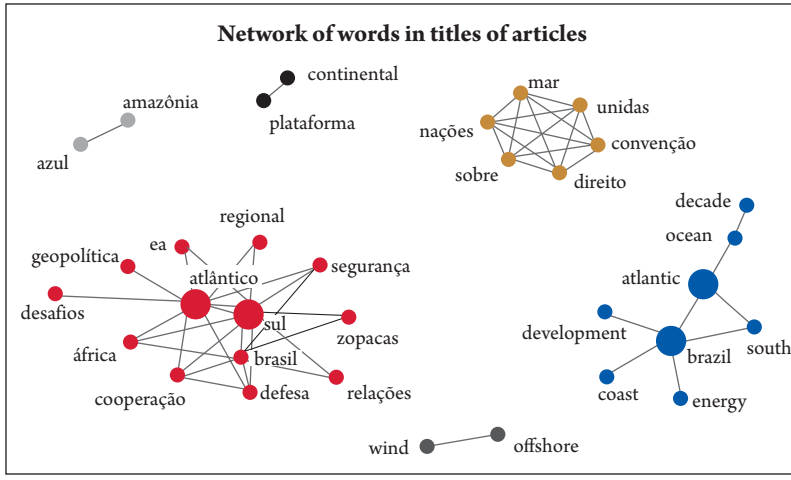

Figure 4.5: Network of words in titles of articles. Source: The authors (2025)

In summary, what are the key findings of the scope review? First, scholarly literature in Brazil follows policy decisions; it does not anticipate them. It was only after the federal government gave priority to the ocean agenda that scholars started publishing more articles about its relevance for Brazil and its economy. As the clusters illustrate, the South Atlantic, the UN ocean negotiations, the tension between cooperation and geopolitics, and issues related to development are at the centre of Brazilian scholarly perspectives.

Second, concerning the five analytical categories (policy, cooperation and strategy, security and defence, international law and energy), what does the scope review reveal? Regarding *policy*, the literature primarily addresses ocean governance, linking international governance structures to domestic arrangements (Gerhardinger et al. 2011; 2019; Barros-Platiau et al. 2015; 2021; Hillebrandt-Andrade et al. 2021). It also focuses on the analysis of specific public policies implemented by the Brazilian state (Reis et al. 2002; Chimeli, Mutter and Ropelewski 2002; Marroni 2014; Polejack 2010; Andrade et al. 2021). A recurring finding within the policy framework is the persistent institutional fragmentation, despite the formal existence of coordination mechanisms such as the Interministerial Commission for Sea Resources (CIRM). While policies such as the National Policy for Sea Resources may represent legal and procedural advances (Marroni 2014), overlapping mandates, sectoral silos and the central (almost exclusive) role of the Navy in agenda-setting still constrain policy implementation. Polejack (2010) and Gerhardinger et al. (2011; 2019)

show that fragmentation persists not due to the absence of policy instruments, but because of entrenched power asymmetries within the public administration, limited financial and scientific capacities and weak incentives for inter-agency cooperation. In practice, initiatives such as Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), Coastal Ecological-Economic Zoning, and Marine Protected Areas are often undermined by competing sectoral interests, uneven enforcement capacity and insufficient integration of scientific knowledge.

These dynamics resonate with critical scholarship on the governance of the blue economy, thus highlighting how sustainability-oriented frameworks can coexist with extractive logics when coordination mechanisms fail to rebalance power relations. The literature also points to a gap between Brazil's international commitments and domestic implementation capacities. Diederichsen et al. (2024) argue that while Brazil rhetorically aligns its policies with global agendas such as the Ocean Decade and SDG 14, initiatives like GOOS-Brazil remain underdeveloped, illustrating the difficulty of translating global governance norms into effective national action.[19]

Concerning 'cooperation and strategy', the academic literature tends to emphasise two closely interconnected themes: the ZOPACAS and Brazil-Africa relations. Despite various advances, a persistent issue across the literature is the relatively limited military and economic capacities of countries within the region. Brazil's engagement in the South Atlantic has thus evolved from symbolic expressions of solidarity into a multidimensional strategy encompassing diplomacy, defence, infrastructure and technical cooperation. The NDP, LEPLAC and PROMAR are examples of this trajectory (Vaz 2011; de Oliveira and Netto 2016)[20]. The Navy has also deepened its connections with African states through training, equipment sharing, joint research addressing challenges like illegal fishing and piracy, and UN peacekeeping operations in Africa (Abdenur and Souza Neto 2014b; Abdenur, Mattheis and Seabra 2016).

Based on ZOPACAS and strengthened ties with African coastal states, Brazil has sought to assert influence, promote a shared regional identity and bolster its aspirations for global leadership. Particularly under presidents Lula (2003–2010) and Rousseff (2011-2016), ZOPACAS was presented as a key dimension of Brazil's South-South cooperation strategy, leveraging multilateralism to counter Western influence (Abdenur, Mattheis and Seabra 2016). This aligned

[19] GOOS-Brazil is a national ocean observation system aimed at collecting, quality control, operational distribution of oceanographic data, and oceanographic and climatological monitoring in the South and tropical Atlantic. For more details, see: http://www.goosbrasil.org/

[20] PROMAR (Promoção da Mentalidade Marítima, in Portuguese) aims to disseminate ocean culture and promote a maritime mindset within Brazilian society.

with broader ambitions, such as securing a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and fostering the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) (Abdenur and Souza Neto 2014c; Saraiva 2010).[21] However, these efforts have been confronted with structural constraints, including the country's limited capacities to invest in South Atlantic economies, weak institutional frameworks and persistent extra-regional competition.

Concerning 'security and defence', the literature on Brazilian defence policy highlights three complementary analytical axes: the institutional consolidation of strategic planning and doctrine (Cepik and Licks Bertol 2016; da Costa 2012); the evolving maritime agenda shaped by resource security and regional leadership ambitions (Mattos, Matos and Kenkel 2017; Duarte 2016; Abdenur and Souza Neto 2014a; Penha, 2012; Wiesebron 2013); and Brazil's emphasis on South-South cooperation to promote stability and autonomy in the South Atlantic (Aguilar 2013; Abdenur and Souza Neto 2014a; Mattos, Matos and Kenkel 2017; Penha 2012). All three underscore how defence policy intertwines with foreign policy, particularly through initiatives aimed at consolidating maritime sovereignty, fostering partnerships with African states and revitalising regional diplomatic mechanisms. Together with the Navy's 2004 blue economy framework, the 2005 NDP and the 2008 National Defence Strategy (NDS), Brazil's maritime security strategy evolved significantly thanks to the pre-salt oil discoveries publicly announced in 2006 (Mattos, Matos and Kenkel 2017; Duarte 2016). As a result, the country shifted from a US-influenced reactive posture to proactively securing maritime sovereignty through UNCLOS claims and naval investments (da Costa 2012).

Internationally, Brazil has strengthened South-South cooperation through the ZOPACAS and CLCS, with initiatives such as the IBSAMAR (India-Brazil-South Africa) naval exercises (Mattos, Matos and Kenkel 2017), as well as Namibia's naval training and Guinea-Bissau's police programmes through the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (Aguilar 2013). These efforts reflect Brazil's dual regional-global strategy, combining military modernisation (for instance, SisGAAz)[22], diplomatic engagement and South-South partnerships to counter Global North influence and promote autonomous governance in the South Atlantic (Beirão 2014; Abdenur and Souza Neto 2014a). Nonetheless, persistent challenges (limited naval capabilities, fragmented defence planning and tensions with extra-regional powers) challenge Brazil's efforts to address transnational

[21] UNASUR, made inactive under the Bolsonaro administration, was an intergovernmental organisation created in 2008 to integrate the twelve countries of South America. Geopolitical reconfiguration in South America, the rise of the far-right in the region and domestic politics in Brazil are key obstacles in its way for reactivation.

[22] SisGAAz (Amazon Blue Management System) is a high-priority strategic programme for the Brazilian Navy.

threats, such as piracy and illicit trafficking. As Cepik and Licks Bertol (2016) argue, the absence of an effective high-level coordination structure within the federal government undermines strategic decision-making and stresses the need for a much stronger institutional framework, continuous investments and greater civilian involvement in defence governance.

Concerning 'international law', the literature regarding Brazil's approach to the Law of the Sea reveals two subsets of studies. The first one focuses on the legal institutions and frameworks established under UNCLOS (Albuquerque and Nascimento 2002; More 2013; Mont'Alverne and Girão 2016; Mattos 2014; Menezes 2015; Barrientos-Parra and da Silva 2017). The second one concentrates on the role of the Brazilian state in shaping its maritime legal and strategic policies, particularly in relation to the development of a state-level policy for the 'Blue Amazon' (Zanin 2010; da Silva 2011, 2013). Despite their different lenses, all these authors share a commonality: they all come from a legal background and have published their papers in Brazilian journals.

This literature also reveals three other aspects that dialogue with Brazil's diplomacy since the first Lula administration in 2003-2006. First, the legal status of marine biodiversity resources under UNCLOS remains contested. Mont'Alverne and Girão (2016) note that developed nations advocated treating these resources as *res communis* (common heritage), while Brazil, India and China successfully argued for coastal state sovereignty within EEZs. The compromise established sovereign rights within EEZs but maintained CHPs for high seas resources (UNCLOS Article 87). Second, Brazil has actively attempted to shape maritime law rather than passively adopting UNCLOS norms (More 2013). Though UNCLOS was signed in 1982, Brazil's 1970 Decree-Law No. 1.098 already expanded its territorial sea to 200 nautical miles. Full alignment with UNCLOS came with 1993's Law No. 8.617, following ratification (Zanin 2010). Third, the Antarctic engagement complements Brazil's South Atlantic strategy. PROANTAR, launched in 1982, expanded significantly with federal investment in developing two research vessels: Ary Rongel in 1994 and Almirante Maximiano in 2008 (da Silva 2011). This trend reflects Brazil's broader ambition to establish itself as a polar stakeholder.

Concerning 'energy', the texts in this category focus on Brazilian initiatives in the energy sector along the Atlantic coast, thus remaining within the scope of this study by analysing the Brazilian state's capacity to diversify its energy matrix through South Atlantic coastal resources. However, all the authors in this group

come from engineering backgrounds.[23] They agree on the relevance of Brazil's coastline for diversifying the country's energy matrix through offshore wind and wave energy (de Assis Tavares et al. 2022; Bastos et al. 2023). While offshore wind has shown growth, wave energy remains technologically immature and costly, though promising for specific locations (Assis, Beluco and de Almeida 2013). Governmental initiatives (for instance, PROINFA)[24] have sought to expand renewables, yet marine energy remains largely experimental, with only pilot projects like the Pecém wave energy installation in Ceará (Bastos et al. 2023). A geospatial analysis identified 319 suitable wave energy sites along the coast, though concentrated in just ten of seventeen coastal states (Bastos et al. 2023).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Coming back to our main research question, how has Brazil positioned itself in relation to transformations in ocean governance in the South Atlantic, particularly in connection with regionalisation and Pan-Atlantic trends? The findings in this chapter provide a comprehensive overview of Brazil's contemporary regional and multilateral initiatives across the South Atlantic, underscoring both emerging trends and longstanding demands. As we discussed in the first section, they add to an understanding of Brazil-Africa relations and the politics of ocean regions from a Brazilian perspective. Analytically, they contribute to a more encompassing vision of the ocean-region as a concept, emphasising its environmental and climate-related dimension, an aspect that has become key in Brazilian foreign policy and strategy towards the South Atlantic in response to the pan-Atlantic trend.

First, we examined the transformation of ocean governance from a sovereignty-based legal regime under UNCLOS to a sustainability-oriented framework shaped by climate change, biodiversity protection and the 2030 agenda. This normative shift occurred within evolving Atlantic geopolitics, marked by renewed South Atlantic regionalism and emerging pan-Atlantic initiatives. In such a context, Brazil cannot reinstate the same diplomatic and strategic efforts from the past under the third Lula administration (between January 2023 and December

[23] We could not find publications related to Brazil's energy capacity published by authors in the field of Human and Social Sciences. Despite our initial criteria, we have opted to include these studies due to their specific focus on a central issue for the Brazilian state: the diversification of the national energy matrix and the pursuit of sustainable economic development.

[24] PROINFA (Programme for Incentives for Alternative Sources of Electrical Energy), established in 2002, seeks to expand the use of renewable sources (wind, small hydroelectric plants, biomass) in the Brazilian electricity matrix.

2026). Due to geopolitical shifts, the need to diversify partnerships through an Asian pivot, the emergence of transnationally organised far-right movements and polarised domestic politics, the Lula administration has reframed its role in the regional arena and the South Atlantic, including South-South relations and the African diplomacy.

As analysed in the second section, the Temer-Bolsonaro governments had implied a retraction from the region, leaving room for other (particularly non-regional) powers to set the scene. Coming back with a vigorous presence in the South Atlantic would imply using resources that Brazil lacks or cannot currently use for this purpose, a situation further complicated by the presence of a far-right president in Washington who promotes closer linkages with anti-democratic leaders in Latin America. Therefore, playing a modest role on both chessboards seems to be Brazil's current and possible diplomatic tactic: regionally, connecting with Colombia and Mexico and their respective progressive and centre-left leaders; globally, rejuvenating IBSA and bilateral relations with India and South Africa, strengthening trade and investment relations with Asian countries (Indonesia, Japan, South Korea) and fostering a strategic alliance with the BRICS+ group in general, and with China in particular.

Second, despite erratic engagement in the last forty years, Brazil is a relevant actor for the understanding of a collective construction of the South Atlantic as an ocean-region. This meandering about the South Atlantic can also be understood through domestic politics: the country's international engagement with the ocean agenda includes multiple strategic actors, such as the Presidency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence (the Brazilian Navy in particular), science networks and key federal environmental agencies. However, as clarified in the third section, the literature reviewed does not examine modalities of interaction among these actors in depth; each one plays not only a technical role which requires expertise, but also represents political stakes, institutional interests and constituencies. Therefore, the country's strategic outlooks may diverge depending on which constituencies and agencies have stronger roles in the formulation of international policies. Bureaucratic politics are a relevant dimension of ocean politics in Brazil, deserving further scholarly attention.

Third, the South Atlantic region encompasses a range of interests, avenues for agency and forms of cooperation for Brazil in its South-South relations with African countries. The scoping review reveals that Brazil's South Atlantic strategy operates across five key domains: (1) coastal policy development (despite

governance constraints), (2) bilateral/multilateral cooperation (particularly with Africa), (3) defence and security initiatives, (4) international maritime advocacy (notably continental shelf expansion), and (5) energy diversification (renewables and seabed resources). The review has shown that 'security and defence' and 'cooperation and strategy' dominate the literature, while 'policy and international law' offer more institutional analyses and normative lenses. Across frameworks, we have identified Brazil's growing agency in South Atlantic governance, along with persistent constraints such as institutional fragmentation, limited coordination and uneven capacity. Overall, we argue that the literature portrays the ocean as a multidimensional strategic space where foreign policy, defence, sustainability and development intersect in Brazil's international projection. All these dimensions have key implications for Brazil-Africa relations, as discussed in Part I.

Finally, as far as the ocean agenda is concerned, global and regional dynamics are reflected in the country's foreign and defence policies, but also in its climate diplomacy. Bearing in mind that ocean governance has been institutionalised as a core dimension of Brazil's external action, particularly regarding the South Atlantic, Brazil strategically frames the ocean as a space for multilateral cooperation, environmental leadership and resistance to geopolitical rivalry, positioning itself as an active oceanic actor in the context of the climate emergency. In this context, the South Atlantic has emerged as a clear example of how contemporary international politics and the projection of normative power take shape through the maritime domain, illustrating the analytical relevance of the theoretical perspective that conceptualises the ocean as a region.

The research agenda is now open for new studies, for instance, to understand if and how there is room for African actors, spaces and processes in Brazil's conception of the South Atlantic as an ocean-region. In addition, research must monitor if and how pledges and promises translate into concrete changes, since we know that translating discourse into policy means Brazil's engagement with the ocean agenda may navigate very turbulent waters, both internationally and domestically.

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