



Exporting Welfare: Social Policy as Foreign Policy in Brazil and the Global South

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ABSTRACT

Bolsa Família is usually seen as one of Brazil's leading anti-poverty programs. Its significance, however, has not remained within Brazil's welfare system. Over time, the program also became part of Brazil's external engagement, especially through the circulation of social policy expertise in South-South cooperation and global social protection debates. Drawing on Bolsa Família, this article examines how a social policy from the Global South can enter foreign policy practice. The study uses a qualitative case study and process-tracing approach, based on official documents, cooperation records, international organization reports, and relevant academic studies. The analysis identifies two connected patterns. When Brazil's social policy agenda was closely aligned with domestic coalitions and foreign policy priorities, Bolsa Família circulated mainly through coordinated policy transfer, including technical cooperation, training, study visits, and policy artifacts. When this alignment weakened, the program did not disappear from global policy debates. Its circulation continued through indirect diffusion supported by international organizations, development banks, expert networks, and instrument constituencies. In this second pathway, learning, emulation, and selective adaptation became more visible than direct state orchestration.

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that some Global South countries have adopted domestic reforms over the past 20 years that have enabled them to participate more actively in international forums. Planning foreign relations has not been limited to arms cooperation, import-export talks, or countries' official attitudes in the international system. It has appeared in ways such as the sharing of domestic policy knowledge between countries. Faria (2012) explains that such a policy transfer represents one aspect of the broader concept of public policy diffusion, which primarily concerns how policies move, change, and eventually play out across various political environments. One of the social policy benefits of observing the pattern of diffusion is that developing countries can use welfare development programs as a vehicle for promoting economic development and social solidarity, which also resonates with practical expertise. Locating domestic programs in welfare settings, South-South cooperation multilateral forums, technical assistance, study visits, and expert networks may facilitate the spread beyond their initial settings and turn into policy references for other countries (Morais de Sá e Silva, 2017; Waisbich et al., 2021).

This transformation also disrupts the usual portrayal of the Global South as the main recipient of norms, models, and development prescriptions from the Global North. Porto de Oliveira (2019) finds that Brazilian social policies have traveled internationally mainly through actors who

serve as policy translators, converting domestic policy experience into foreign engagement. Through this, Global South countries can also serve as policy knowledge-makers and promoters. The source of their influence need not be limited to their military power. It can also be found in a policy experience that other developing countries find suitable for their own social and administrative challenges. In fact, social policy is a powerful foreign policy tool that demands more exploration, especially against the backdrop of South-South cooperation and the altered relations between the Global South and the Global North (Porto de Oliveira & Faria, 2017).

Brazil is a perfect example of this kind of evolution. Bolsa Família has remained one of the country's major social policy programs since the mid-2000s. Morais de Sá e Silva (2017) points out that conditional cash transfer programs have become a matter of international discussion, not just for poverty reduction, but also for education and social protection. At that time, in that stream of conversations, Bolsa Família was a favorite program not only because it was a domestic tool to fight poverty, but also because it sparked demand for policy learning, technical cooperation, training, and study visits. Eventually, the program merged with Brazil's visual propaganda, positioning it as a leader of the Global South. So, in this way, Bolsa Família can be seen as a simple instance of a national social assistance program that was internationally recognized and even considered a prototype for other countries to follow (Porto de Oliveira, 2019).

Foreign Policy Analysis is the right place to start because it denies the notion of a country as a single, uniform actor. Hudson (2014) suggested that foreign policy can be most effectively understood by identifying decision-makers, exploring internal factors, and employing actor-based explanations. Subsequently, Hudson and Day (2020) have further developed this perspective by demonstrating that foreign policy results from a combination of levels of analysis. Such a perspective is extremely crucial for us because Brazil's international promotion of Bolsa Família was more than a mere diplomatic show. Domestically, departments of social policy, technical experts, and political groups were also involved. Research into foreign policy-making reveals how personalities, bureaucracies, and institutional settings determine external conduct (Kaarbo, 2015; Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). The dual-level games in Putnam (1988) also illustrate that the foreign policy negotiation process occurs in both the domestic and international arenas. Nevertheless, the literature still focuses more on decisions, strategies, and diplomatic behavior than on policy outputs subsequently incorporated into foreign policy practice (Brummer et al., 2019; Charillon, 2017).

The circulation of social policy actually makes the difference more visible. A welfare program hardly ever goes abroad as a complete and unchanged package. Hadjiisky et al. (2017) demonstrate that policy transfer is a series of smaller, less obvious moments in which policy ideas are interpreted, translated, and adjusted. To a large extent, this means that policy is divided among different actors. On one hand, international organizations may present a program as a best practice. Development banks may support their technical design, and expert networks may circulate their policy logic. Stone (2008) also points out that transnational policy communities are major actors in transferring policy knowledge beyond the state. In the meantime, recipient governments may accept only policy elements that align with their political priorities and administrative capacity. These are indeed prerequisites of policy-based foreign policy, but they go completely unnoticed when foreign policy is seen only as formal diplomatic decisions or state-to-state relations (Stone & Moloney, 2019).

Therefore, the article builds the bridge between Foreign Policy Analysis and global public policy. Public global policy is a good solution because it focuses on the infrastructure that enables the recognition of policy models that can be packaged and circulated across borders. Stone and Moloney (2019) demonstrate that global policy and broader transnational administrative processes

are influenced by a range of organizations, experts, and administrative practices that help determine which models become credible and transferable. Policy mobilities scholarship is making a point along the same lines, but from a different angle. Peck and Theodore (2010) argue that policies are not merely copied and reproduced in other contexts; rather, they are taken, changed, and even reinvented along the way. Haupt (2023) also calls for more attention to the interplay of policy diffusion, policy transfer, and policy mobilities. From this perspective, Bolsa Família ceases to be merely a social assistance program in a single locality. It is the medium by which social policy know-how was introduced in international cooperation, expert networks, and development policy discussions (Legrand & Stone, 2021).

This article discusses both policy transfer and policy diffusion as two conceptually related issues. In their studies, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 2000) conceptualize policy transfer as the application of knowledge about policies, institutions, or ideas from one setting to another. It is a very helpful concept for identifying purposeful, well-coordinated ways to advance policy. For instance, it can include cross-border sharing of knowledge on policies, institutional arrangements, and program designs. Policy diffusion refers to a broader, generally indirect process. According to Shipan and Volden (2008), there are four main mechanisms of diffusion: learning, competition, imitation, and coercion. On the other hand, Weyland (2005) demonstrates that factors such as the perceived success of a policy and cognitive heuristics influence the spread of policy models.

The article chooses not to separate the transfer from diffusion to a great extent. Instead, it uses both terms to map how Bolsa Família can be regarded as a domestic social policy that has entered a wider international policy circulation (Marsh & Sharman, 2009; Porto de Oliveira & Romano, 2022). With this in mind, this article intends to answer two questions. Firstly, what channels can a domestic social policy use to be transformed into the foreign policy practice of Global South states? Secondly, in what ways do domestic and international changes influence the form, level, and significance of policy transfer and diffusion? These aspects will be analyzed using the Bolsa Família case study. The authors intend to describe the factors that helped it gain recognition outside its country of origin, the different actors involved, the channels through which it circulated, and why its international circulation changed with changing political and institutional conditions.

To make a foreign policy, the social policy needs to be really backed domestically. In the case of Brazil, that would mean having a strong policy reputation, effective bureaucratic coordination, alliances with supportive domestic groups, and a foreign policy that locates the policy's international role. The presence of these elements boosts the appearance of policy circulation as a form of coordinated policy transfer. On the other hand, even when things get worse, it is still possible to ensure the circulation of the initiators through international organizations, development banks, expert networks, and instrument constituencies. Foreign policy influence is not a matter of diplomatic declarations or formal agreements alone; it also depends on the circulation of policy expertise and the ability of different players to maintain domestic policy models that are relevant in other situations. Bolsa Família is an example of this matter.

The author splits the essay into three major sections. First, the section presents the research methods and the theory for analyzing the worldwide spread of Bolsa Família. Then, the results and discussion section explains two possible routes of policy circulation: direct policy transfer and less-direct policy diffusion. In the end, the conclusion reflects on what this instance reveals about the foreign policy of the Global South and on how knowledge of public policy can be a factor in international relations.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper uses qualitative case-study research to understand a social policy program that was designed domestically but, in effect, incorporated foreign policy practice through its external adoption. The authors study the project itself, its promoters, the channels through which it was exported abroad, and the program's transformation when reaching international audiences. Case studies are particularly suitable for process research because they allow for a comprehensive reconstruction of context, time, and actors even in a single case (George & Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2007).

When we talk about the Brazilian social policies that cover the whole country, Bolsa Família is the first one that comes to mind as the best candidate. Besides being a major social program in Brazil, its recognition overseas has been linked to South-South cooperation, collaborative work, technical assistance, study tours, multilateral forums, and networks of experts. Waisbich et al. (2021) note that South-South cooperation is a potential instrument for policy transfer among developing countries. Porto de Oliveira (2022) describes the internationalization of Brazilian social programs through various channels. These two sources present the Bolsa Família case, which is particularly appropriate for exploring the intersection of social policy, foreign policy, and transnational policy changes.

The paper combines Foreign Policy Analysis with global public policy, policy transfer, and policy diffusion. Foreign Policy Analysis is used to explain foreign policy as a subject influenced not only by domestic politics but also by bureaucratic actors, decision-making, and the interaction between domestic and international arenas (Hudson, 2014; Hudson & Day, 2020; Putnam, 1988). This perspective is very important to the case because the international promotion of Bolsa Família was, to a great extent, a mere technical knowledge sharing. In fact, it was also a Brazilian diplomatic strategy, a cooperation between government agencies, and, in addition, Brazil's overall positioning as a Global South leader.

This study also draws on the global public policy literature to understand the cross-border factors that led to the initial recognition, modifications, and the ultimate spread of Bolsa Família. According to Stone (2008), transnational policy communities play a crucial role in disseminating policy knowledge across national boundaries. Furthermore, Stone and Moloney (2019) argue that global policy and transnational administration depend on organizations, experts, and administrative methods that not only highlight certain policy models but also lead to their acceptance. In line with this conceptual framework, the study traces the journey of Bolsa Família from a mere local welfare scheme to international cooperation forums, expert networks, development policy discussions, and, more generally, social protection policies.

Policy transfer and policy diffusion are two major themes in the analytic literature. Policy transfer is the process of studying the deliberate and organized methods by which one country adopts another's policies, through techniques such as technical cooperation, training, study visits, policy dialogue, and the sharing of program designs. This idea of tracing the spread of policy knowledge across contexts is well explained by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 2000). Evans (2004, 2009) makes an important point: the transfer is hardly ever, if at all, a neutral or purely technical one, because policy ideas are interpreted and changed during the transfer process. Policy diffusion, by contrast, is about spreading through less direct and less explicit ways, leading to learning, emulation, normative pressure, and intermediary actions, among other mechanisms. This part of the paper draws on research on diffusion mechanisms and policy transfer across differing settings (Hadjiisky et al., 2017; Shipan

& Volden, 2008; Weyland, 2005). Instead of strictly separating transfer from diffusion, the article at times uses both terms to depict instances in which Bolsa Família was transferred quite directly and, at other times, more indirectly (Haupt, 2023; Marsh & Sharman, 2009).

The empirical data mainly came from the document analysis and secondary literature. Most of the documents were official materials on Brazilian social policy and international cooperation, including public communications, records of cooperation, reports, and policy briefs from international organizations, as well as institutional publications on South-South cooperation and social protection. In addition, a major part of the peer-reviewed studies on Bolsa Família conditional cash transfers, Brazil's foreign policy, policy mobility, and social policy diffusion served as sources for this study. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is a powerful way of investigating how institutional actors, over time, depict problems, roles, and policy processes. Essentially, in this work, documents served as a tool to identify the framing of Bolsa Família, to map key players in its circulation, and to examine how its policy rationale was modified across different contexts.

First, the analysis of the data was directed by the theory-led thematic reading, and then process tracing was used. The purpose of this was to examine the development of Bolsa Família from a simple municipal-level social policy program to an internationally recognized social policy model. The evaluation was based on four basic questions: the program provider, program dissemination, support for circulation, and differences in policy meaning outside Brazil. Such a method allowed investigation of learning, imitation, technical cooperation, normative persuasion, and selective adaptation, while not ruling out the possibility that even the same kinds of programs do not always entail policy transfer.

When the moves of the reasoning forming the work were indicated, the framework was arranged in a line of four axes: actors, channels, mechanisms, and translation and adaptation. Table 1 shows how each aspect was linked to the analytical focus of this study, to the empirical indicators, and to the data sources.

Table 1. Analytical Dimensions, Indicators, and Data Sources
Source: Author's elaboration

Analytical dimension	Analytical focus	Empirical indicators	Data sources
Actors	Identifying state and non-state actors involved in policy circulation	References to foreign policy agencies, social policy ministries, technical agencies, international organizations, development banks, expert communities, and transnational policy networks	Official policy documents, cooperation records, institutional publications, international organization reports, and peer-reviewed studies
Channels	Tracing institutional pathways through which Bolsa Família circulated internationally	Evidence of South-South cooperation, technical assistance, training, study visits, multilateral forums, policy dialogue, and cooperation platforms	Cooperation documents, program reports, official websites, multilateral declarations, policy briefs, and evaluation reports
Mechanisms	Explaining how and why policy	Evidence of learning, emulation, normative	Policy reports, justification statements, program

Analytical dimension	Analytical focus	Empirical indicators	Data sources
	ideas traveled across contexts	persuasion, technical support, and references to Bolsa Família as a policy model or best practice	guidelines, comparative policy documents, and academic literature
Translation and adaptation	Examining changes in policy meaning and form during circulation	Selective adoption of policy elements, simplification of program design, reframing as technical best practice, and adjustment to local political or administrative contexts	Adapted policy documents, implementation guidelines, comparative case studies, international organization publications, and secondary analyses

The table served as a guide for both the coding process and the interpretation of the empirical data. It connected the documentary data to the two research questions and was a very important tool in planning the process tracing of policy circulation episodes. This approach enabled the study to identify periods when the Bolsa Família was implemented through fairly coordinated policy transfer and periods when it was disseminated through more indirect channels. The comparison focused on the logical relationships among domestic policy reputation, bureaucratic coordination, domestic coalitions, and foreign policy priorities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Bolsa Família, quite a renowned program worldwide, did not rely on a single method to unfold. Sometimes, the program was implemented through formal cooperation channels established by Brazilian government departments, with South-South cooperation as the main feature. On other occasions, it could still be found funneling through the channels of international organizations, development banks, expert networks, and instrument constituencies, even though Brazil's direct involvement was scarcely visible. The talk below recounts these two stages: the more tightly controlled transfer of Bolsa Família as an element of Brazil's foreign policy practice, and the more indirect dissemination of its policy logic via transnational intermediaries.

Policy Transfer as Orchestrated State Practice

From the mid-2000s onwards, Bolsa Família became increasingly associated with Brazil's foreign policy as a whole. Indeed, the program was not only shown as a domestic poverty alleviation initiative. On the contrary, it became part of Brazil's development experience and was seen as a policy model to be shared with other developing countries. Faria (2012) situates this type of transfer within the broader context of public policy diffusion. For Brazil, social policy is the vehicle through which the country can showcase its development expertise and raise its visibility as a Global South actor.

Back then, Bolsa Família could even be considered a social program through the policy transfer mechanism, as it was implicitly imposed during policy transfer. The issue was not just vague allegations of poverty reduction. Besides the program itself, the transfer encompassed administrative knowledge, policy tools, and various technical aspects, including program design, targeting, beneficiary registration, monitoring, evaluation, and implementation. These factors gave foreign delegations and partner institutions physical resources to analyze and modify. According to Faria et al. (2022), policy diffusion and foreign policy are interconnected when policy models are used as

tools for international cooperation. In the case of Bolsa Família, the program became a tool for foreign policy not just because it was well known overseas, but also because Brazilian institutions facilitated its dissemination through technical and institutional channels.

Requests for policy learning through formats that officials and technical agencies can actually sustain had to be processed. Waisbich et al. (2021) demonstrate that South-South cooperation can act as a significant pathway for policy transfer among developing countries. Porto de Oliveira (2022) points out that the internationalization of Brazilian social programs was based far more on organized exchanges and technical cooperation than on the programs' reputations alone. Altogether, these practices indicate that policy transfer involved the coordination of various bureaucratic spaces, foreign policy institutions, social policy agencies, and technical experts.

Brazil's attitude as an active policy sender has fluctuated over time. The orchestrated transport was at its peak only when the coordination among the domestic policy reputation, bureaucracy, power, and foreign policy seemed to support each other. This alignment was very apparent during the expansion of South-South cooperation when social policy became part of Brazil's overall diplomatic agenda. Subsequent changes in politics and a redirection of foreign policy have limited the space for direct state-led promotion. Waisbich et al. (2022) depict this path as the rise and fall of Brazil's role as a "policy exporter" from Lula da Silva to Jair Bolsonaro. Porto de Oliveira and Milani (2022) also emphasize the fact that Brazil's policy export profile has depended on the political and institutional environment as well as the program's technical qualities. Hence, policy transfer can only be understood within a given timeframe. It requires not only a well-known domestic policy but also the state's being in power and willing to push it abroad.

This is a very relevant issue for Foreign Policy Analysis because the Bolsa Família case indicates that foreign policy was not within the remit of only foreign ministries and diplomatic speeches. Social policy ministries, technical agencies, and program experts were mobilized internationally when their knowledge and administrative tools were brought into play. Hill (2003) considers foreign policy as a type of public policy that evolves through domestic and international arenas. Milani and Pinheiro (2017) argue that today's foreign policy in Brazil involves a range of actors. Bolsa Família's foreign policy, practical component could be seen in cooperation programs, technical exchanges, training modules, institutional templates, and policy-learning activities (Biedenkopf & Mattelaer, 2019).

Diffusion through Intermediaries and Instrument Constituencies

The distribution of Bolsa Família did not end when direct state involvement weakened. Actually, it became less tied to the Brazilian government's setup and more dependent on the indirect spread of policies. It was international organizations, development banks, expert communities, and policy networks that, through their activities, constantly raised the program's policy rationale to the surface. Besides agreeing with the model, these actors also contributed to its communication in the global social protection language and to its dissemination through publications, technical discussions, and policy networks.

Intermediaries have long been recognized for their contribution to world public policy. Stone (2008) notes that the dissemination of policy objectives largely occurs through transnational networks and knowledge actors, rather than solely through states' direct relations. Stone and Moloney (2019) further contend that international organizations and development agencies influence the decision-making, transferability, and adaptability of policy models. When it comes to Bolsa Família,

intermediaries were the ones who positioned the Brazilian social protection experience in relation to the poverty reduction, food security, and social protection agendas. Even after the Brazilian state's direct and consistent promotion of Bolsa Família had faded, documents, policy briefs, training activities, and technical cooperation remained among the most influential means of maintaining the program's visibility (Arruda, 2023; Porto de Oliveira, 2022).

Instrument constituency theory is also a popular explanation for how policy diffusion continues outside the boundaries of state control. It was not only governments copying each other that led to the spread of Conditional Cash Transfers; on the contrary, it was also the many promoters of the instrument who considered it the most suitable way to combat poverty and address social protection challenges. Béland et al. (2018) name such constellations instrument constituencies, that is, groups of actors that support, refine, and advocate for a policy instrument across different contexts. However, recipient countries were not mere recipients of the international models. They were able to selectively draw on these, negotiate policy options, and modify certain elements to suit their respective institutional settings.

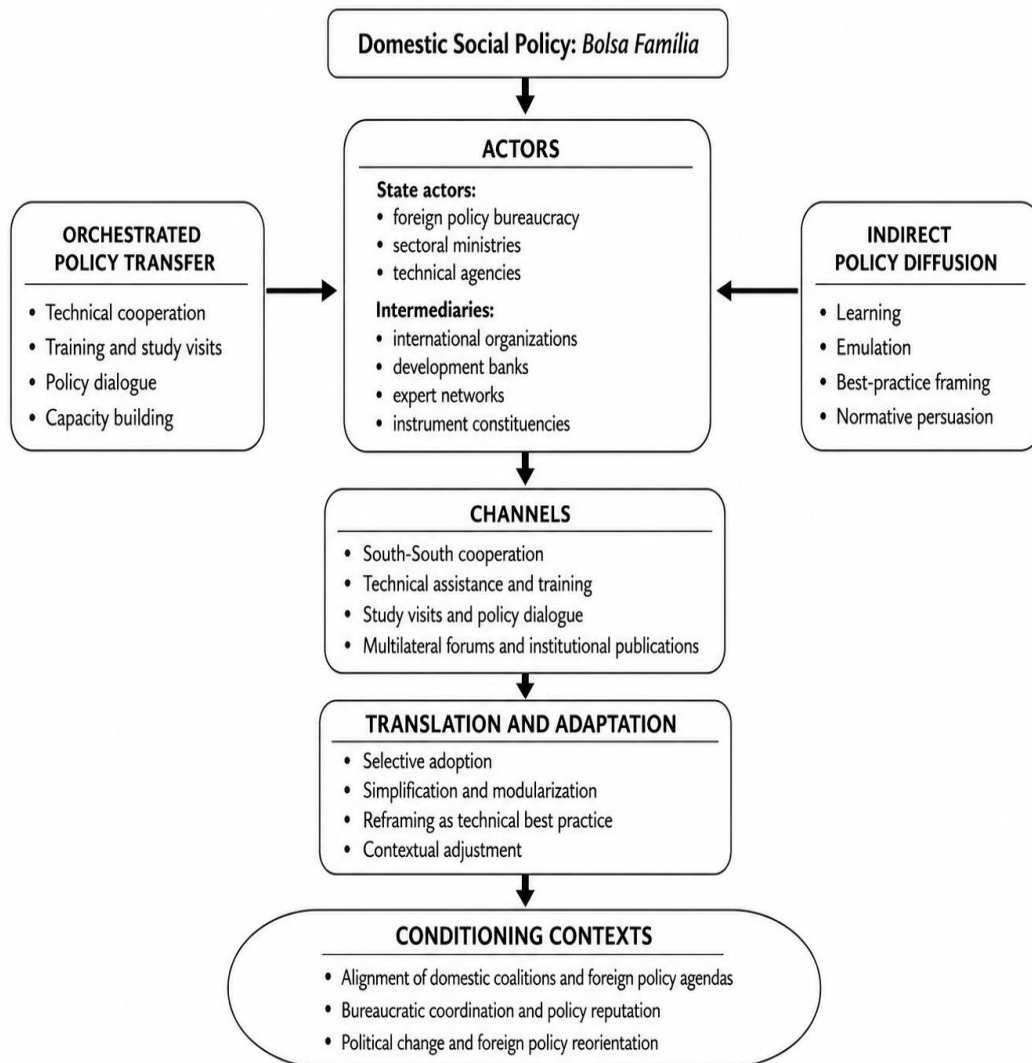
The diffusion of Bolsa Família through intermediaries made the program more comprehensible to the public and a more effective means of dissemination, but simultaneously reduced its control in the hands of the Brazilian political class. Its definition might have been diversified, diluted, or even reinterpreted during its passage through the network of international organizations, experts, and debates on social protection. It transformed the scene. The program's innovation was that it represented a political project of a particular Brazilian region, thereby serving as a technical model of targeted social protection. Also, the policy's interpretation evolved as the program's convertibility increased. Apart from being referred to as "Brazil's Bolsa Família," the program was included in the global array of Conditional Cash Transfer programs and other social protection tools.

The significance of this case can be appreciated in different ways. First of all, the depiction of the Bolsa Família program was not confined to the Federal District only. It was also reported on, discussed at training forums, shared through experts' networks, featured on social protection platforms, and included in discussions on development policies. From the perspective of Foreign Policy Analysis, this implies that a policy-based foreign policy should not be interpreted solely in terms of state preferences or diplomatic decisions. When a policy model is shared across borders, various actors may still promote, translate, and adapt it in different ways. Besides that, this case is well grounded in the global public policy literature, as it shows that international organizations and expert networks can sustain a policy's diffusion even when the initiating state becomes less involved (Stone & Moloney, 2019). Therefore, political circulation operates based on layered authority, meaning that at times the state is the initiator and organizer of the transfer, and at other times it is the intermediaries who preserve and even lead the transformation of the diffusion.

Figure 1 is a visual summary of the empirical discussion of how Bolsa Família primarily operates internationally through two alternative channels. On the left, the figure depicts a more coordinated policy transfer, with Brazilian government officials playing a very active role through technical cooperation, training, study visits, and policy dialogue. On the other hand, the figure on the right presents the indirect policy diffusion through which international organizations, development banks, expert networks, and instrument constituencies kept the program going even after the disappearance of direct state orchestration.

Figure 1. Policy Transfer and Policy Diffusion Pathways of Bolsa Família as a Foreign Policy Instrument

Source: Author's elaboration



Indeed, the figure also shows that each one operated differently only in part. Human actors, channels, mechanisms, and translation and adaptation processes also influenced each other. When internal coalitions, bureaucratic coordination, and foreign policy agendas were aligned, Bolsa Família was propelled more intensely through state-led policy transfer. Correspondingly, when there was a mismatch, the program's policy logic was kept alive by intermediary actors and transnational policy networks. This is an important factor for the same social policy to be able to go through different channels and, over time, change significances.

Mechanisms, Adaptation, and Shifting Policy Meaning

The most significant factor behind Bolsa Família's cross-border movement was a combination of shared learning, imitation, and selective adaptation. Learning took place when officials and assistant staff from other countries reviewed Brazil's experience and the program's design, management, and monitoring. Study visits, workshops, technical briefings, and program design support were among the ways that exchanges were facilitated. The concepts of emulation varied drastically from the initial model, which posited the whole system. Other social policies

pointed to Bolsa Família as the model, and a few officials cited parts of the program as examples, mostly metaphorically. At the same time, it was not the program's overall goal.

Why are these mechanisms important? It is because one cannot just say a policy was changed solely because of policy similarity. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) defined policy transfer as the transfer of knowledge about policies, institutions, or ideas from one place to another. Marsh and Sharman (2009) also stated that research on transfer and diffusion should identify the mechanisms that link policy models across contexts—in the case of Bolsa Família, circulation occurred through specific actions, such as training, policy dialogue, technical assistance, reports, benchmarking, and international cooperation events. In this context, through process tracing, we can connect these activities to mechanisms of learning, emulation, and selective inducement as the most likely explanations, rather than treating program similarity as self-explanatory (Beach & Pedersen, 2019).

Adaptation also played a crucial role in the success of Bolsa Família. It is very unlikely for a program to be completely and unchangedly transplanted from one country to another. One country may adopt certain aspects of the program, but in most cases, these aspects will vary: targeting systems, conditionalities, payment mechanisms, monitoring arrangements, institutional responsibilities, etc. The reasons for differences are varied and include administrative capacity, political priorities, and resources. Evans (2004, 2009) understands policy transfer as a political process in which the meaning of ideas is altered to some extent as they are moved between different institutional environments. Peck & Theodore (2010) go further, stressing mutation, translation, and recombination rather than mere replication. Haupt (2023) calls for more attention to the intersections of policy diffusion, transfer, and mobilities. The Brazilian example of circulating social policy that Morais de Sá e Silva (2017) discusses was more a translation and adaptation than a direct copy. This is why international circulation of Bolsa Família should be viewed as a flexible, negotiated process.

Translation and adaptation have fundamentally changed the program. In Brazil, Bolsa Família was, in a way, a symbol of the country's engagement with poverty, human rights, social inclusion, and the state's capacity. However, once it became known abroad, people mostly discussed it in a very technical sense. Mainly, they saw it as a targeted social protection tool or, at best, a best practice in Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs). This technical approach to describing the program made it easier to apply the policy across different policy sectors. On the other hand, it might also have placed the program quite far from the socio-political environment that led to its creation. In fact, what is going abroad is not only the Brazilian model unchanged but also the policy practice, which is selectively (re)constructed in different contexts.

These methods have also evolved. For instance, when Brazil's internal and external policy conditions aligned to push the movement actively, the Bolsa Família program was not only well-coordinated but also more closely associated with the state. On the other hand, when domestic politics changed and foreign policy priorities shifted, diffusion relied more on intermediaries and expert networks. Porto de Oliveira (2022) shows that even if the state's direct promotion is reduced, the policy's internationalization can still proceed through other channels. Waisbich et al. (2022) highlight the various profile changes of Brazil's "development cooperation and policy-export over administrations, especially from the Lula da Silva period to the Bolsonaro period," which is a similar expression. Such time variations can be very useful in showing how one policy can be implemented through different channels at different times.

Collectively, Bolsa Família functioned as a foreign policy tool through a multi-layered process. On the one hand, the Brazilian state used social policy knowledge as part of its international

engagement costs. However, international institutions, development banks, and expert networks played a significant role in maintaining the program even after the state's direct intervention in orchestration was minimized or the state was less involved. Also, at different levels, Bolsa Família was not exported just by being an exact copy of itself. It was communicated through learning, emulation, translation, and selective adaptation.

The Bolsa Família case should not be considered as evidence that policy diffusion always leads to influence. Its importance is really quite one-sided: first, the program should have almost a cult status in the country. Then, the state agencies should find a way to work together on the program. Finally, international players should continue to promote the program's policy idea outside their home country. In that case, the program may be used as a diplomatic tool. You could even say that policy diffusion is among the foreign policy instruments that states and intermediaries employ, by bringing policy models into their international dealings (Porto de Oliveira & Romano, 2022). This example shows that foreign policy can be the stage where policy transfer and diffusion are most visible, rather than these processes quietly happening in the background of Foreign Policy Analysis.

CONCLUSION

Currently, the Brazilian Government is riding a peak of popularity after being acknowledged worldwide for its leadership in social policy and the effective implementation of its flagship program, Bolsa Família. The program is ranked among the top three globally for successfully reducing poverty and improving the well-being of poor and vulnerable households (World Bank, 2013). World Bank President Jim Yong Kim has referred to the program as a 'first in the world' global model for poverty reduction, which is also helping Brazil tackle some of its biggest killers, such as tuberculosis and AIDS (World Bank, 2013a). What is the story of this success? How did a program of conditional cash transfers, initially intended as a welfare scheme for the local population, become a global benchmark for social policies and poverty reduction?

The global dissemination of Bolsa Família can be examined in different ways that illuminate policy transfer and the conditions that enabled its worldwide circulation. In the first place, considering that one of the factors responsible for the circulation of Bolsa Família abroad was the program itself and its anti-poverty results, it is undeniable. It was the program's visibility and its positive reputation as an effective anti-poverty intervention that sparked interest among other countries in learning the Bolsa Família model. Apart from this, and more generally, Bolsa Família's circulation, especially in Latin America and Africa, has been firmly linked to the broader framework of South-South cooperation. In other words, it was the capacity of Brazilian institutions to organize technical cooperation and the wider political and economic context that, together, supported the alignment between foreign policy and social policy priorities, thereby determining the spillover effects of Bolsa Família at the international level. Here, in examining the phenomenon of the Bolsa Família program through the lens of Brazil's foreign policy, this paper introduces an analytical framework using the actor-channel-mechanism to address the actors, channels, and mechanisms of policy circulation, with the model of adaptation organizing the four elements. This framework not only highlights how Brazilian activation inputs shape the performance and effectiveness of exporting social policy and institutionalization, but also introduces adaptation, a critical element of policy transfer, into the analysis. It highlights the importance of the types of policy input actor-channel-mechanisms in explaining policy outputs. The paper analyzes the contact between various policy outputs and internal and external actors, and their roles in the internationalization of the Brazilian experience of social policy.

In fact, it is these local actors and institutions in Italy, Portugal, Cape Verde, Mozambique, and other countries that decide to adapt the Bolsa Família model in their own countries after exposure to Brazil's model through various channels. These actors serve as mediators and translators who, via adaptation, make the instrument 'fit' their specific socio-political context, while also contributing to changing/hybridizing the original model. This is an important component of policy-based foreign policy because, without internal actors, policy transfer remains a somewhat empty exercise and little more than discourse. This is also a significant finding for policy diffusion studies, as it implies that the instrument-satisfying mechanism operates at the point of induction (individual/organization), rather than in the socio-political context. Hence, internalization, endorsement/establishment, or enactment of international pressures is taken for granted.

Article findings contribute to the scholarship on policy diffusion and policy-based foreign policy by incorporating the four-component actor-channel-mechanism and the policy framework, and by adapting them to examine the internationalization of Brazil's social policy empirically. They challenge the view of policy export in international relations as just a source of power and influence. Instead, they argue that policy-based foreign policy is a multifactorial process that cannot be disassociated from a country's domestic political agenda and its institutional capacity to implement and sustain a policy over time.

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