

'Mind the Gap': Assessing Differences between Brazilian and Mainstream IR Journals in Methodological Approaches

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Abstract: In this article, we assess the methodological approaches employed in articles published in Brazilian and global mainstream IR journals in order to observe the differences between the two. To this end, we compare the methodological tools applied in research articles published in the top two Brazilian journals (*Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* and *Contexto Internacional*) vis-à-vis two other top international influential mainstream publications (*International Organization* and *World Politics*), from the year 2009 to 2019. By undertaking a Systematic Literature Review, we surveyed a total of 955 articles. Our research concluded that Brazilian IR scholarship differs from the mainstream literature because (1) most articles do not mention the mobilized methods during their analyses, (2) the field of IR presents more non- and post-positivist approaches, and (3) contrary to the mainstream outlets, quantitative methods are rarely employed in Brazil.

Keywords: methodology; International Relations; Brazil; scholarly production; systematic literature review.

Introduction

Studies in International Relations (IR) have experienced many methodological debates over the years – some of them directly related to epistemological divides. Disputes between positivists and their critics, qualitative and quantitative perspectives, and divergent

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propositions about how to address the issue of research design were commonly observed in the last decades. They not only contributed to the scientific development of IR scholarship but also enabled the blossoming of a plural and broader research field (see Acharya and Buzan 2019; Alejandro 2019; Bilgin 2008; Eun 2019; Brecher 1999; Kristensen 2020). In other words, as Wæver (1998: 723) claimed, 'IR [the discipline] is quite different in different places'.

Although the field of knowledge became increasingly pluralistic, a mainstream of researchers consolidated its prominence as the central nodes in the IR scholarship web. We refer to mainstream as the most cited researchers, institutions, and journals around the world, a synonym for what other authors have called 'core' or 'US-leading scholarship'. Its components are known to be mostly placed in the United States, especially in the so-called 'Ivy League' (see Lohaus and Wemheuer-Vogelaar 2020; Tickner and Wæver 2009) and, to a lesser extent, in Europe – especially the United Kingdom (Wæver 1998; Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al. 2016).

After entertaining several methodological debates, positivism predominates among these mainstream scholars. As their work aims to find causal patterns on international phenomena and eventually produce predictions, positivist approaches were perceived as a means to provide objective and valid inferences (Maliniak et al., 2011; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2013; Biersteker, 2009). Simultaneously, in other countries, different perspectives became more frequently observed and majorly published, allowing one to identify 'multiple IR scholarships' (Jorgensen et al. 2017; Lohaus and Wemheuer-Vogelaar 2020; Villa and Pimenta 2017; Alejandro 2019).

In considering these differences, the following puzzle remains to be solved: What is the place of Brazil's IR scholarship in methodological terms? Despite the scarcity of sources, the existing literature suggests that the body of Brazilian studies differs from that of the global mainstream. For instance, it rests mainly on historical-descriptive analyses, with little incorporation of positivist debates (Santos and Fonseca 2009; Casarões 2019; Vigevani, Thomaz and Leite 2016; Herz 2002; Schwether et al. 2019). A possible explanation therefor is the fact that IR scholarship in Brazil is mostly driven by the objective to understand the role of the country at the international system – in a higher level than the one observed in the mainstream¹ (Jorgensen et al. 2017). So far, few works have traced the methodological development of this field in Brazil to produce systematic comparisons between what is used in and outside the country to understand the place of Brazilian literature *vis-à-vis* that of the world.

In this article, we expect to contribute in terms of filling this gap, by conducting a systematic comparison to answer the following question: How different is the Brazilian scholarship from the mainstream regarding methodological choices? To that end, we apply a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), surveying articles published in the two leading journals representing the mainstream field – *International Organization* and *World Politics*² – and the two top IR journals in Brazil – *RBPI* and *Contexto Internacional* – over the course of ten years, from 2009 to 2019. Our findings unveiled three core differences between methodological instruments employed in articles published in Brazilian and the leading mainstream peer-reviewed journals. Firstly, in Brazilian journals, most papers do

not explicitly describe which methodological design was applied to the research they refer to. This finding validates Schwether et al.'s (2019) argument about the non-incorporation of rigorous positivist research designs in the country.

Secondly, while qualitative historical-descriptive works prevail in Brazil, providing valuable descriptions about the role of the country in the international arena (and related issues), the 'new qualitative methodology' (Rezende 2017) seems to have been adopted at a similar pace as that of mainstream journals, when methodological tools are concerned. The same does not apply to quantitative tools related to the 'inferential adjustment'³, which predominated in mainstream publications and appeared only in one of the articles among the Brazilian outlets under assessment. Finally, we identified a considerable presence of non- and post-positivist approaches in Brazil, such as Discourse Analysis and Ethnography, as compared to the global mainstream production.

Before proceeding with this analysis, it is crucial to introduce one caveat. This paper does not assume mainstream values and practices to be a role-model for Brazilian IR studies. Our aims are not to convey any sort of normative advice nor to endorse the crystallization of a US-cognitive-primacy approach. It should be noted that we definitely do not have any normative intentions in our article.

In turn, our research simply intends to bring to light differences between a given repertoire of methods and techniques employed in Brazil in comparison with the ones more recurrently found among leading global journals in the field. At the same time, we acknowledge that there are other IR scholarships around the globe and welcome comparisons between these bodies of scholarship and the Brazilian corpus. Understanding the place of the Brazilian IR scholarship in the world is a necessary and unavoidable debate for those interested in discussing its future developments.

The article is organized as follows. In the first section, we discuss how different from the mainstream IR in Brazil is, comparing their origins and present state of the art, since Lohaus and Wemheuer-Vogelaar (2020) claimed that a full understanding of a scholarly production elsewhere required considering the context in which knowledge was produced. In the second section, we briefly introduce the most employed methods in the mainstream literature so as to draw a comparison with Brazilian studies. In the third section, we discuss the research design employed in this analysis. Lastly, in the fourth section, we present and discuss our results.

International relations in Brazil and the world: two sides of the same field

The institutionalization of IR as a field of study emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. The two first departments of International Politics in the world were set up in 1919 and 1920 in the United Kingdom (Vigevani, Thomaz, and Leite 2016). World War I outcomes sparked academic interests in the field in the sense that scholars started to search for answers for the causes of wars (Cox 1981; Viotti and Kauppi 2012). Along the same century, scholars based in the United States, the United Kingdom, and to a lesser extent, in Western

European countries introduced their perspectives on the field. Heavily based on advancements in Political Science, they organized the mainstream epistemological principles of the area (see Acharya 2014; Mignolo 2002; Wallerstein 1997).

Historical-descriptive approaches assumed elements from the Political Philosophy to support their theoretical frameworks in the beginning, i.e., realism and liberalism (Carr 1989; Morgenthau 1978; Angell 2002). In the mid-20th century, an increasing sophistication emerged in qualitative studies, within an emerging debate on levels of analysis and variables to be included for international political analysis. At the same time, behaviorist approaches gained momentum in the IR mainstream scholarship, leading to the inclusion of quantitative approaches into the field (see Alden and Aran 2016; Faria 2012; Kubálková 2001; Waltz 1992; Deutsch and Singer 1964).

Meanwhile, in the Global South, the Brazilian IR scholarship had a late development, as was the case in the entire Third World (Mignolo 2002). Whereas aforementioned debates were taking place in the mainstream of the field, IR discussions occurred in the country only within limited circles, such as the *Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros* (ISEB), the *Instituto Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais* (IBRI) and, of course, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to Fonseca Jr. (1999), few scholars, religious leaders, journalists, attorneys, military officials, and diplomats engaged in debates of this sort. At the time, the first journal specialized in IR – *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* (RBPI) was launched in 1958 under the inspiration of international publications such as Chatham House's *International Affairs* and The Council on Foreign Relations' *Foreign Affairs*, while also maintaining close ties with the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Casarões 2019; Dulci 2013; Almeida 1998).

While having a journal for scholars to publish analysis on IR issues, Brazil lacked an academic department dedicated to the discipline of IR in universities. Researchers often graduated in other areas – such as History, Law, Economics, Geography, and Social Sciences. Also, most of them spent some time in foreign institutions, especially in Western Europe – like Hélio Jaguaribe, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and Celso Furtado. Unlike the mainstream IR scholarship, which had its roots in Political Science, the Brazilian field emerged from a pluralistic background and was mostly rooted in the French historical-descriptive tradition, remounting to authors such as Pierre Renouvin and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle (Vigevani, Thomaz, and Leite 2016; Barasuol and Silva 2016; Tickner 2009; Alejandro 2019).

The first two IR departments in Brazil were inaugurated in the 1970s and 1980s, respectively in Universidade de Brasília (UnB) and Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro – PUC-Rio (Lima 2013), and consequently strongly related to the institutionalization of the field. The latter founded *Contexto Internacional*, the second Brazilian academic journal on international political issues in 1985. During this process, there were very few changes in methodological approaches mobilized in IR investigations in the country. Historical-descriptive approaches remained predominant at least until the end of the 20th century. Two hypotheses emerge to explain it, along with the acknowledgment of the center-periphery division of labor (Mignolo 2002; Wallerstein 1997). The first regards

the problems Brazilians tried to tackle, which differed from the causes of war and several different matters that related to international politics in the mainstream IR scholarship. Brazilians gave precedence to national foreign policy and South American affairs. The second hypothesis concerns the relative lack of trusted data for research work in the country, a feature one could possibly associate with the authoritarian regime in Brazil (Santos and Fonseca 2009; Herz 2002; Tickner 2009; Kristensen 2020).

Having other answers to provide, mainstream IR went through another round of methodological debates. The emergence of an array of agendas required new manners of investigation. While historical approaches remained relevant for some theoretical approaches, such as the English School (Bull 1966), different theoretical frameworks were born (e.g., Structural Realism, Complex Interdependence, Neoliberal Institutionalism, etc.). In that context, positivist lenses appeared increasingly prominent in the search for objective and generalizable inferences (Jackson and Nexon 2013; Kaplan 1966).

During the 1990s and 2000s, sociological and post-positivist theoretical and methodological frameworks became increasingly debated in the mainstream, as well as in the Global South, with the emergence and dissemination of sociological, critical, and de-/post-colonial approaches (see Kristensen 2018; Lapid 1989; Wendt 1992) – despite the fact that positivist approaches remained the most employed ones (Biersteker 2009). Concurrently, in Brazil, the IR scholarship was in a key moment of consolidation. The re-democratization of the South American country occurred in conjunction with a renewed national engagement in international politics, followed by an increase in government funding for research, which sparked new investigations, representing an expansion in both the supply and demand for IR research. There were more and more answers to be provided and loads of data to be analyzed, with more resources to fund them (Herz 2002; Tickner 2009).

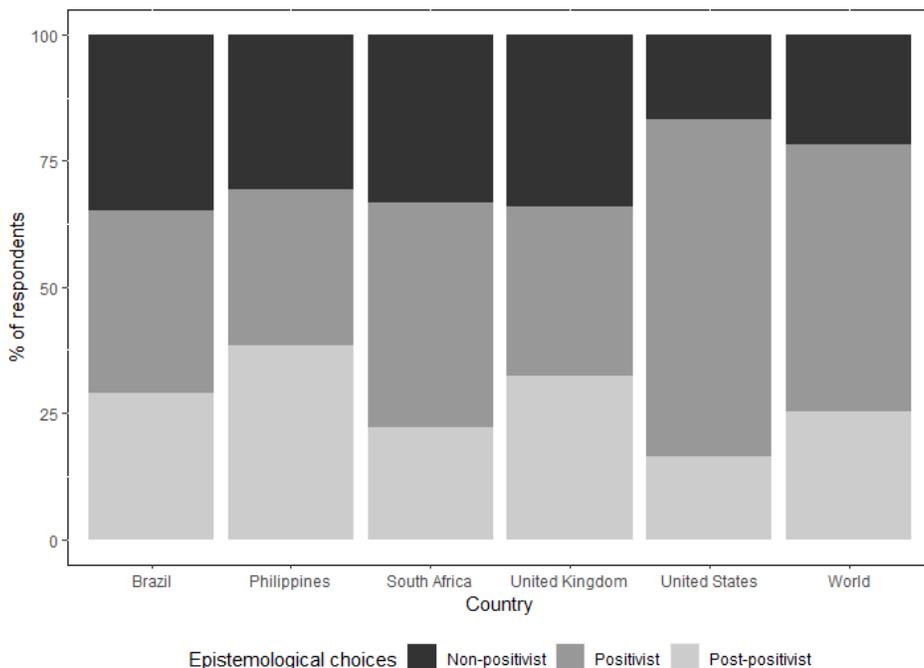
Some (not necessarily intended) consequences of this process were the growing number of undergraduate and graduate programs, respectively from 20 in 1999 to 94 in 2009, and from 2 in 2001 to 24 in 2020 (Barasuol and Silva 2016; Pereira and Belém Lopes 2020). The leading Brazilian IR journals also adopted international publication standards, such as changing their working language from Portuguese to English, inviting international reviewers to join the review process, and making use of international submission platforms (Alejandro 2019). Another relevant accomplishment was the inauguration of the Brazilian Association of IR Studies and Scholars (*Associação Brasileira de Relações Internacionais*) in 2005 (Vigevani, Thomaz and Leite 2016). Within this context, as illustrated by Alejandro (2019), different traditions enmeshed in the local scholarship, such as a French one (more concentrated at PUC-Rio) and an American quantitativism (especially found at the Instituto de Relações Internacionais – Universidade de São Paulo [IRI-USP]).

Even after all these developments, Brazilian IR scholarship maintained its pluralistic character. Taking a glance at faculty members in IR departments in the country, Barasuol and Silva (2016) noted that only 20.5% hold a Master's in the field. The others came from different areas, such as Political Science (20%), History (14.5%), and Economics (13%). Likewise, it is also remarkable that Brazilian scholars have never reached a consensus

about Brazil's Western-ness (Kristensen 2020). This combination of pluralism, the need to provide different answers, all contrasting views, and different trajectories seem to have reflected in the methodological and epistemological choices of IR scholars in the country, as can be observed in the following figures.

In Figure 1, we show that whereas in the United States and other important IR scholarships researchers tend to prefer positivist approaches, in Brazil there is a nearly equal distribution between epistemological choices. At the same time, by including other countries in the plot, we can perceive that this Brazilian pattern is not an exception, in a sense that positivism is not as accepted around the world as it is in the USA (see Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al. 2016).

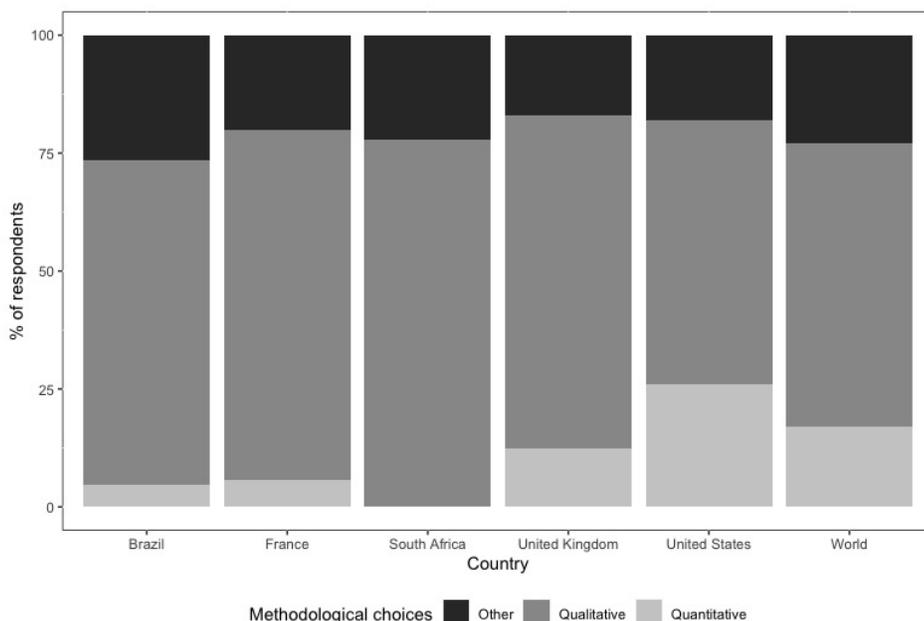
Figure 1. Epistemological choices in Brazil and the world



Source: Maliniak et al. 2017

Having epistemological perspectives other than the mainstream one seems to have driven Brazil away from the mainstream methodological choices, as shown in Figure 2. Brazilians are less prone to apply quantitative methods in comparison to their analyzed peers. If we consider that these tools are only employed by positivists, one would expect that by being less positivist, qualitative tools would predominate in the Brazilian IR scholarship. However, as Figure 2 also shows, Brazil once again is not alone in these preferences. Even some European scholarships, such as the French, present these methodological preferences. Still, the point is that the national IR scholarship differs from the mainstream, but not from the rest of the world.

Figure 2. Primary methodological choices in Brazil and the world



Source: Maliniak et al. 2017

Considering all of these differences, there is evidence that the Brazilian IR literature is somehow different from the mainstream regarding methodological issues. This was an expected outcome since this scholarship has a different trajectory and different problems to answer in comparison with the mainstream (Kristensen 2020). However, this discussion provided us with arguments to formulate two hypotheses to our research questions:

H1: Papers using qualitative methods represent a greater proportion of the total papers published in Brazilian journals than in mainstream publications.

As Brazilian researchers mostly prefer qualitative tools and especially considering that journals tend to display articles from scholars coming from the same geographical region (Lohaus and Wemheuer-Vogelaar 2020), an expected consequence is that Brazilian journals will mostly publish articles using these perspectives. Likewise, as mainstream researchers and publications are primarily based in the US – which presents a quantitative predominance in methodological approaches (Mearsheimer and Walt 2013; Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias 2004; Maliniak et al. 2011), we can expect a more significant presence of quantitative investigations.

H2: Even considering the same kind of methodology (i.e., qualitative or quantitative), the methodological tools employed in papers published in Brazilian journals are different from the mainstream journals.

If methodological choices are supposed to be highly influenced by trajectories and the problems to be solved, then having different origins and puzzles, Brazilian and mainstream

scholars will differ in the methods chosen for their analyses. Even when considering the same type of research, i.e., they will use different qualitative or quantitative methods. It is also important that contrasting trajectories may lead to different methodological training, translating it into distinct choices. Such a context observed in Brazil reflects the prevalence of different techniques vis-à-vis the mainstream ones.

But what techniques are we talking about? What will we search for while trying to answer these hypotheses? In the next section, we will answer these questions, clarifying what methods are being considered for this analysis.

Methodological debates in the mainstream of IR

As we are comparing how different the methodological tools mobilized in Brazilian IR publications compared to the mainstream ones are, it is crucial to report which are the most frequently applied instruments by the mainstream. We acknowledge the valuable role of other epistemological approaches, such as interpretivism and reflexivism, as well as their methods, such as Discourse Analysis and Ethnography [see, for example, Alejandro (2019; 2021), Lichterman (2017), and Montsion (2018)], and their role in Brazil. However, considering our aims, in this section we introduce only the most used mainstream techniques in order to clarify what we are comparing the methodological approaches employed in Brazilian journals to.

The mainstream IR scholarship, as mentioned, embraced positivistic lenses in a search for objective and replicable analyses on an increasing number of issues related to international politics. Whether looking at a small or large *n*, methodological debates have been leading to the emergence of a growing number of tools directly connected to developments in Political Science. In this context, quantitative instruments became the most utilized methods in the mainstream IR field (Mearsheimer and Walt 2013; Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias 2004; Maliniak et al. 2011).

Experimental research has been increasingly published, as IR scholars are getting as close as possible to research designs employed in the natural sciences to search for the best objective causal inferences (see Imbens and Rubin 2015). Experiments are not so easy to do in IR, since we cannot randomly distribute the field's analyzed social phenomena, such as the occurrence of wars, and simply observe the outcomes. However, along with the possibility of laboratory and public opinion experiments, some elements in the international realm can be randomly assigned, such as electoral observers (Hyde 2007), making it possible to rely on experimental data.

Still, as experimental data is usually hard to obtain, researchers have been trying to replicate information which is closer to it, that is, quasi-experimental research designs. For example, it is possible to compare similar units in a set of control variables that differ only in the treatment variable. That is the foundation of 'Matching', one of the instruments that emerged from recent debates and has been increasingly applied in both Political Science and IR (Imbens and Rubin 2015; Morgan and Winship 2007).

Another widely used quantitative instrument is 'Panel Data Analysis'. For these models, it is also considered how cases behave along a time series, providing a rigorous control

of unit and time trends – associated with relevant covariates (Imbens and Rubin 2015; Morgan and Winship 2007). The same authors also mentioned the role of approaches based on instrumental variables in situations in which there is endogeneity, considering dependent and independent variables. A two-stage regression could be a solution for these problems, using an instrument that is not correlated with the dependent variable. Also, depending on both variables and objectives, Cox Proportional Hazards can be a valuable method to produce inferences (Lins 2020). Matching, Panel Data Analysis, and Cox Proportional Hazards are all techniques to deal with what Rezende (2017) called the ‘fundamental problem of the causal inference’. That is, these methods joined traditional statistical tools, such as regressions and correlation tests, providing research designs that allow for robust and often unbiased inferences.

Likewise, there were also considerable advancements in qualitative approaches that sought increased objectivity and accuracy in inferences. Traditional methods, such as case studies and comparative analyses, were thickened by more rigorous strategies. Process-tracing improved researchers’ capacity to analyse causal connections by unpacking the mechanisms that produced them, being useful to either positivist and post-positivist scholars (Beach and Pedersen 2016; George and Bennett 2015). Comparative-historical analysis was refined to achieve more sophisticated results (Amorim Neto and Rodriguez 2016; Falletti and Mahoney 2015; Goerz and Mahoney 2012). These developments, which Rezende (2017) called the ‘new qualitative methodology’, have also been increasingly present in mainstream publications.

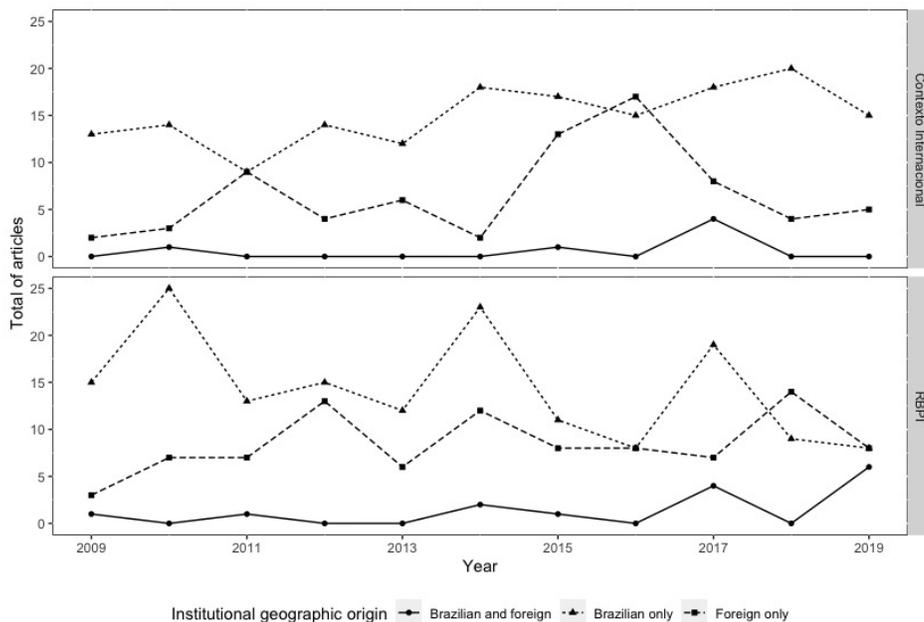
Another relevant aspect is the rise of multi-method approaches. Brecher (1999) discussed the importance of integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods towards multi-method analyses. Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias (2004) show an increasing trend to adopt these designs in the 2000s. Scholars such as Brady and Collier (2004) also mentioned how these approaches would be promising for the Social Sciences as a whole, providing, at the same time, the capacity to generalize findings and detail cases and causal mechanisms. Therefore, while comparing Brazilian publications with mainstream ones, we intend to shed some light on the incorporation of the aforementioned methods in papers published by four outlets (*Contexto Internacional*, *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, *International Organization*, and *World Politics*).

Research design

We built an original dataset to describe the differences between the methodological strategies adopted in leading Brazilian and mainstream IR publications that were observed. Our sample contains all articles published in four IR journals (two Brazilian and two mainstream ones) from 2009 to 2019. To assess the ‘best’ IR articles in Brazil, two of the leading journals in the country, namely *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* (RBPI) and *Contexto Internacional*⁴, were selected. As show in Figure 3⁵, despite RBPI’s raising internationalization in the past decade, most papers published in both journals have at least one Brazilian-based author (in a few cases, we could see them coauthoring papers with

researchers from other countries, as shown in the label “Brazilian and foreign”), making our sample representative of the Brazilian production. To account for the elite of the mainstream scholarship in the world, we selected the two best-ranked publications according to three main impact factor rankings⁶ dedicated to the general debate in IR issues⁷, namely *International Organization* (IO) and *World Politics*, to make up a representative duo.

Figure 3. Nationality of authors who published in Brazilian journals, based on their institutions of affiliation



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

According to the editorial information available on the websites of the four journals, all of them are dedicated to surveying international phenomena. While three of them do not specify any geographic area of interest, *Contexto Internacional* mentions its focus on the Global South. Since all of them address several issues related to the international level of analysis and are not restricted to specific issues (e.g., international security, international political economy), we consider the four journals to be comparable. Table 1 corroborates our perception. We analysed the word frequency in the titles of each published paper in each journal. We can observe that all of them present a relatively high mention of the term ‘international’ (> 20% of the total papers, with the exception of *World Politics*). Also, Brazilian journals tend to attribute a closer focus to Brazil, in a sense that the titles of published papers mentioned the country in 10.65% in *Contexto* and roughly one quarter in RBPI.

Regarding methodology, only *World Politics* makes clear that all methodological perspectives may be represented in their issues. However, as the others do not explicit which kind of methodology is preferable, we consider that there are no barriers

Table 1. Most used words in articles' titles in the four outlets, in frequency

RBPI	Frequency	Contexto Internacional	Frequency	International Organization	Frequency	World Politics	Frequency
Brazil	0.244361	international	0.229508	international	0.243137	political	0.105263
international	0.180451	politics	0.122951	trade	0.098039	international	0.078947
Brazilian	0.112782	foreign	0.118852	war	0.090196	electoral	0.073684
relations	0.109023	security	0.118852	politics	0.078431	politics	0.073684
global	0.105263	Brazil	0.106557	conflict	0.070588	evidence	0.068421
foreign	0.105263	America	0.090164	aid	0.062745	party	0.063158
policy	0.090226	policy	0.090164	global	0.062745	policy	0.063158
politics	0.086466	south	0.081967	domestic	0.047059	states	0.057895
south	0.078947	regional	0.07377	foreign	0.047059	war	0.057895
governance	0.075188	Latin	0.065574	institutions	0.043137	democracy	0.057895
America	0.075188	relations	0.061475	political	0.043137	social	0.052632
Latin	0.067669	war	0.057377	organizations	0.043137	new	0.052632
union	0.067669	European	0.057377	investment	0.039216	economy	0.047368
climate	0.06391	Brazilian	0.053279	civil	0.039216	development	0.047368
cooperation	0.056391	global	0.053279	power	0.039216	Europe	0.047368
European	0.056391	cooperation	0.04918	evidence	0.039216	change	0.042105
analysis	0.056391	BRICS	0.04918	diffusion	0.039216	institutions	0.042105
Lula	0.056391	power	0.040984	world	0.039216	violence	0.042105
defense	0.052632	integration	0.040984	policy	0.039216	conflict	0.042105
American	0.048872	union	0.040984	economic	0.035294	welfare	0.042105

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

to any epistemological or methodological perspective ('Instructions for Authors' n.d.; 'Instructions for Authors' n.d.; 'Editorial Scope and Policy' n.d.; 'Scope and Policy' n.d.). This is not to say that there are no entrance barriers at all. We acknowledge, for example, gate-keeping practices, especially in mainstream journals, that may veto articles written in the Global South because of the different methodological choices or related factors (Alejandro 2019; Lohaus and Wemheuer-Vogelaar 2020). Still, since we want to compare Brazilian publications with mainstream ones, these practices are not within the scope of our analysis.

We have run a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) over this sample. We chose SLR first because it is a valuable tool to understand what has been said in the literature in a given period of time. Also, it consists of an objective and replicable method, providing scientific validity to our inferences (Parris and Peachey 2013; Ridley 2012). We analysed 955 articles,⁸ including their abstracts, introduction, and research designs (when applicable), in order to identify which methods were utilized in each one of them. We proceeded with such analysis with one caveat: This study does not intend to evaluate the articles' contents. Our analysis was based upon observing whether authors were explicit about which methods were applied to provide answers to their puzzles – or not. When they did, we included the mentioned tool in our database. When there was no mention of these tools, we identified them as not identifiable (n/a). As a strategy to make our judgments more reliable, two of us analysed each article.

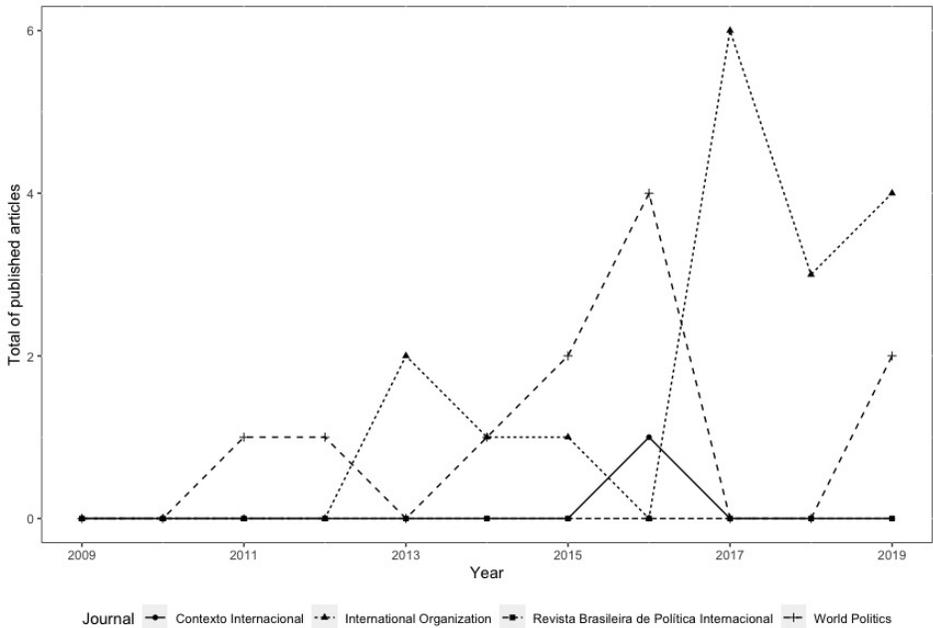
As described in the last section, we considered just methodological tools adopted to analyse data. We did not include in our dataset techniques related to data collection or production, such as interviews, document analysis, and bibliographic review (except for the case of SLR). We reported criteria to code each paper as qualitative, quantitative or multi-method designs in Appendix A. We made this option because we want to compare how scholars are analysing, not gathering data. Then, we reported results in different variables. Firstly, the kind of data analyzed in each article – either observational or experimental. Secondly, the methods employed in each paper, allocated in different columns for qualitative and quantitative tools. Remarkably, since there are multi-method articles, the same paper can present different instruments – for instance, if authors reported they used case study and OLS regressions, we reported both methods at our database. Finally, there was a variable in which we reported the kind of methodology(ies) mobilized in scrutinized papers – either qualitative, quantitative, or both. Categories, in this case, were mutually excluding. In the next section, we report the results.

Results

This section will present and discuss the Systematic Literature Review results, aiming to demonstrate differences between articles published in Brazil and mainstream journals. Before approaching methodologies themselves, we noted the kind of data researchers had been using – specifically, if there was any trend towards employing experimental data/designs. This choice tended to precede methodological choices, since methods need to fit the

analysed data. Hence, as can be seen in Figure 4, while experimental research designs have been increasingly utilized in the two mainstream publications, only one paper published in Brazil relied on this kind of technique. Three possible explanations therefor might be (1) the kinds of problems addressed by Brazilian researchers are not conducive to the technique, (2) the fact that experiments tend to be expensive, and (3) most researchers tend to perceive this kind of design as a wishful thinking, something impossible to implement in IR studies. Still, this is the first stark difference between the methods employed in the compared publications that have also something to say about trends in causal inference designs in the analysed journals.

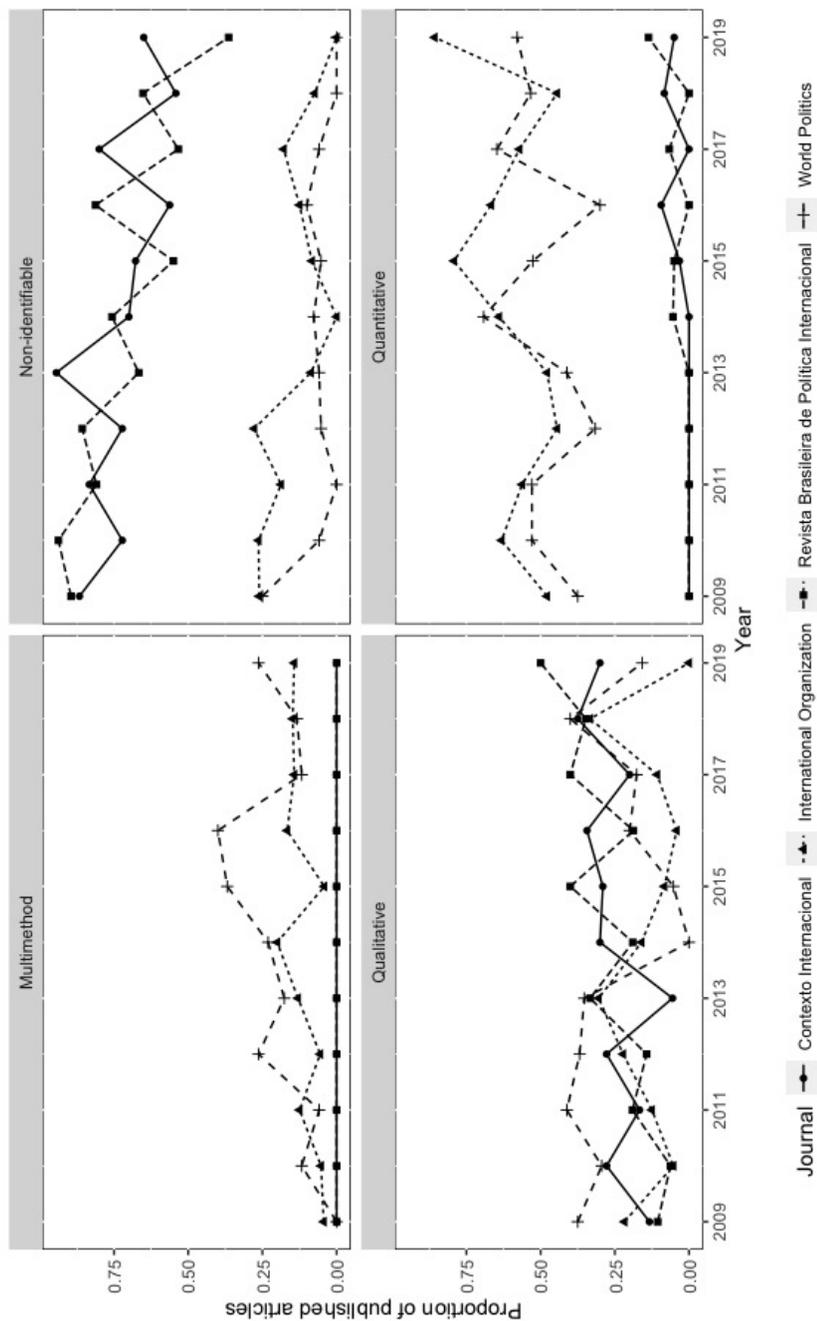
Figure 4. Number of experimental research designs in each journal



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

More than different kinds of data, articles published in Brazilian outlets adopt distinct methodologies, as shown in Figure 5 below. A significant proportion of papers used quantitative tools in mainstream journals, confirming what was discussed in the last section. Concurrently, these methods are not common in Brazilian journals. Only 15 out of 510 papers published in RBPI and *Contexto Internacional* display this kind of research design. There is also an increasing number of papers combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in mainstream journals, whereas no article applied this kind of approach in Brazil.

Figure 5. The use of different types of methodologies in each journal



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The gap between methodological approaches adopted in Brazil and mainstream journals is diminished when it comes to qualitative tools. The proportion of papers applying this kind of methodology is quite similar when comparing the two journal samples. This was an unexpected finding, firstly because papers published in Brazilian outlets adopt neither quantitative nor multimethod approaches, and also because of the qualitative tradition of the local IR scholarship (Vigevani, Thomaz, and Leite 2016; Herz 2002; Barasuol and Silva 2016).

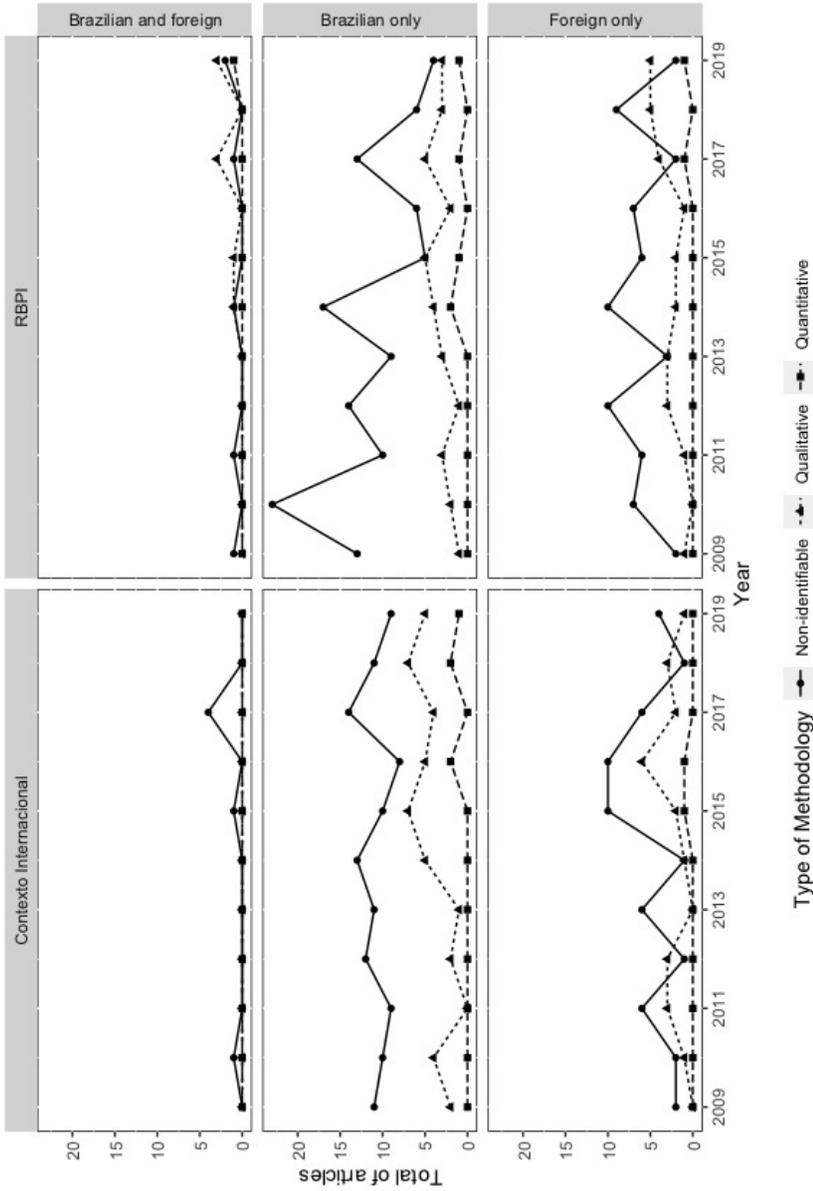
The tentative explanation, however, is also found in Figure 5, that is, the fact that most published articles in Brazilian journals do not specifically identify their methodological choices. Except for RBPI 2019 issues, more than half of the articles in these outlets do not even mention which methodological tools they are using to analyse data. Most of them describe Brazilian foreign policy or the regional environment, meeting the historical-descriptive tradition in the country. However, the papers did not mention any methodology, such as historiography. Also, there is no mention of interpretivist or reflexivist methodologies in these works. In mainstream journals, a similar proportion of non-identifiable methodological choices for articles published only occurred in the 1970s (Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias 2004).

However, it is also noteworthy that the proportion of articles that did not identify the employed methods have been decreasing since the year 2009, as shown in Figure 5. As indicated by Figure 6, this reduction seems to be related to two facts, namely (1) an increasing number of scholars who are not based in Brazil are publishing in the country using qualitative methods – especially in RBPI – and (2) Brazilian scholars have been reducing the number of articles they published without mentioning methodological tools, while also raising the number of papers that used either qualitative or quantitative approaches.

Still, we cannot corroborate H1 since qualitative methods did not represent a greater proportion of papers published in Brazil than in the mainstream publications. This proportion is actually similar. As all of the articles that did not mention methodological tools rely on a small n, our analysis only shows that these papers, focusing on a small number of cases, are more common in Brazil. Searching for a more specific diagnosis – and to test H2 – Figure 7 presents the proportion of specific qualitative methods while considering only articles that mobilized qualitative or multimethod designs. It is noteworthy that authors could have mentioned more than one tool in the same article, e.g. a case study that also used process-tracing. In these cases, both methods were reported.

For one, we can observe that qualitative papers published in IO tend to employ more case studies than the others, which in turn adopt a similar proportion of this instrument. The contrary happens when we look at comparative approaches. It is worth remembering that, in the case of mainstream publications, the use of qualitative methods is sometimes linked to qualitative tests in multimethod research. Still, while also looking at these indicators, it is not possible to conclude that there are differences between Brazilian and mainstream publications, since their results were very similar to those obtained from *World Politics*.

Figure 6. The use of methods in Brazil, according to the origins of authors



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

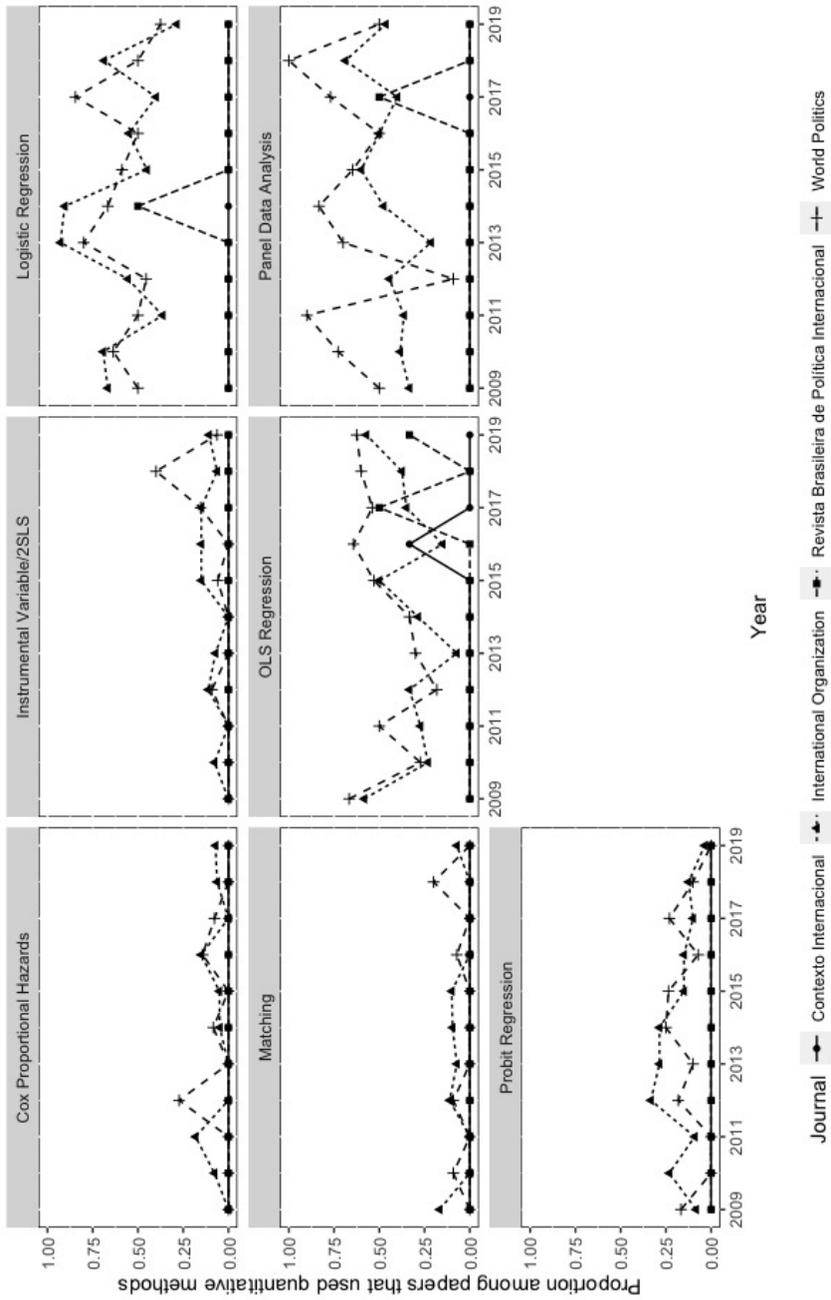
The other indicators, however, show these differences. Post-positivist methods, such as Discourse Analysis and, to some extent, Ethnography, are more present in Brazil than in mainstream outlets. This was expected, as the existing literature claimed that more Brazilian researchers assume non/post-positivist paradigms than mainstream scholars. Content analysis is relatively common in Brazil but also in *International Organization*, which leaves no margin to infer noticeable differences regarding this method.

When we look at the so-called ‘new qualitative methodology’, comparative historical analysis was neither common in mainstream publications nor in Brazil. This finding was unexpected since, as Amorim Neto and Rodriguez (2016) claimed, this is a valuable tool to explain political phenomena in Latin America. Conversely, process-tracing was similarly used in the four analyzed publications. Hence, it is possible to conclude that the incorporation of these methods is not so different in Brazil and the mainstream. In the end, the main difference regarding qualitative methods is that articles published in Brazil tend to adopt more post-positivist methods than mainstream journals.

However, a disclaimer should be introduced here: these results apply only to the comparison of articles that used qualitative methods. If we consider all the small-n analyses, thus including papers in which methodological tools are not identified, it is possible to claim that the incorporation of the ‘new qualitative methodology’ in Brazilian publications is indeed lower than in the mainstream.

Regarding quantitative methodology, in Figure 8⁹, we can see first that regressions [either Ordinary Least Squares (OLS), Logistic (Logit), or Probit] are highly employed in mainstream publications, but not in Brazil. The ‘inferential adjustment’ techniques have found some considerable space in foreign journals, but not yet in the Brazilian ones: no paper utilized Cox Proportional Hazards, Matching, or Two-Stage Regressions in the country. One of these techniques – Panel Data Analysis – is used in more than 50% of the articles recently published in mainstream journals, while only one paper published in Brazil (in RBPI) employed this instrument. Therefore, this is another key difference between mainstream journals and the Brazilian ones, no matter how helpful ‘inferential adjustment’ techniques might prove to be for explaining several issues related to Latin America.

Figure 8. The use of quantitative methods in papers that used either quantitative or multimethod designs



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

From the evidence presented in this section, it is possible to conclude that papers using qualitative methods do not represent a greater proportion of the total papers published in Brazil than they do in mainstream journals, contrary to what had been expected. What is possible to infer is: (1) articles that do not describe or mention methodological choices are more common in the country, as well as the occurrence of (2) small-n analyses. Therefore, our first hypothesis was rejected, but the final conclusion is not so distant from our point of departure.

Our second hypothesis was corroborated. When we look at the qualitative and quantitative tools separately, some differences are easily perceptible. In terms of qualitative techniques, Brazilian publications tend to present more post-positivist methods than the mainstream ones. Another interesting finding was that Brazilian and mainstream journals present similar degree of incorporation of the ‘new qualitative methodology’ – when they mention their qualitative tools. Finally, while *International Organization* and *World Politics* present more than half of their articles using ‘inferential adjustment’ techniques, *RBPI* and *Contexto Internacional* do not seem to incorporate them.

Conclusion

After undertaking a Systematic Literature Review in articles published in *International Organization*, *World Politics*, *Contexto Internacional*, and *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, we observed some relevant differences between the methodological approaches adopted by Brazilian and mainstream IR journals. Firstly, the historical-descriptive tradition in local studies seems to prevail, probably because it has proven to be able to deal with some of the main problems that the national IR academy has to tackle, particularly the role of Brazil in its region and the world, as indicated in Box 1. Hence, several papers published in the country provide valuable descriptions while not clearly defining the methodological guidelines employed in the analysis. This is quite different from the mainstream publications, in which clarifying methodological design is a condition for having an article published.

The prominence of these articles made it impossible for us to conclude that qualitative methods are more widely used in Brazilian journals than in the mainstream ones. Likewise, it was possible to confirm that small-n analyses predominate in the country. Contrary to the IR mainstream, quantitative investigations are quite rare in Brazil, despite this being a useful path to provide a better understanding of the region. Finally, when we consider only qualitative articles, the ones from Brazil mobilize more post-positivist methods than the mainstream ones. The adoption of the ‘new qualitative methodology’ is similar between *RBPI*, *Contexto*, and *World Politics*, although this changes when we look at small-n articles, not only in pieces which mentioned/described qualitative methods. Regarding the ‘inferential adjustment’ techniques, while widely adopted in mainstream journals, they seem still incipient in the Brazilian ones.

Brazil seems to be developing a fertile ground for plural methodological perspectives, assimilating a combination of different traditions, thus looking very different from

the mainstream; yet, this is not necessarily a new finding. The main contribution of this article is to identify 'how different' – to phrase it in a more neutral way – the Brazilian IR scholarship is from the discipline mainstream. We believe this article may contribute to the understanding of the Brazilian position *vis-à-vis* the global IR academy – or, at least, to provide a detailed report on the state of affairs. We hope this article encourages scholars to deepen on methodological agendas to deal with the puzzles that Brazilian analysts will have to solve in the coming years.

Notes

- 1 In the mainstream, authors are also obsessed, to some extent, by the role played by the United States. However, the mainstream develops theoretical approaches that attempt to convey their local knowledge, interests, and ideals throughout the world. In Brazil, scholars commonly focused both on regional issues and the role of Brazil.
- 2 Despite not being part of our criteria to choose the cases, it is worth noticing that these journals are currently published in the United Kingdom.
- 3 We call 'inferential adjustment' a set of techniques that emerged after King, Keohane and Verba's 'Designing Social Inquiry' (1994), aiming to improve causal inferences. It intensively uses formal modeling, quantitative methods (or multimethod research) and focuses on causal logic to produce inferences (Rezende 2017). Examples of techniques classified under the 'inferential adjustment' umbrella are Panel Data Analysis and Matching.
- 4 Both are mentioned as the two leading publications in Brazil in the literature cited in the last section. Also, this is corroborated by indexes provided by Scielo and Google Scholar.
- 5 For a better picture about authors' nationalities in foreign journals, see Lohaus and Wemheuer-Vogelaar (2020), and Noda (2020).
- 6 Google Scholar, SCImago (SJR), and Web of Science/Clarivate Analytics (JCR). In the case of the latter, as data are available for the period analysed in this article, we considered their classification on the past ten years in the ranking.
- 7 Journals such as *International Security* and *Journal of Conflict Resolution* were automatically excluded from the sample because of their focus on specific (security) issues.
- 8 Two hundred sixty-six (266) papers from RBPI, 244 from *Contexto Internacional*, 255 from *International Organization*, and 190 from *World Politics*. As we wanted to analyse methods, we excluded book reviews from the dataset. Also, as we wanted to analyse the most advanced papers from each journal, we focused only on research articles, also excluding research notes, in the case of the international publications.
- 9 When journals did not score anything in any method, it means that they did not publish any article using quantitative research designs that year, or published other non-presented methods, such as other kinds of regressions (e.g., quantile regression). To improve reader visualization and optimize space, we only presented results that referred to the most used methods.

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“Atenção ao Hiato”: Avaliando Diferenças nas Abordagens Metodológicas entre as Revistas Brasileiras e as Principais Publicações de RI

Resumo: Este artigo analisa a produção acadêmica de RI no Brasil. O objetivo final é retratar o desenvolvimento metodológico desta disciplina, especialmente investigando se houve a incorporação dos debates mais recentes do campo. Para tanto, comparamos as ferramentas metodológicas empregadas em artigos de pesquisa publicados nas duas principais revistas nacionais (*Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* e *Contexto Internacional*) com um par de revistas internacionais de maior impacto (*International Organization* e *World Politics*), de 2009 a 2019. Utilizando uma Revisão Sistemática da Literatura, analisamos 955 artigos. Como conclusão, constatamos que a academia brasileira de RI difere do *mainstream* porque (1) a maior parte dos artigos não menciona os métodos utilizados nas análises, (2) tal literatura apresenta mais métodos não e pós-positivistas e, (3) ao contrário do *mainstream*, métodos quantitativos são raramente utilizados no país.

Palavras-chave: metodologia; Relações Internacionais; Brasil; produção acadêmica; revisão sistemática de literatura.

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Appendix A

Criteria for classifying each article as having a qualitative, quantitative or multimethod research.

TYPE OF METHODOLOGY	CRITERIA	EXAMPLES
Qualitative	Articles that mentioned methods that require small-n (a small number of observations) designs to be employed. These methods relate to analyses that dig deeper into cases, focusing on their specificities, in order to provide detailed information about facts and mechanisms.	<p>Case Studies, Comparative Analyses, Historical Analysis, Process-Tracing, Discourse Analysis, Ethnography.</p> <p>Qualitative Comparative Analysis was included in this category, since it is mostly related to qualitative codification and analysis of cases.</p> <p>Content analysis was included in this category because, despite it sometimes relate to a high number of documents, we noted it often relates to a small number of cases.</p>
Quantitative	Articles that mentioned methods that require large-n (a large number of observations) designs to be employed. These methods relate to analyses that often quantify information and try to establish patterns to be applied to a sample and, eventually, a population, using statistical techniques.	Regressions (logistic, ordinary least squares, etc.), Cox Proportional Hazards, Matching, Panel Data Analysis, Difference-of-means, Correlation Tests (Pearson, Spearman, etc.), Factor Analysis, Principal Component Analysis, ANOVA.
Multi-methods	Articles that mentioned methods included in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.	