



# Transnational partnerships, domestic institutions, and sustainable development. The case of Brazil and the Amazon Region Protected Areas program



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## ABSTRACT

The article examines the role of institutions in mediating the interface between global challenges, transnational partnerships and the domestic politics of sustainable development. Empirically it focuses on the Amazon Region Protected Areas (ARPA) partnership, as a new type of governance that engages transnational and domestic actors in pursuing more sustainable management of land use, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the Brazilian Amazon. Drawing on extensive documentary analysis and field work, the study analyzes ARPA's institutional and political effects in Brazil. The case study reveals the materialization of a range of capacity-strengthening and environmental impacts, alongside with institutional and distributional effects. ARPA has also built upon the infusion of significant domestic resources and relied on a conducive political environment and pre-existing initiatives. Domestic institutions have thus been arbiters of transnational influence, engaging with the partnership first and foremost to support state and sub-state institutions and ambitious conservation priorities. On the other hand, while local communities and civil society organizations managed, through advocacy pressure and consultations, to incorporate a greater attention to local livelihoods and participation, the socio-economic components of the program remained weaker, with more limited success in terms of poverty alleviation. The conclusion draws broader implications for the role of transnational partnerships in linking the global governance of environmental systems, domestic institutions and development objectives.

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## 1. Introduction

Transnational public–private partnerships are voluntary agreements between public and non-state actors, linking multiple jurisdictions and levels of governance to advance common goals and an explicit public purpose. Such agreements establish a set of common objectives, rules, practices and means for their implementation (Andonova, 2017). Transnational partnerships are furthermore very diverse, encompassing both large institutionalized initiatives such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, as well as more localized projects deploying a variable mix of governance instruments in response to problems with

transnational dimensions. Partnerships have been formally recognized for the first time at the level of the United Nations (UN) at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) (Andonova & Levy 2003). More recently, the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly framed partnerships as key means of implementation of the global sustainable development agenda.

Over the last two decades, transnational partnerships have thus become ubiquitous mechanisms in development cooperation and sustainability governance, engaging new constellations of actors around issues such as natural resource management, health, energy, agriculture, biodiversity, climate change, and education (Andonova, 2017; Bäckstrand, 2006; Faul, 2014; Pattberg et al., 2012). They are a part of an increasingly thick layer of transnational voluntary governance with variable modalities, which include also transnational private regulations such as certification of global commodity chains or carbon offsets, as well as transnational networks of public actors such as cities, regions and specialized agencies (Hale, 2020). This article focuses specifically on

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public–private partnerships as a modality of transnational governance that has common features with, but is distinctive from transnational private regulations or transnational public networks (Andonova, 2010; Bulkeley et al., 2014). Significantly, transnational public–private partnerships involve direct agreements between a variety of state- and non-state actors and hence an active articulation of public purpose and private practice, as well as varying degrees of hybridization of authority.<sup>1</sup>

The existing literature has contributed greatly to illuminating the politics, incentives and discourses that have shaped the increasing reliance on partnerships as mechanisms of international and transnational governance over the last two decades. There is strong focus on the aggregate level of analysis, exploring the varying degree of participation, clustering and diffusion of partnership governance, and the nature of its instruments and authority.<sup>2</sup> However, relatively less theoretical and empirical attention has been attributed to disentangling the domestic effects of partnerships and particularly to the role that domestic institutions play in mediating their distributional and sustainability impacts. For example, studies of partnership effectiveness have sought to classify their activities against stated goals and implied governance functions (Pattberg et al., 2012, Pattberg & Widerberg 2016), or to rely on comparative meta-analyses of partnership initiatives (Beisheim & Liese, 2014). Research that explores the domestic effects has tended to focus on the role that partnerships play in providing services in areas of limited statehood, or otherwise filling the gaps left by a weak public sector (Beisheim et al., 2014; Liese et al., 2014; Schäferhoff, 2014). This stands in contrast with the literature on private market-based regulations, another transnational governance modality, which has emphasized the interplay between transnational regulation and domestic institutions.<sup>3</sup> This difference reflects the fact that by their very nature, transnational certifications and standards typically carry out significant regulatory and standard-setting functions that complement (or sometimes supplant) the role of national laws and policy, making the linkage between transnational and domestic governance more evident. For their part, partnerships more rarely engage in rule-setting activities, and their domestic effects are likely to occur through different channels of political and institutional interface (Andonova, 2017; Bulkeley et al., 2014; Westerwinter, 2019).

This paper seeks to advance the literature on transnational partnerships by focusing on their interplay with domestic institutions and exploring how such interplay may open new avenues for addressing sustainable development issues, while inadvertently or deliberately foreclosing others. We argue that domestic institutions mediate in important ways the distributional and sustainable development effects that partnerships produce on the domestic plane. Sustainability is broadly understood here, following Matson et al. (2016, p. 14), as “inclusive social well-being [which] does not decline over multiple generations,” and which critically depends on the integrative and long-term management of natural, social, manufactured, human and knowledge capital.

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter the terms ‘partnerships’ and ‘transnational partnerships’ are used as a shorthand and interchangeably with ‘transnational public–private partnerships.’ By transnational we mean partnerships that involve actors and/or activities across national borders which typically pursue objectives with both domestic and global implications. We thus do not focus on domestic infrastructure partnerships, which involve a specific contractual relation between the public sector and private entities, typically through subcontracting of functions and services. We recognize that other definitions and terms (such as multistakeholder partnerships and cross-sector partnerships) are also used across different disciplinary and policy fields to capture the different constellations of actors that constitute governance through partnerships.

<sup>2</sup> See among others Andonova, 2017; Bäckstrand, 2006; Beisheim & Liese, 2014; Biermann & Pattberg, 2012; Faul, 2014; Reinsberg & Westerwinter, 2021; Mert, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> See among others Cashore et al., 2021; Bartley, 2014; Ponte, 2008; Eberlein et al., 2014; Grabs, 2020; Sun 2022.

Our analysis engages with three strands of academic literature. First, we draw on the insights provided by the literature on transnational private regulation, which has more readily discussed questions of regulatory interplay between the public and market-based regulatory spheres. Conceptually we also build on the work of Robert H. Bates, whose scholarship is honored in this special issue, and which is particularly relevant because of its strong theoretical focus on domestic institutions as arbiters of the distributional effects of transnational forces in economies open to global markets. The research of R.H. Bates highlights the politics of interplay between transnational markets and domestic institutions, and the resulting outcomes for different constituencies and development at large (Bates, 1981, 1997, 2017; Bates & Block, 2013).<sup>4</sup> Finally, the paper seeks to contribute to the literature on transnational public–private partnerships by offering a more differentiated understanding of partnership effectiveness and examining how partnerships interact with domestic institutions to produce variable political and sustainable development effects across actors, planes of governance, and sustainability problems.

Our argument stipulates that the interplay between transnational partnerships and domestic institutions shapes the nature and distribution of partnership effects for sustainable development in three important ways. First, transnational partnerships can influence the capacity of domestic institutions through inflow of resources, which in turn can support (often differentially) specific sustainable development objectives, and more generally enhance the capacity for experimentation, innovation and investment as a condition for pursuing sustainable development (Haas et al., 1993; Clark & Harley, 2020). Second, engagement with transnational partnerships and the resources they mobilize is likely to affect the relative political position of domestic institutions across levels of governance, with implications for their policies and for the distributive effects of partnerships across constituencies. Third, domestic institutions also embody the agency of political actors (Bates, 2014), which can act strategically as arbiters of partnership influence by steering their focus towards some sustainability issues, while politically shielding others. The institutional effects that we examine are thus likely to be highly political, with uneven implications for affected institutions and segments of society. The understanding of institutional interplay is therefore important for providing new conceptual insight and empirical evidence with respect to critical debates on partnerships that center precisely around their distributional aspects and anticipated effects on domestic institutions, constituencies and accountability (Buse & Harmer, 2004; Utting & Zammit, 2009; Bäckstrand, 2006; Bexell & Mörth, 2010).

The paper proceeds to examine the effects of transnational partnerships through their interplay with domestic institutions in the case of Brazil and the Amazon Region Protected Areas (ARPA) partnership. Section 2 situates our conceptual approach with respect to existing literature on the effectiveness of public–private partnerships, transnational regulation more broadly and its interplay with domestic institutions. We further specify our key concepts, effectiveness and institutions, and elaborate our conceptual argument on the ways in which institutional interactions are expected to shape the domestic effects of transnational partnerships and their variable distribution. Section 3 provides the rationale for our empirical focus on Brazil and the ARPA partnership, and summarizes the research methodology. Sections 4–6 examine empirically how domestic institutions have mediated key political and sustainability effects of the ARPA partnership in Brazil. The conclusion

<sup>4</sup> Further on open economy politics, domestic institutions and development effects see Bruszt and McDermott, 2014; Katzenstein, 1985; Hall & Lamont, 2013; Chaudoin et al., 2014.

draws implications for understanding the prospects and limitations of transnational partnerships for advancing sustainable development, particularly in an increasingly volatile global context.

## 2. A conceptual framework on transnational partnerships and domestic institutions

### 2.1. Current perspectives on the domestic effects of transnational governance

Providing a systematic understanding of the effectiveness of transnational public–private partnerships in advancing sustainable development remains challenging. On the one hand, the notion of partnership is intrinsically diverse, capturing a wide range of governance arrangements that operate at various scales, often with vast differences in terms of data availability and quality. On the other hand, the concept of partnership effectiveness itself continues to be debated, mirroring the variety of formulations that have been used to describe the effectiveness of international environmental regimes more broadly (Haas et al. 1993; Young, 2011).

Two sets of methodologies have made important contributions towards increasing our understanding of the effectiveness of transnational partnerships more specifically. In an important volume, Pattberg et al. (2012) develop a quantitative approach to assess the extent to which the partnerships registered at the 2002 WSSD meeting have the instruments, resources, and activities that would make them fit to achieve their stated objectives and functions. The fit-to-function methodology has been extended to large-*n* samples of public–private partnerships but also transnational climate initiatives more broadly (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2016; Chan et al., 2016), revealing important limitations of fit and implementation for a substantial share of initiatives. Another approach to partnership effectiveness applies an extended impact evaluation framework to document the inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts of partnerships (Beisheim & Liese, 2014; Stadtler, 2016; Szulecki et al. 2011), as well as possible feedback loops (van Tulder et al., 2016), providing an aggregate assessment of actual outcomes. These contributions have offered comparable methodologies and generated new insights in the early decades of partnership governance.

However, for the purposes of our inquiry, such aggregate approaches are less suited for understanding the on-the-ground and more distributed effects of partnerships for sustainable development. They furthermore present important limitations for examining not only direct partnerships outcomes, but also the second-order effects or potential long-term impacts with differential implications for societies and sustainable development (Young & Levy, 1999; van der Ven et al., 2017). Such effects, as we shall argue, are embedded in domestic political conditions and depend in a number of ways on the interface between partnership activities and domestic institutions. The work of Beisheim et al. (2014), Liese et al. (2014), and Schäferhoff (2014) have offered a more grounded perspective by examining the effectiveness of partnerships in “areas of limited statehood.”<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the very assumption of “limited statehood” and the selection of country cases presupposes a circumscribed view of state institutions and anticipates a compensatory or substitution effect produced by partnerships in the provision of services (Beisheim et al., 2014). Some of these studies do find that even a small variation in domestic institutional capacity can be an important factor for partnerships

effectiveness. However, to our knowledge, the literature on transnational public–private partnerships is still short on providing a broader conceptualization of their interplay with domestic institutions in shaping their effects at the national and local levels.

At the same time, research on transnational governance more broadly has challenged the notion of a retreating state as market and civil society actors engage in voluntary action around the social and environmental consequences of globalization (Andonova, 2014; Grabs, 2020; Joviani Astari & Lovett, 2019; Prakash and Potoski, 2006). Instead, studies have illuminated how state-based institutions can empower or disempower different actors and affect their ability to influence the nature of transnational private regulation (Büthe & Mattli, 2011; Green, 2014). A wide-range of conditions shaped by domestic institutions, such as state capacity and policies, democratic governance, and advocacy organizations, have in turn conditioned the variable participation of actors in transnational governance and the adoption transnational private regulations (Andonova et al. 2017; Andonova & Sun, 2019; Bartley 2014; Eberlein et al., 2014; Gulbrandsen, 2014; Berliner & Prakash, 2014; Espach, 2006). Scholars speak of the ‘layering of public and private rules’ (Bartley, 2011), the ‘assembling’ of governance fields out of transnational and state-centred modalities (Bruszt & McDermott, 2014), and the emergence of complex interactions between public and private institutions across levels of governance (Grabs, 2020; Eberlein et al., 2014; Gulbrandsen, 2014; Abbott et al., 2016).

Research on private regulations more specifically has illuminated how domestic institutions influence their adoption and on-the-ground effectiveness. Distelhorst et al. (2015), for example, find that local institutions such as dispute mediation and functioning courts lead to greater compliance with transnational labour rules. Furthermore, a host of institutional features such as institutional capacity, government policy, local political economy interactions, or the strength of advocacy organizations have shaped the variable outcomes of market-based certification of commodities such as timber, palm oil and coffee, among others (Bartley, 2014; Espach, 2006; Schleifer & Sun, 2018; Shin et al. 2017; Sun, 2022; van der Ven et al. 2022). A study by Grabs (2020) illustrates how services provided by public institutions, such as extension services and technical assistance, support producers’ capacity to implement coffee certification requirements, while in contexts with fewer pre-existing rules there is less duplication and greater additionality. This complexity of institutional interactions lead the study to conclude that the effectiveness of market-driven regulations is highly contingent on their embeddedness “into a pre-existing, complex web of domestic institutions.” (p. 246). In summary, a significant range of cases that examine the adoption of private certification have demonstrated that their developmental and distributional effects reflect not simply transnational market incentives, but significantly, the interactions with different aspects of local political economies and institutions (Berliner & Prakash, 2014; Ponte, 2008; Richey & Ponte, 2020; Sun, 2022). This paper seeks to take the study of transnational partnerships in a similar direction by conceptualizing the role of domestic institutions in mediating the effectiveness of transnational public–private partnerships, and examining empirically this interplay in a specific political and institutional context.

### 2.2. Conceptualising the role of institutional interplay in shaping partnership effects

This study seeks to contribute to the literature on transnational partnerships in two main ways. To begin with, we are interested in investigating the *variety of effects* (both intended and second-order effects) that a partnership produces in a given context, as well their distributive implications, rather than developing an aggregated

<sup>5</sup> Building on Risse (2005), areas with limited statehood are defined in Liese, Janetschek & Sarre (2014, p.131) as areas that “display limitations in (1) the ability to rule authoritatively. . . and/or (2) in the state monopoly on the use of force.”



measure of effectiveness. We thus adopt a conceptualization of effectiveness as the *contribution* of partnerships to addressing sustainable development problems, through a set of intermediate outcomes that influence actors, their behaviour, and their capacity to advance collective action (Andonova et al., 2022). This definition is both broader and more disaggregated, compared to measures of input-output-outcome-impact with respect to attainment of partnership goals. As elaborated by Andonova et al. (2022), such an approach allows us to consider the distribution of different types of effects produced by partnerships. These can include the attainment of partnership goals, but also impacts on the capacity of domestic institutions, as well as the direct or indirect environmental and socio-economic benefits or costs that partnerships create at the local level (Andonova et al. 2022; Haas et al., 1993; van der Ven et al. 2017; Young, 2011; Young & Levy, 1999). In addition, the approach of this article recognizes that partnerships typically focus on relatively narrow aspects of larger environment and development problems, and hence they may be contributing (or not) to problem-solving as part of a broader sphere of transnational, inter-governmental and domestic initiatives in which they are embedded. Hence, our empirical focus here is on the different types of effects and impacts produced by a partnership in interaction with domestic institutions,<sup>6</sup> and the variable distribution of such effects with implications for sustainable development.

Furthermore, our contribution to the literature on partnership governance seeks to bring in a stronger conceptual focus on domestic institutions and their roles in mediating the effectiveness of transnational partnerships. Following Douglas North (1991, p. 97) institutions are understood as "...humanly-devised constraints that structure political, social or economic interactions" that could be both formal and informal. In our analysis of institutional interactions, we draw on the insights of the literature on private regulation discussed earlier. In addition, we focus more specifically on political institutions, extending the insight of the work of Robert H. Bates (1981, 1997, 2006), which highlights how the politics embedded in domestic institutions profoundly shape the development effects of transnational forces such as global markets, and the distribution of benefits and risks across sections of society. Moreover, as Bates (2014) clarifies, political institutions both structure relations in a polity and channel the political agency and power of politicians. Drawing on such understandings of political institutions, we identify three general ways in which the politics of institutional interplay can produce a set of varied and unequally distributed effects of transnational partnerships.

First, transnational partnerships can build domestic institutional capacity and claim governance functions through the leveraging of resources across partners. An increase in institutional capacity may include, *inter alia*: (i) the possibility for environmental administrators to access new financial instruments (e.g. trust funds, development bonds) and skills (e.g. through new resource management approaches, collaboration with experts through transnational networks); (ii) the deployment of specific technical capacities and technologies (e.g. new software, management tools, verification and monitoring systems); (iii) the availability of additional resources to strengthen staffing, training, or project implementation; (iv) greater normative legitimation and political capital at domestic or international levels.<sup>7</sup> Historically, limitations in institutional and financial capacity have been among

the main barriers to effective environmental governance and sustainability (Clark & Harley, 2020; Dietz et al. 2003; Haas et al., 1993; Weiss & Jacobson, 1998; Young, 2011). The capacity-strengthening impact of partnerships is therefore expected to be a key determinant of their overall effectiveness (Beisheim & Liese, 2014; Schäferhoff, 2014; Espach, 2006; Schleifer & Sun, 2018). However, critical questions remain, as studies have shown that an important share of partnerships announced at large global forums have failed to commit necessary resources (Pattberg et al., 2012). In other words, the variable effect of transnational partnerships on institutional capacities needs to be examined rather than assumed, as a key mediating factor for advancing sustainable development.

Second, transnational partnerships and networks can increase the political leverage of participating domestic institutions and in this way generate differential political and distributional effects (Bates, 2006; Bates & Block, 2013). Through access to resources, information and legitimation, transnational networks can bestow participating institutions with additional autonomy and power to advance policy agendas selectively, and potentially closer in line with the interests of transnational actors than with those of domestic constituencies (Utting & Zammit, 2009). Moreover, studies of transnational governance have revealed a tendency of skewed participation in favor of actors with pre-existing power and resources, compared to those that are disadvantaged economically and politically, even if the latter may be the intended beneficiaries of such arrangements (Bulkeley et al., 2014; Bäckstrand, 2006; Buse & Harmer, 2004). Partnerships create new lines of accountability to donors and transnational actors (Burci, 2009), which may further shape the political positions of domestic partner institutions, possibly weakening accountability to the public at large.

The political and distributional effects of partnerships may also vary across layers of domestic institutions, with different implications for urban-rural biases in policy implementation (Bates, 1981), and the empowerment or disempowerment of institutions and their constituencies at the national, regional and local level (Bates, 2006). Critical concerns have been raised for instance that the implementation of REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) projects in biodiversity-rich developing countries would potentially shift power towards government institutions as key interlocutors of transnational donors. Such a shift can further marginalize the authority and rights of indigenous communities in the management of forestry resources (Peskett et al., 2008; Phelps et al., 2010). In a similar vein, Richey and Ponte (2020, p. 2) show that transnational 'brand-aid' partnerships between corporations, celebrities and governments, provide "limited and mainly short-term benefits to beneficiaries...on the ground," compared to the corporation and its development partners.

Finally, we argue that domestic institutions are the main conduits through which governments and politicians can actively arbitrate the direction of transnational public-private partnerships influence and the kind of effects they produce. In this sense, institutions do not only structure the relations between transnational partnerships and different constituencies, they are also a site of political agency. As Bates (2014) points out, "politicians create institutions; they determine how [their] power is employed and how, therefore, institutions will behave" (p. 62). Our analysis therefore reverses the lenses to examine not only the effects of transnational partnerships on domestic capacity and distributive effects, but also how government institutions engage with transnational partnerships to circumscribe their influence to some areas of sustainability, while politically shielding other dimensions of environmental problems and domestic political economies.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout our empirical analysis, we use the terms 'effects' and 'impacts' interchangeably, recognizing that the term 'impact' typically has a stronger directional connotation with respect to a specific actor and process. Both terms have more concrete and narrow meaning that can be associated with specific activities and evidence, compared to a more cumulative assessment of overall effectiveness (see Gutner & Thompson, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> See for example Andonova, 2014, 2018; Atun et al., 2016; Faul, 2014. For a critical account, see Romero, 2017.

### 3. Case study selection and methods

Brazil presents an important site to examine empirically how the interplay between domestic institutions and transnational partnerships shapes partnership effects in sustainable development governance for several reasons. First, the country has experienced a long history of international and transnational engagement with domestic environmental policy agendas. Brazil hosts roughly 60 percent of the Amazon biome, which harbors the world's largest tropical forest and significant species diversity (by some estimates, around 10% of all known species, and probably a large proportion of yet undiscovered ones) (Lewinsohn & Prado, 2005). It also includes a large number of other ecosystems, from floodplains to savannah (Salati et al., 2012). As a result, the protection of the Brazilian Amazon has progressively emerged as a prominent agenda item in intergovernmental negotiations and subject of transnational governance initiatives such as public-private partnerships (Andonova, 2014; Hecht, 2011, 2012; Hochstetler & Keck, 2007; Kok, 1998). Thus, it presents a substantively important case for scrutinizing the domestic institutional impact of transnational partnerships.

Second, over the last three decades domestic institutions and policies related to the Amazon biome and issues such as deforestation, biodiversity and climate change have evolved considerably (Hochstetler & Keck, 2007). Through much of the 1980s and 1990s, the Brazilian Amazon became a theatre of contestation, and at times, open conflict and violence surrounding issues of land use and tenure, deforestation, and the rights of local and indigenous populations. Transnational networks that intervened took the shape of advocacy coalitions, linking global non-governmental organizations with local actors such as rubber tapper unions and environmental activists to spearhead the politics of attention (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Hecht, 2011).

Since the 1990s, successive governments of Brazil have adopted measure to strengthened its environmental bureaucracy. These have included the creation of government institutions such as the Federal Ministry for Environment, implementing agencies such as the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Natural Resources (IBAMA, established in 1989) and the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMbio), and the development of a national system of protected areas (SNUC) which assigns an important role to federal states and municipalities. The country is also a site of active civil society organizations working on the nexus between environmental and social issues. The political relevance assumed by these movements in Brazil is aptly illustrated by the appointment of Marina Silva, a close associate of Chico Mendes as Minister of the Environment in 2003–2007 (Hochstetler & Keck, 2007). However, such changes in institutional structures have evolved amidst the politics of continued contestation and competing agendas of different political factions, which inevitably shaped policy outcomes.

In international fora, the Brazilian government has maintained strong sovereignty claims over the management of the country's natural resources and biodiversity (Allan and Dauvergne, 2013). At the same time, governmental policies and deforestation rates have change significantly since the late 1990s, reflecting a complex political economy of resource exploitation to supply global commodity chains as well as what Hecht (2012) describes as "multiplicities...of political ecologies, policies, politics, scientific approaches and technologies that have moderated forest conversion and shaped Amazonia's...development and conservation conjunctures."(p. 4). The period from 2004 to approximately 2014 marked a significant overall decrease in deforestation rates, subsequently giving way to a moderate upsurge (Müller 2020), and more recently to reports of a significant rise after President Jair Bolsonaro took office in 2019 (Hecht, 2020; Silva Junior et al., 2021).

In other words, Brazil's evolving experience in addressing deforestation exemplifies the significance of domestic political institutions in shaping sustainable development trajectories. As opposed to cases of partnerships operating in areas of limited statehood and weak domestic capacity, Brazil thus constitutes an ideal setting to explore the interface of transnational partnerships and the domestic politics (Bates, 1997, 2014) in attempting to reform institutions and advance policies for the protection and more sustainable management of the Amazon.

The focus on the ARPA partnership in turn is justified by its relatively long history and broad scope, which allow us to examine its interaction with domestic institutions and the variation in effects produced over time and across institutional domains, constituencies, and sustainable development issues. ARPA was announced at the 2002 WSSD meeting as a joint initiative of the Brazilian government, the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and the Government of Germany (ARPA, 2014).<sup>8</sup> It was facilitated at the highest political level by the then-President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the Executive Director of WWF International, Claude Martin, and the World Bank President James Wolfensohn and reflected growing political incentives to find an institutional response to a decade of rising Amazon deforestation in Brazil (Martin, 2015). The partnership announced an overarching target of the conservation and sustainable management of some 10% of the Brazilian Amazon, subsequently increased to 15%, covering 60 million hectares of rainforest, across 117 protected areas (ARPA, 2018). Over two decades, and several changes in political leadership, ARPA's implementation has required the direct involvement of a plurality of Brazilian institutions at different levels of governance.

Overall, our case selection serves as a plausibility probe to generate new descriptive inference and investigate the importance of institutional interplay for partnership effectiveness and its distributional implications in a particular political setting.<sup>9</sup> Like previous studies of transnational certification (e.g. Bartley, 2010; Ponte, 2008), the focus on a specific country does not undermine the relevance of our findings, but rather shows how the analysis that is specific to local conditions is critical to understanding how transnational partnerships are implemented on the ground in different contexts.

For the purposes of the empirical analysis, our team conducted 11 semi-structured interviews in Brazil (in Portuguese and English) in 2019 with representatives of government institutions, transnational NGOs, domestic civil society organizations, regional authorities and representatives of international organizations and the private sector. The fieldwork was conducted in São Paulo, Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro, and Manaus (state of Amazonas). Additional informal interviews and personal communications with Brazilian and international experts, including with founding members of ARPA, were conducted in Geneva in 2018 and 2019, and as part of an earlier project on the rise of public-private partnerships in global governance. In addition, the analysis draws on extensive documentary research of primary and secondary sources. These include official partnership documents, reports of the Federal Ministry of the Environment of Brazil, project appraisal documents, reports by partner

<sup>8</sup> As of 2019, the public and private actors involved in the third phase of the partnership (also known as ARPA for Life) include, among others, the Brazilian Federal and State governments, the World Bank and the GEF, WWF, the government of Germany and the German Development Bank (KfW), the Inter-American Development Bank, the Amazon Fund, companies including Anglo-American, Natura and O Boticário, and foundations such as the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the Linden Trust for Conservation, the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation, the Bobolink Foundation, and the Roger and Vicki Sant Charitable Trust.

<sup>9</sup> For further justification of the case study approach to generate descriptive inference and analysis of mechanisms through which certain effects materialize see Bates et al., 1999; Lijphart, 1971; Matson et al., 2016; King et al., 1994; George & Bennett, 2005; van der Ven et al. 2017.

organisations such as the WWF, the Brazilian Biodiversity Fund (Funbio), the World Bank/Global Environment Facility (GEF), and newspaper articles available online.

While focusing on a partnership with a long history of implementation enables us to examine how domestic institutions mediate its effects, it also presents certain limitations. Specifically, ARPA is representative of a universe of partnerships that are actually implemented, and whose effectiveness can be scrutinized. However, this should not mask the fact that some partnerships announced at high-level platforms may never muster sufficient resources or commitment from partners for actual implementation (Pattberg et al., 2012). In this sense, our study highlights one important aspect of the larger problematique of partnership effectiveness. Moreover, we recognize that ARPA operates amongst a wider network of national, subnational and transnational initiatives in the Amazon (Hecht, 2012). While our analysis focuses on the specific environmental and distributional effects that can be attributed to this initiative, further research would be necessary to disentangle the differential and cumulative aspects of effectiveness of the broader network of transnational governance in the region. The following three sections examine how the interplay between domestic institutions and ARPA has unfolded, and how it mediates different dimensions of partnership effectiveness.

#### 4. Transnational resources and institutional capacity

The creation of ARPA and the deliberate structuring of its financing instruments illustrate aptly the significance of institutional interplay. In this particular instance, such structuring represented both a pre-condition for the creation of ARPA and a key institutional design feature of the partnership, exerting significant effects on domestic capacity for biodiversity conservation.

Despite Brazil's traditional stance on sovereignty over the Brazilian Amazon, the government progressively developed a new strategy on biodiversity protection during the 1990s, including in cooperation with international agencies such as the World Bank, the GEF and bilateral donors. By the turn of the 21st century, one of the main political motivations for government institutions to engage in ARPA was the climbing rate of deforestation and "demand for rapid response" at both the domestic and international level.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the government was facing a significant problem in "mobilizing public spending for the environment," since the Federal Government had adopted, in 1993, Law 8666 that tied procurement for public spending to approval by the Brazilian Congress, which was highly politicized on questions of development and deforestation.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the WWF was developing a new multi-program for biodiversity conservation and limiting tropical deforestation, which included a financing model that would later be referred to as Project Finance for Permanence (WWF, 2015). It was a part of WWF's new repertoire of activities targeting land-use and expansion of protected areas, in parallel to intervening in global commodity markets with certification initiatives.<sup>12</sup> The World Bank, in turn, was actively seeking to expand its environmental portfolio in response to environmentalist and anti-globalization pressures (Brown & Fox, 1998; Gutner, 2005). In a number of ways, the creation of ARPA therefore responded to both prior institutional developments in Brazil and its collaborations with international actors, seeking to address specific financial and political constraints that the Brazilian environmental administration was facing.

The first important effect of the ARPA partnership reflected rather directly the political and environmental objectives of government institutions and WWF as core partners, to increase the capacity for conservation activities. This involved the creation of the *Protected Areas Trust Fund*, which was set up as a permanent endowment fund to receive and manage grants and other funding from donors, outside the traditional top-down channels of development assistance (Fig. 1). This institutional innovation served to increase domestic capacity and, to some extent, to insulate conservation and sustainable development finance from domestic budgetary politics.<sup>13</sup> Funbio, the Brazilian fund created in 1993 as a non-governmental entity for hybrid public and private environmental financing, became ARPA's overall manager of grant resources, including through the *Protected Areas Trust Fund* and the appointment of an Asset Manager tasked with developing and executing an investment strategy. It followed a permanent capitalization process, whereby only the return of the capital invested were used, while the principal remained intact in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of investments and conservation resources. From the beginning, Funbio was also tasked with the financial monitoring of ARPA, and with reviewing, coordinating, approving and executing requests by ARPA protected area managers to procure all the goods (e.g. vehicles and computers) and services (e.g. elaboration of management plans, surveillance and inspection actions) for the implementation and operation of protected areas (see Fig. 1 on the structure of ARPA). For this purpose, it developed financial control and management systems, including a series of special blocked accounts to permit direct allocation and monitoring of resources to specific protected areas.<sup>14</sup>

Through a new set of financial, disbursement and monitoring mechanisms ARPA produced an important institutional effect in terms of strengthening domestic capacity for Amazon conservation and establishing intricate institutional mechanisms to lock-in commitments and resources. This was reflected in the flexibility of ARPA's financial mechanisms and the tools developed by Funbio ensured that unforeseen budget shortfalls could be dealt efficiently, for instance through the reallocation of residual resources under certain projects components to other components, based on the specific grant agreements concluded with the donors (World Bank, 2018, pp.12–13). Moreover, the sophisticated institutional and financial structure of the ARPA partnership deliberately sought to address a set of capacity and political constraints through greater financial independence and improved the transparency of resource management. The collaboration between ARPA and environmental administration in Brazil in effect helped to move environmental policy in Brazil towards a new institutional equilibrium in the 2000s as, theoretical approaches on institutions would highlight (Bates, 1997, 2014), by significantly increased resources for protected areas and creating forward-looking institutional mechanisms for environmental financing. This type of institutional design was deemed essential for the effective implementation of the partnership objectives and its long-term sustainability.<sup>15</sup>

In turn, the stronger financial and institutional capacity produced distinctive political ripple effects. In particular, they reinforced the domestic ownership of ARPA, enabling a renewed commitment under Phase II of the partnership (2010–2015) despite a context of political change represented by the election of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2003 (ARPA, 2014). Phase III of ARPA

<sup>13</sup> Interview with senior staff of WWF-Brazil, Brasilia, March 2019.

<sup>14</sup> This mechanism is known as *conta vinculada* and was introduced as part of the ARPA structure in 2005 to ensure a faster and decentralized access by protected area managers to the fund needed to implement their annual plans.

<sup>15</sup> Presentation and discussion by former Executive Director for Conservation, WWF International, Geneva, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with former senior staff of WWF-Brazil, São Paulo, February 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Martin, 2015.



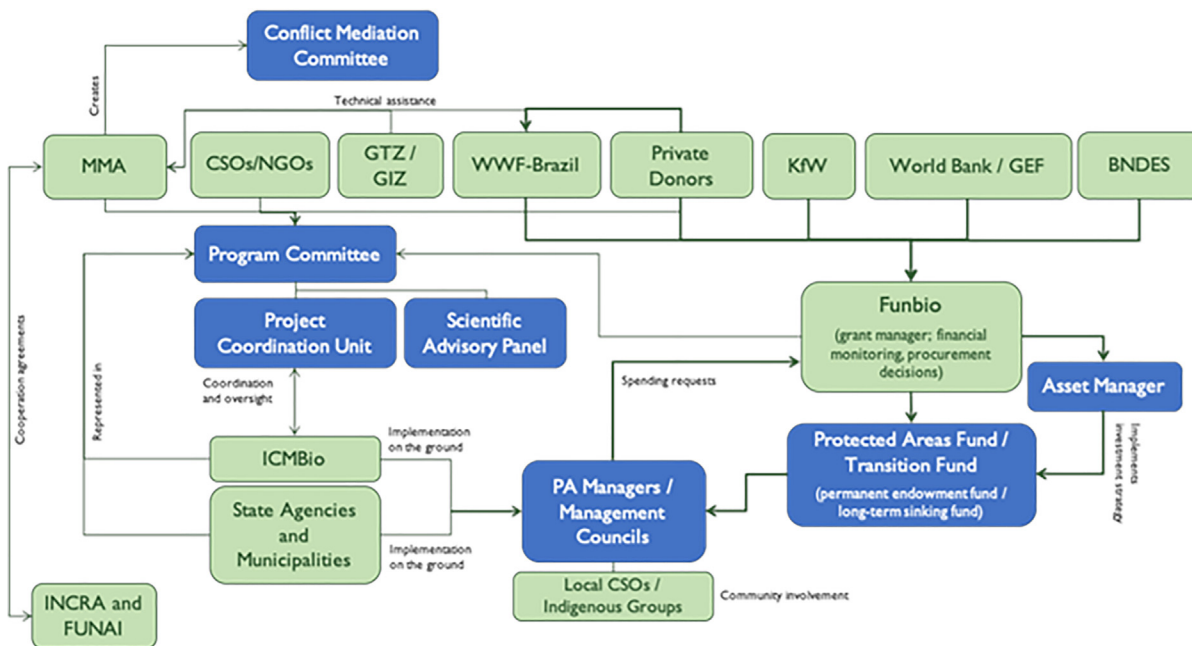


Fig. 1. Structure and governance of the ARPA partnership. Source: authors, based on cited project documents and reports from ARPA, World Bank, and WWF.

was subsequently launched in 2014 with a significantly longer timeframe (2014–2039). The creation of a new *Transition Fund*, to which the balance of the *Protected Areas Trust Fund* was transferred, essentially seeks to consolidate a more permanent institutionalization of ARPA in Brazil, in that it is a long-term *sinking* fund meant to guarantee sufficient resources to cover the recurring costs of project activities until 2039, when a transition to full government funding is expected to take place.

The most direct result of Brazil's stronger institutional capacity, facilitated by ARPA and the direct engagement of domestic institutions, is undoubtedly the mobilization of a financial stream for conservation and sustainable development in the Brazilian Amazon, which is of unprecedented scope and scale. Fig. 2 presents the main public and private contributions to ARPA and total funding, which in Phase I amounted to around USD115mn (ARPA, 2014, p.16), USD 89mn in phase II (IEG Review Team, 2018, pp. 2-3), and the contributions to the *Transition Fund* for Phase III estimated at roughly USD 215mn (2018). These include significant contributions from the Government of Brazil, the Brazilian Development Bank, the German Development Bank, WWF International, the World Bank and the GEF, and several private donors, among others.

Elaborated by authors based on information from IEG Review Team, 2018; WWF, 2018, and ARPA (2014).

Fig. 2 captures a tendency that is highly characteristic for a class of large-scale transnational partnerships that leverage large inflows of multilateral, public, and private financing to target specific sustainable development issues (Andonova, 2017, 2018). Such vertical or targeted approach has raised controversies in global health, for example, with critics questioning the extent to which it detracts from the overall capacity of health systems or sidelines significant health problems that are not high on donors' radar screens (Storeng, 2014; Held et al., 2019). So far, similar concerns have been less forcefully raised for environmental issues, partly because shortages in financing have been a significant and recurrent barrier to pursuing sustainability.

In the case of ARPA, the capacity-building effects were closely intertwined with domestic institutions and policies at the federal level, but also within third-sector financial institutions such as Funbio and administrative entities such as ICMbio. Importantly,

the use of resources for ARPA also overlapped with pre-existing efforts in the area of biodiversity conservation in the Amazon biome, as these efforts provided an important baseline on which the partnership activities built (World Bank, 2002). One interviewee summarized the significance of this institutional interplay and the role of ARPA as a catalyzer rather than sole driver of stronger institutional change as follows: "We think of ARPA as sometimes cause and sometimes consequence of the [Amazon protection] moment Brazil went through in the 2000s."<sup>16</sup> The next section probes further the distribution of the variable effects of such institutional interplay and targeted influx of resources.

### 5. Institutional interactions and distributional effects

By leveraging new types of resources and increasing the domestic salience of the biodiversity conservation agenda, the ARPA partnership has affected not only the capacity but also the political position of domestic institutions for environmental protection. However, the institutional and political dividends of ARPA have varied considerably across the national, regional and local levels, thus affecting the politics of sustainable development in profound ways.

At the national and state levels, the Brazilian federal agencies and regional environmental agencies can be considered the primary beneficiaries of ARPA implementation. On the one hand, ARPA channeled much-needed transnational financing towards Brazil's national conservation objectives and supported the creation of income-generating activities and other economic incentives to maintain protected areas over the long term. On the other hand, it also built managerial capabilities and legal frameworks for protected areas, while contributing at the same time to the strengthening of political constituencies around the objective of biodiversity conservation and extension of protected areas (GEF, 1998). ARPA therefore provided key support to the Brazilian government's policies and legislative objectives related to the protection of the Amazon rainforest, particularly those related to

<sup>16</sup> Interview with senior staff of WWF-Brazil, Brasilia, March 2019.

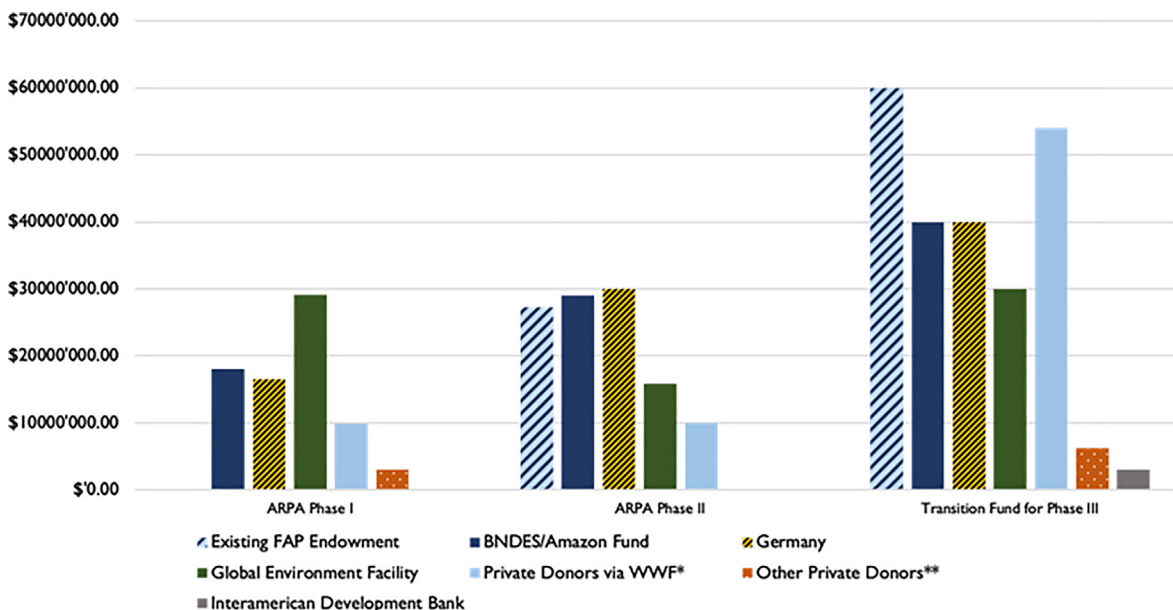


Fig. 2. ARPA financing by phase of implementation, pledges executed until 2017. \* Includes Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, Roger and Vicky Sant Trust, Margaret A. Cargill Foundation, Bobolink Foundation, Linden Trust, among others. \*\* Includes Anglo-American, O’Boticario, Natura Foundation. Source: authors, based on cited project documents and reports from ARPA, World Bank, and WWF

biodiversity, ecosystem services, and contribution to reduced greenhouse gas emissions (ARPA, 2012b). In 2004, the government launched a broad Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Deforestation in the Amazon (PPCDAm), which coordinated several ministries to improve territorial planning and deploy satellite monitoring and data analysis to support sustainable use activities in the Brazilian Amazon (West & Fearnside, 2021). The scale of PPCDAm speaks of policy reinforcement through institutional interplay, as ARPA was both embedded in the program and contributed to its successful implementation.<sup>17</sup> It also reflected the strengthening and contribution of scientific institutions in Brazil and intermediation of civil society organization.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, PPCDAm aimed to provide an international demonstration of Brazil’s commitment to effectively reduce (and verify) emissions from deforestation. Together with the Amazon Fund (created in 2008) it later served as a basis for the country’s participation in REDD+ (Marcovitch & Pinsky, 2014).

The interface between federal agencies such as the Ministry of the Environment, the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) and ARPA took place at the very highest level and was seen as politically essential. Interview respondents associated with federal agencies several times referred to ARPA as part of “Brazilian public policy,”<sup>19</sup> arguing that it strengthened the position of environmental agencies and shifted the policy discourse away from a previous baseline in which “it was impossible to speak about deforestation targets.”<sup>20</sup> The partnership was promoted as a component of the country’s international commitments as part of the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNDP, 2016; 2016). This layering of international commitments and transnational action has helped domestic environmental agencies and the government to legitimate ambitious land use monitoring programs (Hecht, 2012) and take on a prominent position at

the international level (West & Fearnside, 2021; Allan & Dauvergne, 2013; Marcovitch & Pinsky, 2014).

At the same time, domestic institutional capacity has also mediated ARPA’s effects in a limiting sense. According to the World Bank’s implementation reports, during ARPA’s Phase I there were some problems in public procurement procedures and delays in staffing and disbursement of agreed-on matching funds for protected areas, and the absence of a supportive personnel policy within the Ministry of the Environment, Funbio and the ICMBio at times was found to created problems of high turnover and attrition rates (World Bank, 2009). Moreover, the political support for environmental protection in Brazil significantly changed after the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016. As a consequence, not only has the rate of creation of new protected areas in the Brazilian Amazon plunged since 2017 (WWF, 2017a), but deforestation rates started to rise and the relationship between WWF and the Brazilian government became increasingly confrontational (WWF, 2017a; 2018). More recent changes in the political context in Brazil, following the election of President Jair Bolsonaro, are likely to further test the durability of initiatives such as ARPA and their environmental and institutional dividends, a topic on which we elaborate later on.

At another level, ARPA is credited with strengthening the protected areas system of the Brazilian Amazon biome by, *inter alia*, bringing together institutions operating at different scales and facilitating greater coordination between civil servants, the regional protected area administrations and local community leaders, in addition to the mobilization of unprecedented amounts of financing. However, the strong leaning towards a conservationist agenda and working with federal agencies in the original design of the partnership was contested by domestic civil society organizations and by states, as privileging the national administration and potentially undermining support for sustainable use activities at the state- and community-level. It took concerted pressure, including by state administrations, to expand the scope of ARPA to state-managed protected areas and encompass those designated as ‘extractive reserves’ and ‘sustainable development reserves.’ The argument was made that state-level agencies were more attuned and better informed about activities in protected areas of direct use, some of which were initially under pressure to be listed as

<sup>17</sup> Interview with former President of ICMBio, Brasilia, via skype, March 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with senior staff of a national scientific non-governmental organization, via skype, Brasilia, March 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with former senior official at the Federal Ministry of the Environment, Rio de Janeiro, February 2019; and with former Secretary of the Federal Ministry of the Environment, São Paulo, February 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with former President of ICMBio, Brasilia (via skype), March 2019.



strict protected areas.<sup>21</sup> Respondents from a regional environmental agency in the Amazon and civil society organizations further highlighted that effective protected area management was shown to be facilitated in sustainable use areas, because of more direct engagement of representatives of local communities and civil society organizations.<sup>22</sup> As this discussion reveals, active civil society and state-level institutions played an important role in mediating and to some extent renegotiating the distribution of partnership inputs and effects.

At the level of local implementation, protected area management services were among the most important beneficiaries of ARPA. An official study conducted between 2005 and 2010 highlighted a 16% difference in the average management effectiveness between protected areas which were assessed in the initial stages of the partnership implementation (2005–2006), and those that were assessed at the end of Phase I (2008–2010), with sustainable use reserves generally improving more than strict protected areas. Interestingly, these developments did not only concern the inputs (e.g. investments) and management processes, but also the outputs (i.e. the conservation actions implemented in the protected areas). However, the same study noted that other aspects including employment conditions, staff performance reviews, and training opportunities, lagged behind despite the progress on conservation issues (ARPA, 2012d).

Furthermore, academic studies have been more critical and have provided an additional layer of assessments. For example, a study by Nolte et al. (2013) found no statistically significant association between avoided deforestation and indicators focusing on various aspects of protected area management in Amazon protected areas, including ARPA-supported ones (e.g. budget, staff, equipment, management plans and stakeholder collaboration). These findings suggested the need to emphasize the role played by unsettled land tenure conflicts in exacerbating deforestation pressures, somewhat mirroring ARPA's own acknowledgment that legal security represented one of the areas with the weakest improvement around the beginning of Phase II (ARPA, 2012d).

In addition, the effectiveness of the partnership in creating opportunities for sustainable development is less evident at the level of local and indigenous communities. This aspect of ARPA appeared initially tenuous and not clarified beyond the formal scope of the World Bank's social safeguards on the rights and resettlement of local populations. The first version of the partnership proposal submitted to GEF and to then-Secretary of the Amazon Mary Allegrretti became subject of heavy criticism, because of its feared impact on sustainable extractive activities conducted by Amazonian peoples (Barbosa, 2015). Given that biodiversity loss in the Brazilian Amazon is caused by a complex set of socio-economic drivers including cycles of poverty and lack of alternative livelihoods, ARPA subsequently included a strategy for providing forms of local participation, sustainable exploitation of natural resources and alternative livelihoods to forest-dependent communities (World Bank, 2012). A social safeguard principle was adopted to ensure that ARPA-supported protected areas did not overlap with officially-demarcated indigenous lands or any other type of indigenous land not yet fully demarcated (World Bank, 2009, p.21). Simultaneously, it was formally recognized that local communities living inside protected areas and in their surrounding areas were a crucial constituency for ARPA. The partnership was expected to manage any potential livelihoods losses relating to the elimination of forms of clandestine exploitation of natural resources by providing possibilities and renewed support to for-

malized land tenure, legal resource access, and sustainable revenue-generating activities inside protected and in nearby buffer zones (GEF, 1998; World Bank, 2012).

Ultimately, some of the most notable positive effects for local communities have accrued indirectly from land tenure regularization related to the consolidation of protected areas and the development of management plans, even if this has not happened everywhere yet and land conflicts remain (ARPA, 2012d). One representative of a civil society organization elaborated on this linkage: "deforestation takes place in land that is not regularized; it is public land without any status that can be easily grabbed. So, ARPA was instrumental in accelerating the process of giving land a status of a protected area."<sup>23</sup> An official from the State of Amazonas further clarified:

"Once you create the protected area, you start to regulate and give [traditional populations] CDRU (*Concessão de Direito Real de Uso*, a form of rights of use). Second, once the protected area is created, they are given a voice *vis-à-vis* the government on issues relating to land reform and its benefits. Finally, the use of the natural resources was legitimated through 'planos de manejos' (*action plans*) for protected areas."<sup>24</sup>

The Protected Area Management Councils and action plans were introduced as another institutional arrangement to integrate more directly local representatives in decision-making, to increase awareness about ARPA and other initiatives and improve access to public programs and financing for sustainable use. As a consequence, the possibility was given to selected protected areas to finance specific activities for indigenous peoples and local communities, which also participated in the development and implementation of some 23 action plans known as *Planos de Ação Sustentável* and *Planos de Ação para Povos Indígenas* (World Bank, 2018, p.24). At the same time, however, a vast majority of the protected areas reported difficulties with financial management and disbursements linked to this sub-component, as well as lack of human resources needed to implement the action plans (Leme da Silva & Ferreira Bueno, 2017). Respondents from civil society organizations emphasized that "both ARPA and government institutions need to recognize the role of civil society organizations in the management of PAs" and their intermediation with respect to areas with more successful conceptualization and implementation of ARPA at the local level.<sup>25</sup> Over time, it was also acknowledged that typical income-generation activities for protected areas—ecotourism, concession agreements, and entrance fees—were not well adapted to ARPA-supported areas "due to their remoteness, the lack of an adequate transportation infrastructure, health and sanitation concerns, and high costs" (World Bank, 2018, p. 20). The direct and additional socio-economic benefits accrued from the transnational partnership were thus relatively small for the populations at the local level.

An academic study by Pinho (2014) supports this assessment; it rated the contribution of ARPA to poverty alleviation as 'low,' compared to its 'high' impact on the protection of key ecosystem services. According to the study, ARPA ended up incorporating relatively limited socio-economic components, whereas some other, parallel programs and partnership efforts have sought to more directly target the link between ecosystem services and poverty alleviation in the Brazilian Amazon, including the Bolsa Floresta and Bolsa Verde programs (OECD, 2018). Despite the positive incorporation of sustainable use reserves under ARPA and the adoption of a more participatory approach with respect to pro-

<sup>21</sup> Interview with former senior official of ICMBio, Brasília (via skype), March 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with former senior staff from Secretary of the Environment of Amazonas, Manaus, March 2019; Interview with senior staff of a national NGO, Brasília (via Skype), March 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with former senior staff of WWF-Brazil, São Paulo, February 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with former senior staff from the Secretariat of the Environment of Amazonas, Manaus, March 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Interviews with the Executive Director of a national NGO, Manaus, March 2019.

tected areas management, the partnership thus had a more negligible impact on poverty alleviation), especially when compared with the benefits that accrued to Federal and state agencies. Furthermore, the assessment of partnership activities on Amazonian populations suffers from a relative dearth of published data, as existing project assessments often rely on qualitative reports from global and national partners, rather than on a rigorous engagement with intended local beneficiaries of project activities.

Finally, the ARPA Program Committee and its Scientific Advisory Panel, which are two of its main governance bodies, included representatives of national and regional civil society organizations as core partners. In particular, the Program Committee, which is coordinated by the Ministry of the Environment, was established as a deliberative, joint administrative unit whose purpose is to ensure the compliance of the partnership activities with the proposed project objectives. Nonetheless, several of the interviews conducted underscored that the decision-making has been in practice dominated by donors and federal institutions,<sup>26</sup> a tendency that is frequently observed in transnational partnerships more broadly. The significant influence of donor concerns produced particularly visible effects on the strategic development of the partnership, and created a certain policy rift around the decision to consolidate the revolving *Protected Areas Trust Fund* into the sinking *Transition Fund* as part of the present Phase III of ARPA.<sup>27</sup>

Overall, our research reveals a picture of significant variance in the effects produced by the ARPA partnership across different layers of domestic institutions, from federal agencies to park management institutions and local communities, with implications for their different constituencies and sustainable development. The relatively limited effects in terms of political empowerment or poverty alleviation for local populations reflects in part the original design of the partnership and its strong focus on protected areas. Nonetheless, the degree of regulation of land tenure around the consolidation of protected areas is a significant finding, which deserves further exploration with respect to its extent and implications for rights and livelihoods.

## 6. Domestic institutions as political arbiters of transnational influence

Sometimes we can learn about the effectiveness of transnational partnerships as much from their goals and outcomes, as from effects that were unintended or never materialized. Domestic institutions, as argued earlier, are not simply takers of transnational influence; they are also the sites through which politicians project power and pursue agendas. Government institutions thus also become arbiters of the direction and extent of transnational effects, through prioritization of specific sustainability problems and deflecting attention from other issues and their underlying politics.

In the case of the ARPA, the Brazilian government and its environmental agencies have successfully advanced the objectives of biodiversity protection through the partnership, which expanded significantly the areas under protection and improved their management (Fig. 3).

The partnership has largely attained its environmental objectives and overarching target of supporting the creation of new protected areas, and the consolidation of existing ones, to cover at least 60 million hectares of rainforest, or 15 percent of the Brazilian Amazon (ARPA, 2018). Deforestation has been shown to be generally lower within and around ARPA-supported protected areas than

in other areas (ARPA, 2012c, p.8; Heino et al., 2015), and it has also been suggested that the former have achieved higher overall levels of management effectiveness through the deployment of investments, operational and planning tools, and other resources (WWF, 2017b). This is not surprising, as the core partners of ARPA considered the creation of new protected areas and the consolidation of existing ones in order to avoid occurrence of illegal activities caused by lack of land tenure and limited enforcement, as critical for preventing forest loss and threats to the biodiversity of the region (GEF, 1998).

At the same time, while conservation efforts expanded and deepened across significant parts of the Amazon, initiatives such as ARPA in a way provided to an extent a political shield for the government to avoid engaging the deeper structural causes of land clearing, while the expansion of industrial agriculture continued. Brazil remains a leading exporter on the global commodity markets for timber, minerals, and soy. With growing demand, especially in emerging economies such as China, strong structural, economic and political incentives for the expansion of agribusiness have persisted. In this sense, ARPA illustrates also important limitations of partnership governance, namely the lack of legislative or direct policy authority to tackle issues of rights and the underlying political economy, which are fundamental to sustainable development (Adhikari & Agrawal, 2013; Ponte, 2008).

For instance, the early stages of ARPA have been described as a unique historical moment, during which the government and the Ministry of the Environment seized the opportunity to expand protected areas, while political cost were limited due to the abundance of external finance. However, as protected areas approached the area known as the 'deforestation arc' at the southern and eastern edges of the Brazilian Amazon and started to clash with economic interests, the resistance towards protected areas increased.<sup>28</sup> The creation and consolidation of protected areas became more costly.<sup>29</sup> As a result, in Phase II of the implementation of the partnership, the Ministry of the Environment deliberately prioritized "increasing the volume by creating new protected areas in remote regions in the north of the state of Pará. This was a move to show success and raise funds in a time when this was on demand."<sup>30</sup> However, this strategy reduced to some extent the effectiveness of the partnership with respect to some of its earlier objectives of achieving higher ecological representativeness through a connected network of ecological corridors and a mosaic of protected areas.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, critics have drawn attention to the displacement of some of the ARPA-avoided deforestation to the temperate Cerrado forest (Dou et al., 2018). This unintended outcome could itself be considered a result of different institutional and political priorities, and of the inability to mitigate some of the possible leakage of deforestation activities that are not in the purview of the partnership. Looking at future scenarios, it has thus been argued that confronting the lack of economic incentives to reduce the rate of land use change will be critical to secure ARPA's role in the protection of multiple ecosystem services in the Brazilian Amazon (Pennington et al., 2016).

The new Forest Code passed in 2012 by the Brazilian Congress during the administration of President Dilma Rousseff is another example of the arbitrating role by political institutions. The law opens new zones for legal deforestation on private land and has failed to dis-incentivize illegal logging, contrary to what its propo-

<sup>28</sup> The term 'arc of deforestation' traditionally refers to the arc-shaped area of the Brazilian Amazon, which follows the southern and eastern flanks of the Amazon River basin, in which forest conversion rates are the highest.

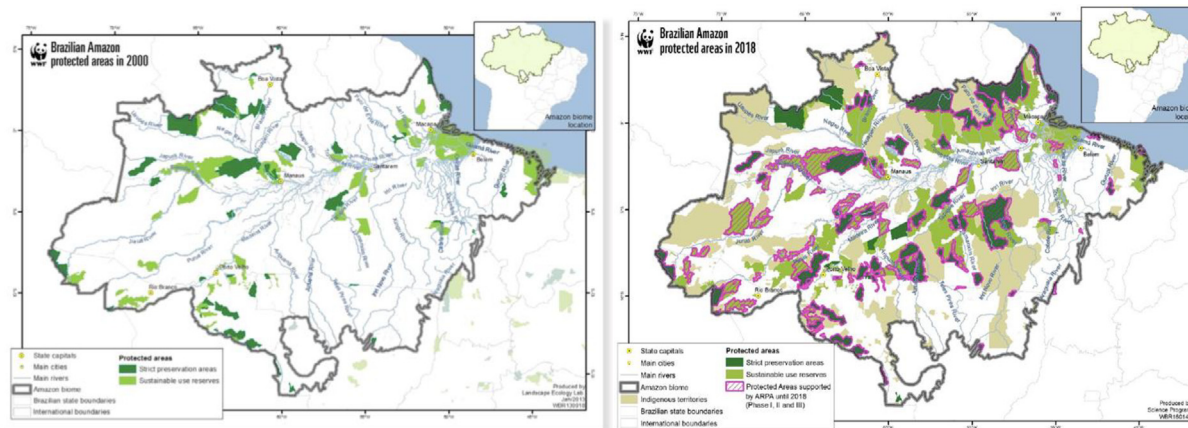
<sup>29</sup> Interview with former President of ICMBio, Brasília (via skype), March 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with former President of ICMBio, Brasília (via skype), March 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with the Executive Director of a national NGO, Manaus, March 2019; interview with former senior staff of WWF-Brazil, São Paulo, February 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with former Secretary of the Federal Ministry of the Environment, São Paulo, February 2019.



**Fig. 3.** Brazilian Amazon protected areas in 2000 and 2018, ARPA-supported areas highlighted in purple (Courtesy of WWF; source: WWF, 2019). (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

nents claimed (Freitas et al., 2018; Azevedo et al., 2017). This policy move went in parallel with the extension of the ARPA program to its Phase III, illustrating the contradicting ways in which institutions can steer different governance instruments.

Under the government of President Bolsonaro, and in a political context that has eased limitations on land clearing (Hecht, 2020), the Brazilian Amazon has become the site of intense and prolonged forest fires in 2019 that destroyed over 6 million hectares of forest. Year-to-year deforestation between 2019 and 2020 have been reported to increase by an estimated 50% on the basis of data collected by the Institute for Space Research (INPE) (Müller, 2020, p. 20). The politics of government institutions may thus effectively undermine some of the gains in institutional capacity, protected area management, and conservation that resulted from ARPA. This is evident in the reduction by 30% of the budget of IBAMA, the Brazilian implementation agency, and the dismissal of field officers and 27 of the 29 heads of its regional environmental agencies in the Amazon region (Hecht, 2020; Müller, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic, which was particularly devastating in several states of the Brazilian Amazon, has compounded this trend toward diminishing the human and operational capital for environmental protection.

Moreover, government actions such as the freezing of the accounts and operation of the Amazon Fund, which led Norway and Germany to suspend their support (Arias, 2020), may also significantly arbitrate the effects and durability of initiatives such as ARPA. At the same time, it has been argued that the present situation may spur action from civil society organizations and especially from the Brazilian states, which administer around 40% of all ARPA areas, to fill the gap left by the federal government through stronger subnational engagement with transnational actors (Milhorance, 2020). In many ways, the change in the political context may prove to be a ‘hard test’ of the extent to which the lock-in of certain institutional infrastructure and commitments, including the ARPA *Transition Fund* of which the Brazilian government is the primary intended beneficiary, may support the durability and effectiveness of the partnership.

## 7. Conclusion

As the interdependence of socio-economic, technological and environmental systems deepens at an unprecedented pace, governance has also become globalized in terms of the types of actors and mechanisms involved. Transnational public–private partnerships are one relatively recent modality that exemplifies these

trends, straddling layers of governance from the global to the local and linking public and private authority. Notwithstanding the significant power and resources that transnational partnership arrangements have marshalled across sustainable development challenges, this paper posits that the variable impacts of partnerships on sustainable development are ultimately mediated by their interplay with domestic institutions.

The case study of the ARPA initiative in the context of the Brazilian Amazon reveals the materialization of a range of capacity-strengthening, institutional and environmental effects across levels of governance. More specifically, the new empirical data presented in the manuscript reveals multiple ways in which domestic institutions in Brazil have been influenced by ARPA, while simultaneously mediating its sustainability impacts and distributional effects. First, domestic institutions have reaped a range of benefits brought by ARPA in terms of increased institutional capacity, including through the availability of additional financial resources, the deployment of new management tools and technologies, and the training of staff. However, ARPA has also built upon already-existing domestic resources and transnational initiatives and relied on conducive political environment to adopt a far-reaching institutional model for financing the extension of protected areas in the Brazilian Amazon, and related conservation and sustainable development gains. This signals the complex causality, which lies beneath ARPA’s effects and it may raise questions about whether some of such effects would have occurred in the absence of the partnership. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the unprecedented mobilization of resources made possible by ARPA, often through innovative mechanisms which had not been adopted before, was a key factor in the expansion of domestic capacity for conservation. Even if the Brazilian government at times reaped ‘low-hanging fruits’ through the creation of remote protected areas, the partnership certainly contributed to the progressive reduction in deforestation rates which characterized Brazil until recently – as demonstrated by the fact that the protected areas supported by ARPA have been reportedly more effective in curbing deforestation than those that are not part of the program (ARPA, 2012a).

Secondly, ARPA strengthened the political positions of some domestic institutions more than others, while also being inevitably affected by the mediating effects of these institutions’ activities. The federal government, state agencies and the administrators of protected areas reaped significant dividends from ARPA, including a stronger financial and political clout at the domestic level, and growing legitimation at the international level; but they also hindered its effects in cases of changing political contexts. On the other hand, local communities and civil society organizations



managed, through advocacy and consultations, to incorporate a greater attention to local livelihoods and community participation in ARPA's management activities. Yet, the socio-economic components of the program remained generally weak, with limited success in terms of poverty alleviation.

Finally, domestic institutions have been arbiters of ARPA's transnational influence, ensuring that the partnership supports first and foremost state institutions and conservation priorities, in comparison to its more limited emphasis on the underlying commercial incentives driving deforestation or on the strengthening of institutional arrangements at the level of local populations, civil society organizations, and income-generation activities.

In sum, in the case of ARPA, the politics of institutional interplay have ultimately produced a multiplicity and unevenness of effects. Some of the ongoing challenges, ranging from the increase in deforestation rates under the incumbent Brazilian government to ARPA's mixed success in improving local livelihoods, are also central to understanding the potential impacts of such an interplay. On the one hand, it could be argued that by contributing to the creation and strengthening of domestic institutional structures, as well as through a long-term strategy which subtracted issues of financing from short-term political debate, ARPA may have facilitated the lock-in of positive incentives for conservation in the face of a changing political landscape over more than three decades. Although it may still be premature to evaluate the future durability of this effort, ARPA's influence on domestic institutions could in other words lead to 'path-dependent' process that could enable possible solution to pressing collective action problems for complex issues such as biodiversity protection or climate change (Levin et al., 2012; van der Ven et al., 2017).

On the other hand, the limited impact of ARPA's socio-economic components highlights the potential limitations of transnational initiatives more broadly in placing considerations about the well-being of affected populations and justice at the core of their programs. This is an especially important concern at a time in which indigenous and local stewardship of protected areas is widely recognized as critical in the fight against biodiversity loss and climate change (Dawson et al., 2018), and biodiversity conservation is increasingly framed through the lenses of human rights (Knox, 2018; Boyd & Keene, 2021). Most recently, the disproportionately devastating impact exerted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kasznar, 2020; Angelo, 2020) in many of the areas where ARPA and other transnational and domestic partnerships are implemented, demonstrates in tragic terms the persistence of low levels of resilience and high poverty rates, which are contrary to the vision of sustainable development that underpins transnational public-private partnerships. By their focus and highly-specialized nature, such partnerships can indeed create significant environmental gains, but their partial and politically distributed impacts on wider sustainability objectives should be understood in relation to the fundamental mediating role of domestic partners and institutions.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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