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How do impeachments influence foreign policies? Lessons from South America

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Abstract

Although we have a vast understanding of the causes and institutional impacts of impeachments, we know little about their policy outcomes. As such events occur during crises, new incumbents are expected to promote policy reforms. To identify how they influence foreign policy, I applied a most-different-system design to compare the cases of Lugo in Paraguay (2012) and Rousseff in Brazil (2016). Internally, impeachments politicize foreign policy, linking the external agenda to domestic politics. Externally, they may restrict foreign policy alternatives, depending on political actors' perceptions of process legitimacy, ideological proximity, and state resources. I found that politicization after impeachments does not necessarily bring decision-making decentralization. Instead, actors capture the foreign policy agenda for political purposes.

Keywords: Foreign Policy; Latin America; Most-Different-System Design; Impeachment; Presidential Breakdown; Pink Tide.

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Introduction

Presidential breakdowns (PB) have replaced regime breakdowns, which were once widespread in Latin America (Pérez-Liñán 2007). That trend began with the third wave of democratization in 1978. Distinguished researchers have studied PB, showing their main drivers and institutional implications (Hochstetler 2008; Marsteintredet 2014; Martínez 2017; Valenzuela 2008), but few studies have focused on how presidential breakdowns affect policies (Llanos and Marsteintredet 2010; Merke et al. 2020).

Regime transition and presidential interruptions are not two completely distinct processes. Should we anticipate similar policy consequences if the causes are comparable, such as poor economic performance and civil society mobilization (Alvarez and

Marsteintredet 2010)? Regime breakdowns have previously brought foreign policy change (Hagan 1989; Sposito 2019).

To examine how PB may impact foreign policy, I analyze two impeachment cases. Since they “enjoy neither symmetry with respect to the selection procedure, nor popular legitimacy [are] easy targets of critical narratives” (Pérez-Liñán 2020, 202). Consequently, they are ambiguous in terms of legitimacy, enabling domestic and foreign parties to engage in narrative disputes. This trend is particularly evident in recent situations when impeachment has been referred to be a neo-coup (Araújo and Pereira 2018).

Responses to presidential failures may appear to an international audience as responses to regime collapses. A current trend of conceptual expansion that mixes the conceptions of coups and PBs (Marsteintredet and Malamud 2019) is causing governments to respond more strongly than they should to the latter. The reactions are contingent upon geopolitical interests, ideological affiliations, and ideational preferences. They might also conform to power differences between countries and the degree of certainty regarding the potential resolution to the crisis (Feldmann et al. 2019).

Having this puzzle in mind, I analyze if (and how) impeachment impacts foreign policy. The primary thesis is that impeachment has dual consequences on foreign policy. On the domestic front, impeachments will impact cabinet nominations and determine political support for the next administration. In addition, they will politicize the international agenda, approximating it to domestic politics and ideologizing actors’ rhetoric. On the external front, foreign players will respond according to their normative evaluation of the impeachment processes and political preferences.

The structure of this article is as follows: First, I provide a theoretical argument on the foreign policy analysis (FPA) of Latin American states to organize the domestic political variables to be employed. In addition, I explore the responses of local and foreign players to impeachments. In the second section, I address conceptual and methodological issues, including research design, geographical and temporal scopes, and case selection. In the following sections, I first present each case study and then show foreign policy outcomes to explain how impeachments influenced them. In conclusion, I draw from the findings and offer a few final remarks.

Theoretical background: Latin American Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA)

A basic premise of FPA is the need to consider the domestic level. That means to ‘open the black box’ and develop medium-range theories based on the specific information of each actor (state) in search of multi-causal explanations (Hill 2003). That implicates explanations that are agent-oriented and actor-specific (Hudson 2005). Therefore, we need to examine actors responsible for foreign policy and the structure in which they operate.

In regards to structure, presidents in Latin America work under fragmented multiparty presidential systems. The presidential party is unlikely to hold a legislative majority on its own, hence coalition majorities must be formed (Mainwaring and Shugart 2002, 257). Presidents can only retain multiparty coalitions by offering executive branch positions in return for legislative support (Amorim Neto 2006, 437).

If, on the one hand, presidents have few incentives to distribute cabinet positions proportionally (Amorim Neto and Samuels 2011, 12–15), on the other, a parliamentary majority may be crucial for retaining office during periods of low popularity (Pérez-Liñán 2007; 2014). Overall, cabinet distribution should have an impact on foreign policy when it influences nominees for the economic and foreign portfolios.

In regards to agency, presidents concentrate sufficient power to prevail over other players with veto power (such as Congress and bureaucracies/agencies) due to presidential institutional capacities and cabinet formation prerogatives (Malamud 2015, 113). When facing multiparty cabinets and strong oppositions, presidents generally centralize decisions. It is a strategy to overcome hostile legislative and bureaucracies and, ultimately, implement their policy agenda (Rudalevige 2002).

In Latin American presidential systems, in order to identify foreign policy decision-making, it is essential to analyze foreign policy presidentialization or delegation to foreign ministries. On the one hand, presidential diplomacy is the personal conduct of foreign policy by *ex officio* assignments, a practice that is on the rise in the region (Amorim Neto and Malamud 2019). Such participation depends on the willingness of the leader to deviate from conventional norms (discreet and institutional). It entails tying the nation's foreign performance to his/her image (Danese 1999, 51–52). Higher presidential interest and participation should generate greater foreign policy centralization and politicization.

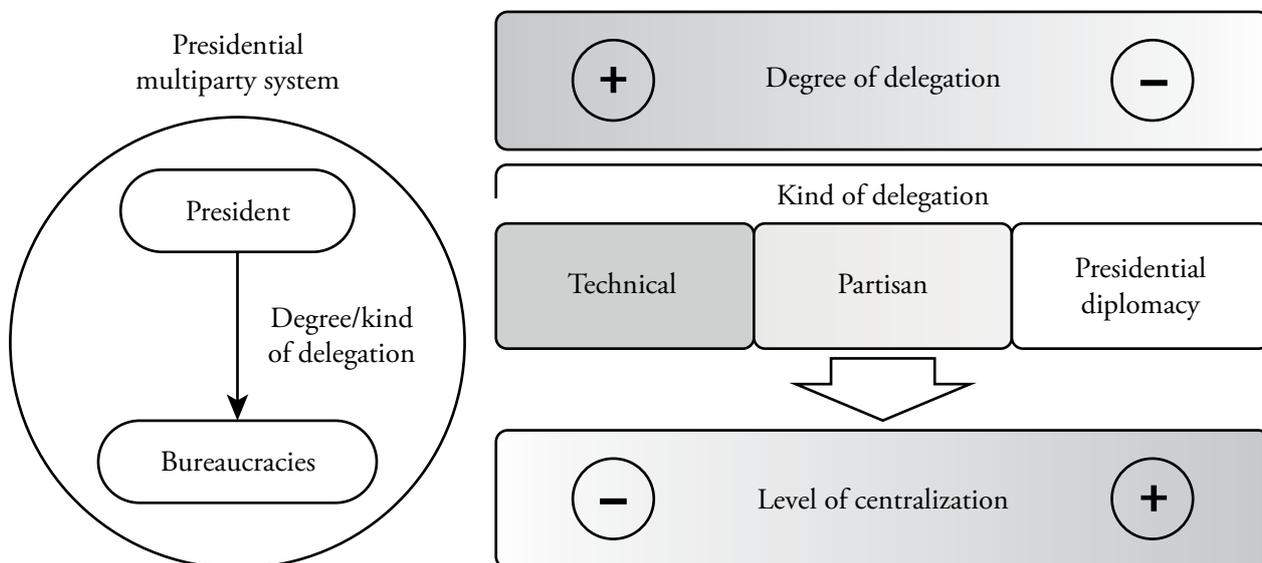
On the other, institutional diplomacy relies on the relevance of specialized bureaucracies. It differs according to the professionalization of its body, its institutional responsibilities in foreign policy (relative to the scope of each specialized ministry and the rivalry from another bureaucracy), and the degree of presidential delegation (Amorim Neto and Malamud 2019, 813). This degree will not respond exclusively to the quality of public policies. Presidents align their policies with their political goals. This entails appointing political allies to critical positions to control decisions and thereby politicize bureaucracies (Batista and Lopez 2021).

In broad terms, foreign policy will be more pragmatic and less influenced by short-term political goals where the decision-making process is more democratized/decentralized (broader participation and increased professionalization). In contrast, when it is restricted, inaccessible, and exclusive, presidents are more likely to centralize choices, which may lead to more ideological and unpredictable conduct (Gardini 2011, 25).

Presidents will generally choose their degree/kind of delegation to bureaucracies according to their interest in foreign policy and cabinet distribution strategy or necessity. On one end of the spectrum of foreign policy centralization, when delegation is limited, we will find presidential diplomacy. If the president opts to delegate, the decision-making process will be less centralized,

ranging from technical appointments, at the other end of the spectrum, to partisan nominations, representing an intermediary category (see figure 1).

Figure 1 – Main actors and structure in foreign policy development/implementation



Source: Elaborated by the author

However, when the variable of interest is present, how do impeachments influence foreign policy? In general, the early termination of presidential terms occurs during economic, political, and social crises, where the removal of the president is a crucial component of the crisis resolution (Valenzuela 2008). It typically results from the convergence of four factors: widespread protests, the loss of congressional majority, corruption scandals, and economic crisis (Hochstetler 2008; Pérez-Liñán 2008).

Specifically, impeachment is an extreme form of political failure, a solution for gridlock during presidential crises (Pérez-Liñán 2007). This procedure has tensions between two dimensions. On the one hand, it mirrors a trial by presenting evidence against the president (legal component). On the other hand, it is subject to legislative majority approval (political component). This ambiguity makes impeachments susceptible to politics and controversy, with partisan strife frequently taking precedence above legal concerns (Pérez-Liñán 2020).

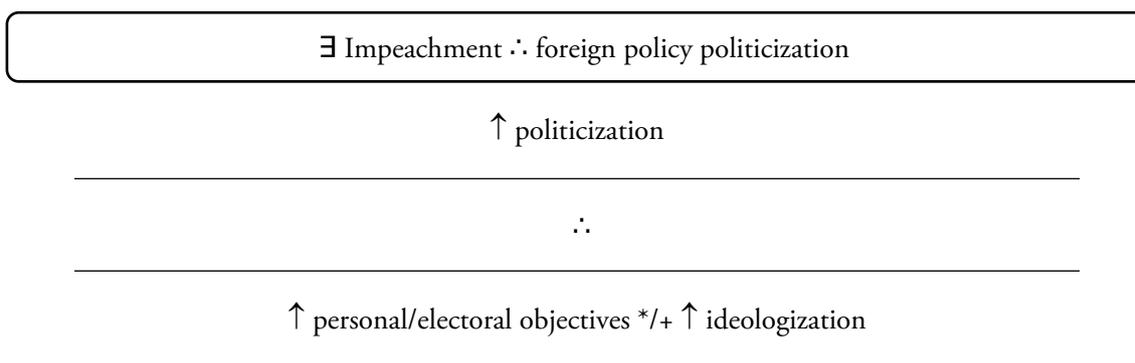
These crises politicize decisions by tying them to immediate electoral, political, and personal concerns (Pérez-Liñán 2007). Consequently, the political agenda attracts public interest, bringing more participants. The greater the polarization of opinions, the greater the politicization of a decision or institution (Zürn 2019, 2).

Impeachments should shift foreign policy away from state policy/public diplomacy and increase political actors' influence (the president or other politicians involved with foreign policy). Actors might centralize foreign policy conduction and profit from it, linking foreign policy to

personal and electoral aspirations. The urgency related to political crisis politicizes foreign policy, encouraging ideological and unpredictable behavior.

To summarize, at such critical junctures, impeachments become the hot topic on the agenda, prompting actors to anchor policy decisions to it. They shift foreign policy away from state diplomacy and increase political actors' influence, generating ideological behavior. Table 1 organizes this line of thought and relates the presence of the variable of interest with possible outcomes.

Table 1 – Theoretical assumptions on the impact of foreign policy politicization



Where: ∃ = there exists ↑ = the greater ∴ = therefore * = logical AND + = logical OR

Source: Elaborated by the author

Furthermore, we must take international factors into account. The FPA tradition of focusing on domestic variables does not preclude the consideration of foreign variables. This is particularly crucial for Latin American foreign policy where systemic variables prevail, particularly the pressure emanating from the United States, other major powers, and international financial institutions (Hey 1998).

Although the Chinese expansion has become a political alternative for Latin American nations, giving Latin American foreign policy more margin for maneuver, its policy of non-interference means a stance of neutrality and reciprocity on issues such as political regime (Mendes 2015).

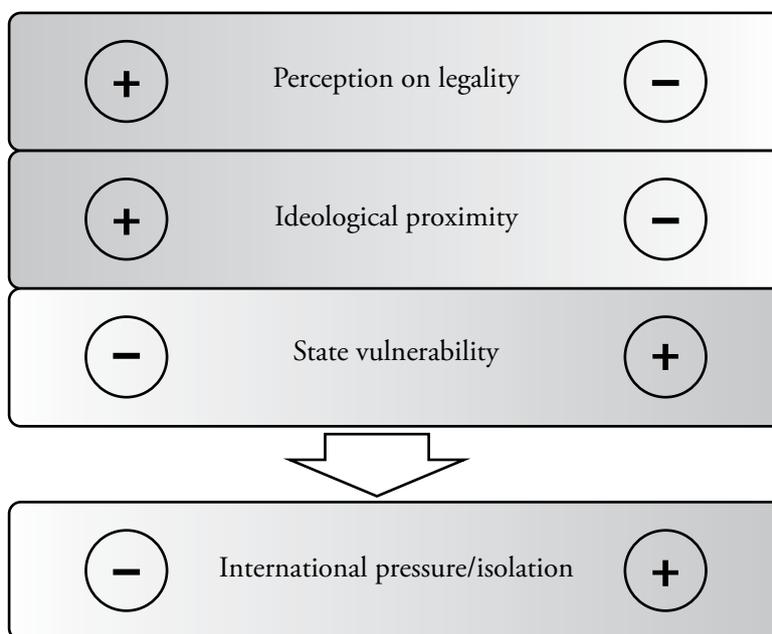
To comprehend how international peers respond to PB, I examine their perceptions regarding the legitimacy of the mechanisms by which the new incumbent ascended to power. I am interested in regional and US reactions: countries within the regional institutional framework and the hegemon historically involved in Latin American domestic politics.

Legitimacy is a dual phenomenon with an internal and an external dimension. Therefore, “domestic legitimacy’ has always contained an essentially international aspect” as it “has done much to bolster the ‘domestic’ legitimacy of individual regimes.” A broad legitimacy acceptance is contingent upon the consensus backing of domestic and international players. In addition, it consists of two components. First, the normative, which includes legality, morality, and

constitutionality. Second, the political, since legitimacy is also “part of a process of political calculation and contingency and as a result of negotiation and diplomatic pressure in which power differentials, material as well as ideational, most certainly matter.” (Clark 2005, 4–5). Impeachments may weaken governments’ international legitimacies (like democratic breakdowns), confining their international alternatives and reducing conditions for caretakers to pursue foreign policies. Caretaker governments’ international pressure should depend on three factors. First, international players’ judgments on impeachment legality, which accounts for the normative factor. Second, international peer’s ideological connection to the ousted government (part of the political calculation, related to ideational factors). Third, the impeachment state’s susceptibility to international pressure (also part of the political calculation but centered in material factors and considering the prominence of systemic variables over Latin American foreign policies).

Figure 2 shows how these three variables should influence the international restraints faced by caretakers. First, the more actors view the impeachment procedures as legal, the lower the pressure on caretakers. Second, the closer the caretakers are ideologically to other governments, the less likely it is that the latter will challenge them. Finally, the lower a state’s vulnerability, the milder the international condemnation of the impeachment.

Figure 2 – International response to impeachments



Source: Elaborated by the author

Research design

The research conforms to John Stuart Mill’s method of agreement, the foundation for the most-different-system designs. In this approach, the researcher must “compare cases that are as

different as possible, demonstrating the robustness of an association between dependent and explanatory variables.” Therefore, cases need to be different from the explanatory variable (Y) and the outcome (X). The aim is to show that coinciding independent variables are responsible for this common result (Heijden 2014, 39).

To apply this design, I compare the foreign policies adopted after the impeachments of Lugo in Paraguay (2012) and Rousseff in Brazil (2016). Case studies vary. Brazil is a regional power with a fragmented and unstable party system, while Paraguay is weak with low bureaucratic professionalization and an institutionalized two-party system. In Paraguay, presidencies changed when Pink Tide governments still dominated the region, but Brazil’s president faced a less unfavorable regional situation with ideologically closer neighbors. Even though some parts of a system are the same, others are different, and the most important part of a system is the same: it has a presidential regime, which is needed for the phenomenon of interest to happen.

Case selection establishes the conditions for a structured comparison with the theoretical framework. Using a set of standardized questions for each case, it serves as a guide for research and data collection to establish a methodical matching system (George and Bennett 2005, 68–69).

Also, it prevents “noise” associated with presidential change (and their ideologies), the most important explanatory variable of Latin American foreign policies (Merke et al. 2020; Merke and Reynoso 2016). Comparing cases with different ideological transitions may make it difficult to establish which outcomes are due to the variable of interest or the ideology shift.

Therefore, the spatial scope is the South American subcontinent, where the majority of PBs (Edwards 2015; Hochstetler and Edwards 2009; Martínez 2017) (and impeachments),¹ occurred, and where regional regimes² increased the political costs associated with interventionism and democratic failure, thereby generating international activism regarding respect for domestic democracy.

The transition from a left to a right presidency in Latin America should result in a shift from economically protectionist, ideologically oriented, South and regional integration-oriented, and independent from the U.S. foreign policies to economically liberal, pragmatically oriented, North and hemispheric integration-oriented, and seeking approximation to the U.S. foreign policies (Jenne et al. 2017; Merke and Reynoso 2016; Merke et al. 2020).

To both cases, I apply the theoretical framework proposed in the previous section and analyze the variables summarized in the figures and table. The main hypothesis is that, as impeachments occur via the emergence of alternative legislative majorities, caretakers need to reaccommodate political groups. During this process, foreign policy is attached to these groups’ political survival and legitimacy, becoming politicized.

¹ While five incidents occurred in South America, including Fernando Collor and Dilma Rousseff (Brazil, 1992 and 2016), Carlos Pérez (Venezuela, 1993), and Cubas Grau and Fernando Lugo (Paraguay, 1999 and 2012), only Pérez Molina occurred in Central America (Guatemala, 2015). This list includes instances in which the president chose to resign prior to the trial.

² Like the Organization of American States’ (OAS) Resolution 1080 (1991), Mercosur’s Ushuaia Protocol (1998), and Unasur’s additional protocol (2010).

In section 3, I first present the institutional and political conditions related to the impeachment and foreign policymaking in each case, and then the foreign policies of the impeached government and its successor. The following is also divided. In the first, I discuss how impeachments shift political groups generating new coalitions and, consequently, foreign policy goals. In the second, how new incumbents respond to international reactions to impeachments. In this dimension, I try to evaluate the domestic-international interaction and how they narrow states' external alternatives.

Case studies

Paraguay – Lugo (2008-2012) to Franco (2012-2013)

Political system, domestic politics, and foreign policy

Compared to other Latin American countries, the president's constitutional authority is limited in the Paraguayan political system. The two major parties, the Colorado Party (or *Alianza Nacional Republicana*, ANR) and the *Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico* (PLRA or Liberals), represent the interests of the dominant classes (primarily agrarian elites) and have a low level of ideological polarization (Feliu and Oliveira 2018, 76).³

The authoritarianism and personalism of the Stroessner Regime (1954-1989) formalized the supremacy of presidential authority and clientelist practices in state administration. Like most facets of the Paraguayan state, the foreign policy agenda is dominated by the executive, particularly the president, causing it to overlap with domestic policy objectives. This resulted in the formation of a highly politicized and ineffective foreign policy bureaucracy in which presidential and the Colorado's interests routinely took precedence over national issues (Lambert 2011, 67–68).

Like other bureaucracies in Paraguay, most chancellery staff are political appointees. A statute enacted in the 1990s upheld norms from the time of Stroessner. It began mandating only merit-based competitions for new hires, and selection bias continued (Masi 2014, 39).

In addition to ending the Colorado Party's 61-year hegemony, Fernando Lugo's victory was the first peaceful transfer of power in Paraguayan history. Lugo, who was elected with 41% of the vote, formed a heterodox coalition consisting of left-wing parties and the right-wing PLRA, which joined Lugo to challenge the ANR. This coalition's ideological divergence was the primary source of the government's high instability, as seen by the PLRA's repeated threats to leave the alliance. The vice-president (later one of the impeachment's articulators) was initially angry with Lugo for marginalizing the PLRA (particularly his faction) in the cabinet nomination (Claro and Feliu 2017, 78–81).

Lugo's domestic (mostly land reformism) and foreign policies (support for Venezuela's membership to Mercosur) led to political conflicts with Franco's PLRA faction. Lugo's incapacity

³ The Latin American Elites Project, which applies questionnaires to parliamentarians to classify political parties' ideology, assigned a 6.33 score to the ANR and 6.78 to the PLRA (on a scale of 1 to 7, from the Left to the Right).

to deal with the *Ejército del Pueblo Paraguayo* (Paraguayan People's Army, EPP) or to carry out an agrarian reform, which were crucial problems for his political and social support groups, alienated the president politically (Espósito Neto 2012, 20). Due to its poor popularity, the tragic Curuguaty affair involving the EPP prompted PLRA to withdraw its support, thereby constituting the majority required to oust the president by political court (Marsteintredet et al. 2013, 113–14).

Federico Franco faced domestic constraints, as the alliance with the Colorados only sought to oppose Lugo's government and agenda. In other issues, he was heavily condemned for corruption issues, partisan appointments (with electoral goals), and several hires made without a public tender (ABC, 2013), resuming practices and policies in the foreign ministry.

Foreign policies in succession

During the Lugo administration, the appointment of Alejandro Hamed Franco (2008-2009) and Héctor Lacognata (2009-2011) as foreign ministers put an end to a reactive foreign policy and established new goals: the recovery of national sovereignty; independence in decision-making; and the recovery of strategic resources (Lambert 2011, 77).

Overall, it marked a brief era of change in Paraguayan foreign policy, with the adoption of a critical stance toward the US blockade of Cuba and a policy of rapprochement with neighbors to counterbalance the asymmetric relationship with the United States (Winand et al. 2016, 85).

Lambert (2011, 78–81) argues that Lugo was able to prioritize pragmatic and long-term goals by professionalizing the chancellery. As examples, he mentions the administration's success in renegotiating the Itaipu deal, which granted financial breathing room and political unity; the reconciliation with the ALBA-TCP; and the renewal of the Urupabol Group to reduce Paraguay's isolation.

Lugo's legislative proposals on foreign policy issues had broad legislative support, as only 3% of foreign policy measures delivered to Congress were rejected and 1% were amended. The principal veto was the ratification of Venezuela's entry into Mercosur, which was heavily politicized and opposed by both major parties. While Lugo had to withdraw the proposition in 2009 and 2010, due to heavy Senate opposition, the bill was defeated during Franco's administration, confirming his PLRA faction's stance (Feliu and Oliveira 2018, 86–88).

This issue is adequate to show how the politics of the impeachment influenced foreign policy. Federico Franco was always a significant voice against Venezuela's accession to Mercosur. In the October 2011 voting on the issue, when the Liberal Party (then part of the government coalition) obligated its parliamentary to support the bill, the vice-president led his faction to adhere to the Colorado allegations on the use of bribes by the Venezuelan government to approve its accession to Mercosur (Insaurrealde 2014).

As a result of this ideological divide, Franco's foreign policy objectives were centered on overturning regional isolation. Paraguay was suspended from Unasur and Mercosur for violating

the democratic clause. In response, his government contested the imposed penalties and reiterated its legitimacy (Lambert 2016, 39).

Federico Franco appointed José Félix Fernández Estigarribia, a member of his party and faction, to lead the chancellery. The chancellery complained to the OAS and the Mercosur Permanent Review Tribunal over judgments taken against Paraguay following the impeachment (Lambert 2012).

Overall, Instability in domestic politics created unfavorable circumstances for the former vice-president. His relatively brief tenure (14 months) and questions over impeachment proceedings made it difficult to put forward any policy proposal. With the upcoming elections in mind, the debate between Colorados and Liberals dominated Franco's presidency. On the international stage, he focused on gaining respect for his government, employing a highly ideological language to counteract the pressure from Lugo's regional supporters.

Brazil – Rousseff (2015-2016) to Temer (2016-2018)

Political system, domestic politics, and foreign policy

The party system in Brazil is very fragmented and poorly institutionalized. This fluidity makes voters likely to shift their perceptions quite rapidly (Mainwaring 1999). Therefore, parties rely on individuals to garner political support. In addition, the president possesses legislative powers (such as the ability to issue executive orders), veto authority, and the ability to set the agenda (all of which makes him/her strong vis-à-vis the legislative branch) (Jones 2012, 27–28).

Even if the executive dominates the legislative processes (via the agenda-setting power), the president must entice legislators to adopt the executive's recommendations through political transfers (such as ministry appointments) and/or financial transfers (e.g., pork). The system of preferences anticipation also takes into account the priorities of lawmakers, with ideas being pre-negotiated to ensure parliamentary support for the executive agenda (Figueiredo and Limongi 2001, 38).

The president and his/her minister of foreign affairs are the primary decision-makers in Brazilian foreign policy (BFP) (Figueira 2009, 188). Due to its tradition, experience, and professionalization, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministério de Relações Exteriores – MRE, or Itamaraty) typically retains bargaining strength. The distancing of foreign policy issues from domestic politics results in sparse political interest in commanding the MRE (Arbilla 2000, 345).

Despite a recent decline in its dominance in foreign policy formulation and decision-making as a result of presidentialization, pluralization, and horizontalization processes, the bureaucracy's high level of professionalization and institutionalization guarantees significant influence in policy-making (Cason and Power 2009; Lima 2000; Figueira 2010). However, Itamaraty does

not have a monopoly on foreign policy decision-making. Its degree of autonomy is typically set by the president, either through omission or delegation (Lima 1994, 32).

During her second term (2015-2016), Dilma faced the most fractured congress in history and unsuccessfully attempted to create a coalition with 10 parties. Since the first cabinet formation, she encountered opposition from the coalition's largest party, the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (*Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*, PMDB, currently MDB), whose leaders (including the vice-president) believed that the ministerial distribution favored the Social Democratic Party (*Partido da Social Democracia*, PSD), which was comprised of several dissidents. The election of Eduardo Cunha, a member of the PMDB faction that did not support the administration, as president of the lower chamber severely strained Dilma's relationship with both the party and the congress. The investigation against her was initiated with the support of 367 of 513 congressmen (54% of the allied base), and the impeachment was approved with 61 of 81 Senate votes. Only 26.5 percent of the coalition remained faithful to Dilma in the end (Nunes and Melo 2017, 285–87).

The development of the *Lava Jato* investigations against conventional political parties, according to Limongi (2017), explains Dilma's collapse. Temer was able to articulate a pro-impeachment alliance that offered the political elite greater shelter in the face of mass denunciations. The disintegration of the government's coalition undermined the 'legislative shield', leading to calls for the president's removal.⁴

Alternately, Temer enjoyed a stable and disciplined parliamentary majority. Despite corruption scandals, low economic development, low popularity, a big fiscal deficit, and high unemployment, he remained president due to this factor. Due to the revised cabinet distribution, which was extremely proportional to coalition parties, he remained in office (Feliu 2018, 182, 196).

Foreign policies in succession

Frenkel and Azzi (2018) and Actis (2017) consider that Temer brought significant change to BFP but highlight that changes were initiated during Rousseff's second administration. According to the former, there was a combination of foreign policy change and continuity as Temer deepened measures first started during the Rousseff government. Changes include approximation to the US and the OECD, trade proposals to the EU, and energy sector concessions and privatizations. The South-South to North-South dimension is also noteworthy (Frenkel and Azzi 2018, 198–99).

Actis (2017) presents empirical evidence to support his argument that initiatives deepened by the Temer administration were first started by his ticket mate, like the rapprochement with the OECD, the United States and Europe, as well as trade opening initiatives like the Mercosur-Europe Union agreement.

The rapprochement to Brazilian traditional partners, like United States and Europe Union in detriment of Mercosur or the Global South are not necessarily evidence of Itamaraty's dominance,

⁴ About a week before the vote on the admissibility of the impeachment by the Chamber of Deputies, around 60 per cent of the population supported Dilma's dismissal ("Maioria quer que Dilma e Temer saiam, mostra pesquisa Datafolha." 2016).

as they were long demanded by PSDB politicians during their tenure at the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and Defense (CRE) (Serra 2015), which enabled the emergence of a more liberal faction of the MRE (substitution of autonomists by pragmatics or liberals) (Saraiva 2017). That does not necessarily mean a return of Itamaraty's "monopoly", but of its capacity of adjustment to domestic politics. The foreign minister himself called the exclusive adherence to multilateral negotiations, a MRE tradition, "paralyzing" (Serra 2016).

The process was undertaken with one of the highest levels of foreign policy delegation since the re-democratization of Brazil (1988). A succession of political scandals prompted Temer to focus on securing the support of his political and business elites, the latter by passing market-oriented policy changes (Oliveira et al. 2018, 149).

After the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, a Senator from PSDB, also a member of Temer's coalition, and proponent of Dilma's impeachment inherited the MRE, even though parties do not typically have political interest in this bureaucracy. The position served as a political platform for Serra to run for president in the forthcoming elections. Serra was succeeded by another PSDB exponent, Aloysio Nunes. During the latter's presidency of CRE, from 2015 to 2016, he made the party's position clear by repeatedly relying on widespread anti-PT sentiment to criticize Rousseff's foreign policy.

The modernization project proposed by the president (Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro 2015) aligned with his foreign minister's goal. The "Bridges to the Future" initiative aimed to open new exporting markets through relationships with the world's largest economies (particularly the United States, Europe, and Asia), with or without the cooperation of other Mercosur members (Oliveira et al. 2018, 154). Nonetheless, José Serra conditioned his acceptance of the position of foreign minister on the transfer of the foreign trade agency (Apex-Brasil) to the MRE, which was deemed essential to his "New Foreign Policy" project of commercial expansion, but more importantly to achieve political-electoral projection (Casarões 2016, 84).

Discussion

Foreign policy outcomes – domestic domain

In both cases, neither the presidentialization of foreign policy nor the extreme centralization of foreign policy decision-making occurred. However, domestic politics were crucial to foreign ministry nominations, as both caretakers had to restore legitimacy and resolve narrative disputes at home and abroad.

Thus, domestic politics significantly altered international insertion approaches. The caretaker's political agenda dominated foreign policy even without presidential diplomacy. Even though the level of development of bureaucracies differ, institutional conditions influenced how each responded.

Paraguay contested Mercosur and Unasur judgments and accused them of persecution to the OAS after its suspension. In reaction, the Franco government raised energy prices to Argentina and Brazil and threatened to cut energy transfers to the latter (Winand et al. 2016, 87). Fernández, the foreign minister, soon threatened Lugo with legal actions and criticized his peaceful act of resistance (he asked his former ministers to follow the decisions of the new government) (Luna 2012).

Paraguay requested OAS, EU, UN, and US support to offset regional isolation. South America moved from horizontal to vertical (North). The country criticized Mercosur members in the UN General Assembly and asked the OAS and EU for election assistance while refusing Unasur and Mercosur monitoring (Luís et al. 2015). The government pursued Pacific Alliance membership (formalized in May 2013). It also defended Paraguayan democracy in the OAS and UN to legitimize the impeachment process and government legality (Heduvan 2020).

Its foreign policy was founded on “an upsurge of nationalist sentiment in Paraguay [...] condemning Mercosur as an instrument of Brazilian imperialism, and Brazil as a hegemonic power” (Lambert 2016, 39). It echoed the anti-communist rhetoric of the Stroessner era, signifying a marked shift in the Lugo Administration’s proximity to the Pink Tide administrations. The foreign policy mirrored domestic polarization, bringing back old disputes of Paraguayan politics.

Hugo Saguier, the ambassador of Paraguay to the OAS, referred to the suspension of Mercosur as “another Triple Alliance”. Venezuela was accused of pressuring the military to oppose Lugo’s impeachment and of forming a “Bolivarian Alliance” (Lambert 2012).

Franco and his group were against Venezuela joining at first. This shows how the shift in the government composition generated by the impeachment transformed foreign policy, with the new leaders politicizing it to justify their narrative against the ousted leader’s former allies and the impeachment procedure legitimacy itself.

A return of regional alternatives to balance the US hegemony over Paraguay only occurred with the election and inauguration of Horacio Cartes in 2013, fully restoring the country’s legitimacy (Winand et al. 2016, 87). Foreign policy was politicized and used to attain international support to confront the domestic crisis (Lambert 2011) and a clientelist tool to respond to domestic political imperatives (Heduvan 2020).

The Brazilian case represented the instrumentalization of the MRE by Serra. His political activism against leftist South American governments, especially Venezuela, generated discomfort within Itamaraty (Oliveira et al. 2018, 156). Casarões (2016, 83) points out that the strong rhetoric, aiming to destroy PT’s legacy and its model of international insertion, differed from previous ministers. A drop in the level of presidential diplomacy (following the prior relative fall from Lula to Rousseff) (Seabra et al. 2017, 209) contributed to giving room for Serra.

Early in his tenure, Serra attacked governments that were critical of the impeachment process. MRE Press Releases 176, 177, and 179 categorically criticized the actions of Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, El Salvador, the ALBA-TCP, and the Secretary-General of Unasur (Casarões 2016, 82–83).

The chancellor was most critical of Maduro's dictatorship, with three press statements (No. 204, 213, and 255) commenting on acts of violence against the opposition and highlighting the government's political radicalism. Several neighbors, including Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, and most notably Venezuela, were hesitant about his nomination due to this behavior and his statements during the 2010 presidential election campaign. The gentler tone of press releases 216 and 290 reflected Serra's attempts to establish a coalition against the Maduro dictatorship. The first agreement was signed by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay, while the second was signed by 15 OAS nations, including all Mercosur members (Casarões 2016, 86–87).

That was a direct effect of the multiparty presidential system that led to naming a member of the congressional coalition to the MRE. Despite a recent past of intense presidential diplomacy (mainly during Cardoso's and Lula's mandates) (Cason and Power 2009), there was a politicization of foreign policy by its linking to electoral interests of the foreign minister, with the adoption of anti-PT activism.

Thus, Temer's delegation of foreign policy to a political figure during impeachment negotiations politicized it and tied it to the domestic/electoral agenda. The foreign minister introduced an ideological component by using an anti-PT rhetoric and attacking Venezuela, as was the case in Paraguay.

Foreign policy change was expected after a succession between presidents of different ideologies, but there was a strong link between external and domestic agendas, with the former being highly politicized. Despite significant differences in political systems and bureaucratic professionalization across cases, the politics of impeachment approximated how political forces shifted and foreign policy changes were implemented. In Brazil, pushing Itamaraty's and traditional presidential predominance, the foreign ministers' objectives influenced foreign policy.

Foreign policy outcomes – international domain

The Franco government received a swift regional response. Several South American countries withdrew ambassadors, claiming that Lugo's 24-hour defense preparation breached the impeachment process and suggested an institutional coup. In Mendoza, on June 29, 2012, Unasur and Mercosur suspended Paraguay until the 2013 presidential elections for breaking the democratic clause. They also established a political process monitoring commission (Marsteintredet et al. 2013, 114).

However, Brazil was not sanctioned despite neighbors' protests. In her final days, Rousseff called the impeachment a coup. Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Cuba, and Unasur's Secretary-General Ernesto Samper supported her. The latter warned of potential harm to regional democracy and hemispheric legal security (Oliveira et al. 2018, 155). Rousseff's Minister of Foreign Affairs opposed her threats to invoke the Mercosur democratic clause, showing a division on the coup theory. Regionally, Venezuela's negative reaction was offset by Argentina's receptive response (Portes 2017, 66).

Argentina, under Macri's administration, was the first nation to acknowledge and welcome Temer. The United States adopted the expected stance in response to the anticipated outcome (impeachment). Obama's Press Secretary Josh Earnest reaffirmed the maturity and resilience of Brazilian institutions and viewed the impeachment as a foregone conclusion (Earnest 2016). The neutrality of the proclamation did not call into question the validity of the process.

Following the theoretical discussion of the first section, the degree of international restraints was most evident in Paraguay because of the impeachment procedures (often called 'lightning impeachment'), Paraguay's higher vulnerability, and the more adverse ideological conditions. The quickness of the impeachment process generated stronger reactions from neighbors, with the new government not being recognized by several countries (i), a condition accentuated by Paraguay's low power and resources (ii), insufficient to reverse neighbors' and international institutions' positions. Regional conditions also intensified its isolation, with South America predominance of leftist governments. In addition, members of Mercosur were interested in approving Venezuela's membership (iii) (so far blocked by the Paraguayan parliament).

Variations in the same three factors explain why Temer did not face such an adverse scenario. The impeachment process followed the legal rite, although contested by various political and social forces.⁵ The successor soon had his government internationally recognized and was internally accepted by an expressive share of social forces (i). Although pressured by some neighbors, Brazil's greater resources and diversification of international partners guaranteed better conditions for Serra to alter from South-South to North-South strategy (iii). The retreat of the Pink Tide, already underway in 2016, also permitted forming a regional coalition with other center-right governments, like Argentina, Peru, Colombia, and Paraguay itself (ii). Therefore, despite problems of international legitimacy, Brazil had material conditions and partners that enabled counterbalancing external and domestic restrictions. A more ideologically friendly region and a broader international prominence generated alternatives for action.

Again, like with the implementation of changes, the kind of foreign policy adopted was expected (North-oriented, economic liberalization, hemispherical integration) apart from the ideological style. This feature demonstrates the existence of narrative disputes and the politicization of foreign policy.

Political polarization imposed on newly inaugurated governments the need to seek international alternatives, a natural path for the government's legitimization at home and abroad. Despite this, reactions were more adverse in Paraguay than in Brazil. First, procedural problems involving the impeachment of Lugo facilitated the emergence of conflicting narratives. Second, the Pink Tide was stronger then. Third, Paraguay's lower resources hampered its quest for legitimacy.

⁵ Mostly social movements, university communities, public employees, and left-wing sectors.

Conclusion

In this article, I examined caretaker governments' international strategies after impeachments. Two case studies were compared using a shared framework to show how local and international issues affect foreign policy.

It was possible to identify a resembling process of foreign policy change that usually takes place in Latin America when the left is substituted by a right-leaning president. Still, foreign policy actors behaved similarly despite major structural disparities. Domestic politics set foreign policy, even though Temer and Franco delegated (affected by the cabinet changes following the impeachment).

After impeachments, narrative disputes over caretaker governments rose legitimacy questioning, politicizing foreign policy and regional relations. As a result, foreign policy was tied to domestic politics and short-term goals, causing unstable and ideological behavior.

The interaction of the impeachments with international variables shaped the outcome. Both Temer and Franco had to confront contestation from neighbors, with regional ideological conditions, perceptions of the impeachment legality, and material resources (all variables differ when comparing Brazil and Paraguay, especially the latter) influenced the challenges faced by each president.

Despite the possibility that politicization could decentralize or democratize the decision-making process, the case studies showed that politicians instrumentalize foreign policy for personal and partisan purposes. Consequently, impeachments brought ideologization and erratic behavior instead of a public debate to achieve consensual positions. Still, although centralization is usually related to presidentialization, this was not necessarily the case; other political actors might lead the politicization process.

Some questions remain unanswered in this study. First, its findings are time- and scope-bound. In a cursory examination, when presidents Collor in Brazil, Cubas Grau in Paraguay, and Pérez in Venezuela were impeached, there was no significant change in foreign policy nor presidentialization, with caretakers also delegating the agenda to foreign ministers. However, politicization was not a prominent feature; thus, impeachments may not be a sufficient condition for it. Finally, in less politically unstable regions, the emergence of narrative disputes may not be as significant, likely not influencing foreign policy accordingly.

The selection of one specific kind of PB in which narrative disputes are more likely to emerge – impeachments – serves as an initial contribution to a research agenda that still needs to disclose the differences between the effect of impeachments and other kinds of presidential interruptions and between democratic and presidential ruptures on foreign policy, as well as, more broadly, to understand the processes of politicization of Latin American foreign policies.

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