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Luis Leandro Schenoni

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# **The Brazilian Rise and the Elusive South American Balance**

## **Abstract**

Within the last 50 years, the Brazilian share of South American power has increased from one-third to one-half of the overall material capabilities in the region. Such a significant change in the regional power structure cannot have gone unnoticed by Brazil's neighbors. The article addresses the main question related to South American unipolarity (1985–2014): Why have most countries in the region not implemented any consistent balancing or bandwagoning strategies vis-à-vis Brazil? Drawing on neoclassical realism, the article proposes that certain domestic variables – government instability, limited party-system institutionalization, and powerful presidents – have diverted the attention of political elites and foreign policy executives from the challenges generated by a rising Brazil. Crisp-set qualitative comparative analysis is used to test this hypothesis and other alternative explanations for the regional imbalance.

Keywords: South America, neoclassical realism, regional powers

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# The Brazilian Rise and the Elusive South American Balance

Luis Leandro Schenoni

## Article Outline

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## 1 Introduction

It is unquestionable that the power gap between Brazil and its regional neighbors has increased dramatically in recent decades.<sup>1</sup> According to the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC),<sup>2</sup> Brazil's share of global power has increased moderately from 1.2 percent to 2.4 percent over the last 50 years, while its share of regional power has increased from 36 percent to 50 percent over the same period. This has meant that South America has been a unipolar subsystem since 1985.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Earlier versions of this working paper were presented at the Observatoire Politique de l'Amérique latine et des Caraïbes – Sciences Po (Paris, 24 April 2014), the XXXII International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (Chicago, 23 May 2014), and the Instituto de Relações Internacionais – USP (São Paulo, 12 February 2015). I would like to thank Jorge Battaglini, Olivier Dabène, Anja Jetschke, Ignacio Labaqui, Andrés Malamud, Detlef Nolte, Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, Marcel Vaillant, Amâncio Oliveira, Janina Onuki, and Leslie Wehner, as well as my fellow doctoral students Víctor Mijares, Jorge Garzón, Fernando Mourón, Francisco Urdinez, and Nicolas Beckmann, for many thought-provoking insights on previous drafts.

2 The CINC is based on six indicators of international power: energy consumption, iron and steel production, military expenditure, military personnel, total population, and urban population.

3 A system turns from bipolar to unipolar when the most powerful country is more than two times the size of the second-most-powerful country. In South America, this happened in 1975 and then – and definitely – in 1985, when Brazil's CINC became more than twice that of Argentina's (Martin 2006: 55).

Most studies on Brazilian foreign policy address the country's relations with other emerging powers or with great powers. However, it is evident that the rise of the South American colossus, while generating new parities at the systemic level, has produced sub-systemic disparities that have affected its relations with other states in the region (Malamud 2011; Lima 2013; Flesmes and Wehner 2015). There has been increasing awareness of and concern about the effects this change has had – and probably will have – in the Brazilian backyard. Moreover, a lively debate has ignited around a forthcoming edited volume entitled *Latin American Reactions to the Rise of Brazil* (Gardini and Tavares de Almeida 2014) and the latest issue of *International Politics* (Flesmes and Lobell 2015), where several scholars address this issue from different perspectives.

Such academic interest seems to be justified by a patent empirical riddle. Realism<sup>4</sup> stands as the single international relations (IR) theory that addresses the expected effects of changes in relative power. In a nutshell, it predicts that in a unipolar – yet not hegemonic – South America the power gap between Brazil and its more powerful neighbors should drive the latter to counterbalance by increasing their capabilities or reorganizing their regional and extraregional alliances (cf. Waltz 1979; Mares 1988; Huntington 1999). Nonetheless, this has not consistently occurred. South American secondary powers may have contested Brazilian leadership at times, with varied intensity (Flesmes and Wehner 2015),<sup>5</sup> but this behavior has not been consistent across cases and years.

What explains the South American underreaction to the Brazilian rise? Neoclassical realism proposes an answer to the paradox, asserting that inconsistent balancing or bandwagoning strategies may be attributable to certain domestic conditions that prevent a coherent response to subsystemic incentives (Rose 1998; cf. Abb 2013). This article tests the plausibility of such an explanation by analyzing unipolarity in South America from 1985 to 2014. In doing so, it focuses on long-term strategic trends, thereby differentiating itself from foreign policy analyses based on short-term data (cf. Lobell et al. 2015).

The article is divided into three sections. The first section explains how Brazil's neighbors' foreign policies could be expected to have developed in the absence of domestic constraints. A second section identifies certain domestic variables that may have intervened, preventing such behavior. A third section contrasts these explanations with other competing hypotheses using crisp-set qualitative comparative analysis (csQCA). The article closes with

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4 In a broad sense that encompasses balance of power theory, hegemonic stability theory and also power transition theory.

5 The umbrella concept of “contestational politics” involves a variety of foreign policy instruments – for example, alliance building, entangling diplomacy, binding, omni-enmeshment, balking, hedging or fence sitting – which can be interpreted as alternatives to a soft-balancing strategy (cf. Pape 2005; Paul 2005). Daniel Flesmes and Leslie Wehner (2015) apply this concept to South America and find some evidence of strategic contestation in the region. However, secondary regional powers in South America have behaved very differently from each other, with some changing their strategy several times since the inception of regional unipolarity in 1985. This article attempts to explain these different behaviors.

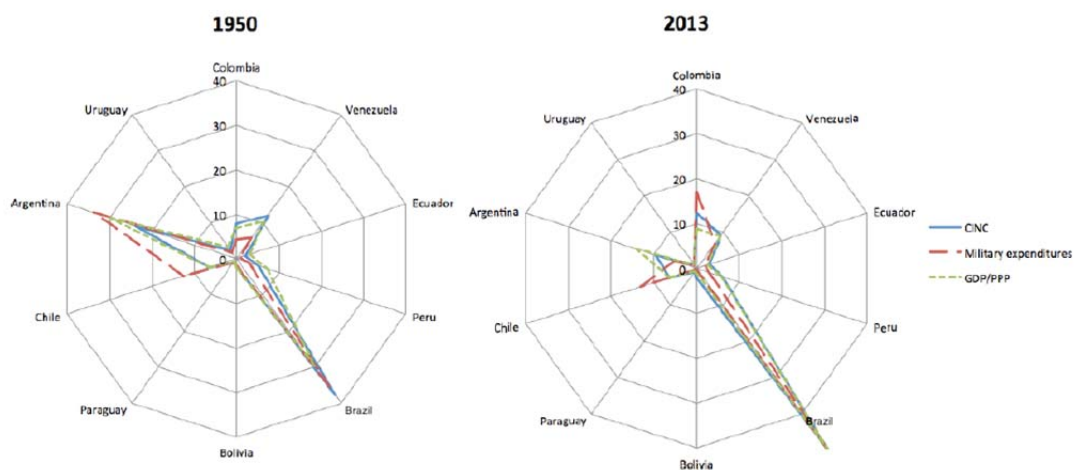
conclusions regarding how government instability, limited party-system institutionalization, and powerful presidents have diverted the attention of political elites and foreign policy executives from the challenges generated by a rising Brazil.

## 2 The International Level: Power Distribution and Foreign Policy Behavior

This article argues that it is the combined effect of international and domestic variables that has given shape to South American international politics. For the sake of clarity, this section explores the international variables first. Therefore, it focuses on states as the main actors in and relative capabilities as the main determinants of foreign policy outcomes, while *ceteris paribus* is assumed for any other international or domestic variables. Thus, to begin with, South America is imagined as a neorealist subsystem of unitary, rational, and self-interested countries (Waltz 1979).<sup>6</sup>

The neorealist logic was omnipresent in South American foreign policy decision-making before the 1980s. In fact, the balancing of power was the standard behavior in the region until the competitive Argentine–Brazilian bipolarity gave way to Brazilian primacy and cooperative unipolarity (Martin 2006; Lima 2013). Since then, secondary regional powers such as Argentina have not attempted to counter the Brazilian rise by increasing their own capabilities through internal balancing or by reorganizing alliances through external balancing.

**Figure 1: Power Concentration in South America: Country Percentage of GDP, Military Expenditures, and CINC in 1950 and 2013**



Source: CINC, Correlates of War, and Bank's Database.

<sup>6</sup> Waltz does not develop a theory of how subsystems behave. He says instead that "A general theory of international politics is necessarily based on the great powers. [However,] The theory once written also applies to lesser states that interact insofar as their interactions are insulated from the intervention of the great powers of a system" (Waltz 1979: 73).

Confronted with this new reality, many IR scholars abandoned neorealism and assumed that somehow identities or institutions explained the imbalance. Even among those who continued to subscribe to realism, the effect of the Brazilian rise was underestimated because of the overwhelming American hegemony in the region. For instance, it was argued that the United States' offensive policies in the commercial realm created incentives for secondary regional powers such as Argentina to cooperate with Brazil through MERCOSUR, even given the uneven conditions of Brazilian primacy (Gómez-Mera 2013).<sup>7</sup> However, the American hemispheric hegemony had already existed during the period of Argentine–Brazilian bipolarity, and few incentives had existed then for South American secondary powers to ally against the hegemon (Mares 1988).

If we keep the American hemispheric hegemony as a constant from 1945 onwards, a distinctive South American logic remains: the more the major regional power, Brazil, grows, the greater the incentives for secondary regional powers – Argentina, and also Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela – to safeguard their autonomy from their rising neighbor. In the words of Samuel Huntington,

... the principal source of contention between the superpower [the United States] and the major regional powers [that is, Brazil] is the former's intervention to limit, counter, or shape the actions of the latter. For the secondary regional powers [that is, Argentina], on the other hand, superpower intervention is a resource that they potentially can mobilize against their region's major power. The superpower and the secondary regional powers will thus often, although not always, share converging interests against major regional powers, and secondary regional powers will have little incentive to join in a coalition against the superpower. (Huntington 1999: 42)

The logic highlighted by Samuel Huntington is clear. Brazil has without a doubt “sufficient material capabilities to project power in its regional [South American] environment ... which assumes a typically unipolar distribution” (Lima 2013: 190). Of course, material capabilities are not power per se, but “... are the raw material out of which power relationships are forged” (Baldwin 2013: 277); therefore, given that Brazil represents 50.5 percent of the regional CINC and 55.6 percent of the regional GDP, it is not unreasonable to think that the country could eventually pose a threat to (cf. Walt 1985) or be perceived as a threat by (cf. Jervis 1976) the neighborhood, even if it appears unlikely in the short term. In other words,

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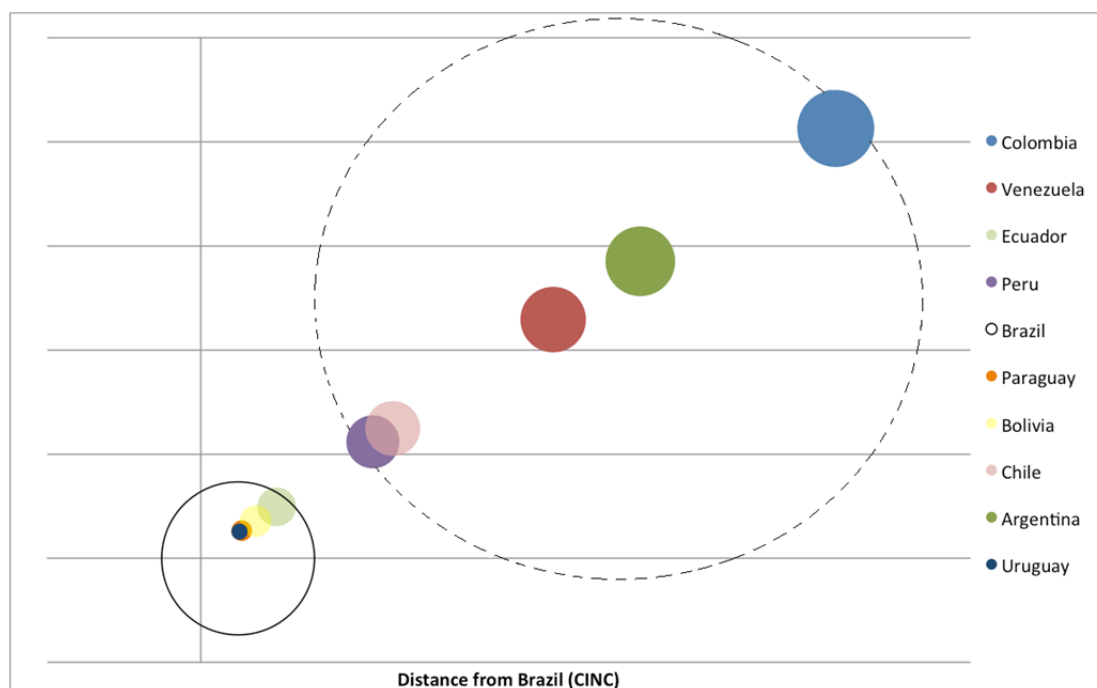
7 Laura Gomes-Mera (2013) provides evidence based on interviews with top policymakers that shows how MERCOSUR served as a defensive strategy against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), but this is different from stating that Argentina had structural incentives for forming a strategic alliance with Brazil. Two pieces of evidence contradict Gomes-Mera's claim. On the one hand, the Argentina–Brazil cooperation started through regional unipolarity, way before the unipolar world came into being: “the initial rapprochement occurred much earlier, under the military regimes in 1979–1980, and economic integration proceeded under democratic governments in the 1980s” (Darnton 2012: 120; cf. Resende-Santos 2002). On the other hand, the end of the Cold War did not substantially change power relations in the Western hemisphere, where US hegemony was uncontested by the USSR. In sum, MERCOSUR may have been a reaction to the FTAA initiative, but not a consequence of capability distribution.



... in each region there are smaller “pivotal states” that make natural U.S. allies against an aspiring regional power. Indeed, the United States’ first move in any counterbalancing game of this sort could be to try to promote such pivotal states to great power status ... regional balancing dynamics are likely to kick in against the local great power much more reliably than the global counterbalance works against the United States. Given the neighbourhoods they live in, an aspiring Chinese, Japanese, Russian, or German [and in this case Brazilian] pole would face more effective counterbalancing than the United States itself. (Wohlforth 1999: 31)

To summarize, there seems to be agreement in the literature on how subsystemic incentives should have operated in a unipolar region where Brazil was waxing but the United States remained a proximate and powerful regional hegemon (Lobell et al. 2015). On the one hand, secondary regional powers – Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela – should have contested Brazilian primacy in a consistent manner. On the other hand, small states historically at loggerheads with secondary regional powers and significantly less empowered – Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Uruguay – should have bandwagoned the South American giant.<sup>8</sup> Figure 2 shows how the regional balance of power should, according to a realist perspective, have been since 1985.

**Figure 2: CINC Country Share and Expected Behaviors in South America**



Notes: The x-axis and the y-axis both represent the distance from Brazil in terms of the CINC using the formula  $CINC_{BR} + CINC_x^2$ . The area inside the circles represents each country's share of the CINC.

Source: CINC mean, 1984–2013; Correlates of War.

8 The difference between secondary regional powers and small states is that the former have enough resources to affect the subsystem by forming alliances with a relatively small number of their peers. Small states, in contrast, have so little power that they would have to coordinate huge alliances to generate an effect (cf. Mare 1988).

From the vantage point of neorealism – that is, considering material capabilities and controlling for all other domestic and international variables – behaviors should follow the pattern described in Figure 1. This statement is a point of departure for addressing this article's central research question: Why have South American countries not consistently reacted in this way?

Table 1 summarizes the countries' actual behaviors towards Brazil, taking into account two key features: commercial interdependence and military expenditures. Economic statecraft and military buildups have long been taken as proof of soft- and hard-balancing, respectively (Pape 2005). Therefore, expected balancers – secondary regional powers – are supposed to be less commercially attached to Brazil while maintaining relatively high military expenditures. In contrast, expected bandwagoners – small states – are presumed to exhibit a high level of trade interdependence with Brazil and low military expenditures.

Considering structural factors such as trade interdependence and military expenditures in order to assess balancing in South America is of utmost importance. This allows us to distinguish, unlike previous studies (cf. Flesmes and Wehner 2015), between states that really do soft-balance and those that, despite some “contestational” tactics, do not actually apply a long-term soft-balancing strategy.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, many studies have confused bandwagoning with tactic convergence. However, a certain country's support for foreign policy initiatives, joint membership in regional institutions (Burgess 2015), or friendly declarations (Gomez-Mera 2013) do not guarantee that it does not see Brazil as a threat.

This article focuses on structural conditions. It is not as much about perceptions, threats, and short-term balancing (Walt 1985; cf. Wehner 2014) as it is about capabilities and long-term precautions (Waltz 1979). The point is that even if no South American country is obsessed with the possibility of conflict in the short-term, some countries do consider the probability – as low as it may be – and thus have long-term independent strategies (cf. Brooks 1997). Therefore, secondary regional powers that remain commercially autonomous from Brazil and maintain some degree of military readiness still behave as balancers of some sort. Table 1 provides a picture of the region in 2012; only Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay behaved as expected.<sup>10</sup>

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9 See FN 5.

10 Interestingly, these behaviors were almost constant from 1985 to 2012. The changes in the international system – from bipolarity in the 1980s to unipolarity in the 1990s and an emerging multipolarity after 2000 – did not affect the regional hierarchies of South American intraregional traders or military exponents. For instance, the mean in intraregional trade varied from 24.1 percent (1985–1990) to 32.7 percent (1991–2001) to 34.9 percent (2001–2014), but during the whole period Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay remained the greater intraregional traders (CEPAL 2014). The same was the case with military budgets: Chile and Colombia remained the highest spenders in all three periods (SIPRI 2014). Therefore, even if changes at the systemic level affect military expenditure and trade with Brazil in absolute terms, the relative South American hierarchies remain, proving that a subordinate but relevant subsystemic logic exists.

**Table 1: Theoretical Expectations and Actual Behavior towards Brazil**

	ARG	CHI	COL	PER	VEN	BOL	ECU	PAR	URU
Expectations	Balance					Bandwagon			
Exports to Brazil	HIGH	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW	HIGH	LOW	MED	HIGH
Brazilian imports	HIGH	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW	MED	LOW	HIGH	HIGH
FTA with the US	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
MERCOSUR	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES
Military budget	LOW	HIGH	HIGH	LOW	LOW	LOW	HIGH	LOW	LOW
Rational behavior	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES

Notes: Exports and imports are classified as high if they constitute more than 20 percent of the country's total exports and imports, medium if between 10 percent and 20 percent, and low if less than 10 percent. A threshold of 2 percent of GDP separates high military expenditures from low military expenditures.

Sources: SIPRI Military Expenditures Database (2012), WTO Trade Profiles (2012).

On the one hand, Uruguay is the only small state in South America that consistently bandwagons with Brazil, as evidenced by its trade interdependence and military expenditures. However, while President Mujica has literally stated that Uruguay should “jump on Brazil’s wagon,”<sup>11</sup> all the other small states have thwarted Brazil’s plans, be it by nationalizing Petrobras’ facilities (Bolivia), blocking Venezuela’s admission into MERCOSUR (Paraguay), or disturbing regional stability because of domestic quarrels and border crises (Ecuador).

On the other hand, Chile and Colombia are the only secondary powers that have secured some margin for maneuver vis-à-vis Brazil, both in the commercial and the defense realms. Unlike Argentina and Venezuela, Chile has gently rejected the pressure to participate in MERCOSUR since the organization’s very inception and has used the UNASUR Defense Council to monitor Brazilian doctrines and expenditures (Nolte and Wehner 2014). Colombia is a more reckless balancer. It once overtly defied the UNASUR project by signing a deal allowing the United States to use its military bases. Chile and Colombia are by far Brazil’s most cunning and wary middle-size neighbors.

Besides Chile and Colombia, regional soft-balancers, and Uruguay, a regional bandwagoner, all the other countries contradict realist predictions. Peru, for instance, is a secondary regional power whose behavior resembles the balancing ideal, but its military budget is too low, 1.3 percent of its GDP, for it to be considered a coherent balancer. Bolivia and Paraguay, on the other side, are small countries whose behavior is close to the ideal bandwagoning type, but they are not interdependent enough with Brazil.

Other cases, like Argentina, Ecuador, and Venezuela, bluntly contradict theoretical expectations. Argentina behaves as a bandwagoner: Brazil is its major trading partner and it has the lowest military expenditures – as a share of GDP (0.9 percent) – in the region. Venezuela is less commercially interdependent with Brazil but shows a similar tendency: its trade has shifted considerably from Colombia towards Brazil, now its major trading partner in South

11 Uruguay debe viajar en lo estribos de Brasil (*El Observador*, 1 February 2012).

America. Lastly, Ecuador, a small country expected to bandwagon, behaves almost as a balancer by staying out of MERCOSUR and maintaining high military expenditures. The contradictory nature of these cases is highlighted in Table 1 and deserves special attention.

In the past, some have explained the absence of consistent balancers or bandwagoners as being due to the thick normative nature of South American international society (Merke 2015). Others have focused on short-term tactics – rather than long-term structural constraints – softening the realist lexicon and switching the emphasis to the analysis of Brazil’s “leadership” instead of its primacy (Malamud 2011; Burges 2015). The next section explains why most countries in the region have not implemented any consistent balancing or bandwagoning strategies vis-à-vis Brazil. Neoclassical realism (Rose 1998) offers insights on the problem, asserting that inconsistent balancers or bandwagoners may have particular domestic characteristics that explain their behavior.

### 3 The Domestic Level: Institutions Constraining Foreign Policy

We will now look inside the “black box” of the state to understand how and why neorealist previsions have not taken place in some countries while they have in others.

Following Randall Schweller, it could be said that the most immediate variable affecting a country’s assertion that there is a potential threat is elite consensus on its existence. If a particular country’s political elite is divided on whether or not to balance, the expected balancing behaviors may be inconsistent or may never be exhibited. Therefore, elite and social cohesion, as well as regime stability, are the key variables for understanding foreign policy behavior, as the following causal scheme shows (Schweller 2006: 63):

Rise of an external threat → social fragmentation (cohesion) + government or regime vulnerability (stability) + elite fragmentation (cohesion) → elite disagreement or nonbalancing consensus (elite balancing consensus) → underbalancing (balancing) behavior

In South America, elite and social fragmentation constrain state behavior by calling the foreign policy executive’s attention to domestic politics rather than the international environment.<sup>12</sup>

Since 1985, South American democracies with deep elite divisions have demonstrated less institutionalized party systems and more personalistic politicians as heads of government (Mainwaring and Torcal 2006). Typically, these “delegative” presidents (O’Donnell

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12 The divided nature of Latin American elites has long posed a puzzle to neorealist explanations: “[Latin American nations’] problems did not have so much to do with their neighbours but more with internal factions excluded from power. This observation brings us once again to the types of units that form the region. They are states that are strong in their capabilities to take decisions but weak to implement them; states that are strong in articulating dominant coalitions but weak in administering conflicts when the factions are left out of the loop. Here, the theory of ‘omnibalancing’ brings complexity to the power dynamics. In other words, the region’s leaders do not only seek to balance power in relation to their neighbours but also in relation to domestic factions” (Merke 2010: 18).

1994) have accumulated a great amount of power to secure their position but have sooner or later fallen dramatically due to several episodes of government instability (cf. Pérez-Liñán 2007; Llanos and Marsteintredet 2010).

When the internal politics are unstable and mandates are at stake, the national arena becomes almost as harsh and anarchic as that of international politics. In the event of low party institutionalization and recurrent government crises, South American presidents are not expected to pay much attention to the power transitions taking place in their region. Foreign policy is more likely to become a tool for accumulating domestic power, and countries that would have otherwise been rivals can become allies or be ignored.

Paradigmatic cases like Argentina and Venezuela suggest that two foreign policy behaviors are to be expected from “divided” countries. First, the concentration of veto power in the president should cause foreign policy instability (Tsebelis 2002). Second, domestic turmoil should lead to the underestimation of international threats, an internally oriented foreign policy, and behaviors at odds with neorealist expectations. The story looks more or less like this:

Rise of an external threat ♦ high (low) party-system institutionalization \* representative (delegative) president \* government stability (instability) → neorealist (no neorealist) behavior

Very concrete empirical questions can be addressed to determine whether South American countries are closer to the “unitary” or “divided” ideal type: Have these countries’ presidents completed their mandates? Are their party systems institutionalized? Are their presidents delegative? Table 2 summarizes these data. Not surprisingly, countries with recurrent presidential crises, hyperpresidentialism, and greater electoral volatility – that is, “divided” countries – are the ones that are at odds with neorealist expectations and that have more unstable foreign policies.

**Table 2: Characteristics of “Unitary” (Blue) and “Divided” (White) Countries**

	ARG	CHI	COL	PER	VEN	BOL	ECU	PAR	URU
<b>Government instability</b>	HIGH	LOW	LOW	MED	MED	HIGH	HIGH	MED	LOW
<b>Electoral volatility</b>	HIGH	LOW	LOW	HIGH	HIGH	MED	HIGH	LOW	LOW
<b>Delegative nature</b>	HIGH	LOW	LOW	MED	HIGH	LOW	MED	MED	LOW

Notes: Government instability is classified as low if there has been no presidential crisis, medium if there have been one or two, and high if three presidents were ousted between 1985 and 2013. The average electoral volatility for the period 1990–2011 is measured by the Pedersen index and classified as low if it is less than 35 percent, medium if it is between 35 percent and 48 percent, and high if it is above 48 percent. Finally, the delegative democracies index classifies countries according to an eight-point scale, which is divided here into low, 0 to 3; medium, 3 to 5; and high, 5 to 8.

Sources: Georgetown Political Data of the Americas database (2013) and the delegative democracies index (González 2013).

The first row in Table 2 considers presidential crises that ended with the dissolution of either the executive or the legislative branch (Pérez-Liñán 2007; Llanos and Marsteintredet 2010).<sup>13</sup> The second row shows the country's average ranking on the Pedersen index, which measures electoral volatility as a proxy of party-system institutionalization, in presidential elections from 1990 to 2011. Finally, the third row shows whether the country is more or less similar to what Guillermo O'Donnell (1994) called a delegative democracy, as opposed to a representative one (González 2013; cf. Shugart and Carey 1992).<sup>14</sup>

When the countries are filtered according to party-system institutionalization, the level of delegative democracy, and presidential stability, three cases stand out: Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay.<sup>15</sup> As predicted by neoclassical realism, only these countries have responded rationally to international incentives. Chile and Colombia, secondary regional powers, have consistently counterbalanced Brazil by strengthening economic ties with extraregional powers and maintaining large military budgets. The small state of Uruguay has, despite its harsh tactical discourse, opted to tie itself structurally to Brazil.

The two secondary regional powers that have clearly underbalanced, Argentina and Venezuela, as well as the small state that has been more reluctant to bandwagon, Ecuador, are precisely those that have experienced more presidential crises, greater electoral volatility, and stronger executives. In these cases, domestic instability has resulted in significant foreign

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13 The picture would be far more dramatic if failed coups or crises that did not lead to presidential or legislative breakdowns were considered. In Colombia, César Gaviria and Ernesto Samper had to face corruption scandals that threatened their governments in 1991 and 1996, respectively. This was also the case for Jaime Paz Zamora in Bolivia, González Macchi in Paraguay, and Rodrigo Borja in Ecuador, among others. Venezuelan coup d'état attempts in 1992 and 2002 are also not considered in Table 1 as long as they did not succeed in ousting the president. In all of these cases an institutional arrangement was possible and both legislative and executive powers stood.

14 Lucas González measures O'Donnell's celebrated concept for the first time by asking regional experts to classify every country with regard to eight characteristic attributes of delegative democracies. Those attributes are as follows: "i) the president is taken to be the embodiment of the nation, custodian, and definer of its interests, ii) the policies of his government need bear no resemblance to the promises of his campaign; iii) the president's political base is a political movement, presenting himself as above both political parties and organized interests, iv) other institutions, such as courts and legislatures, are considered impediments to the exercise of power, v) the exercise of power is noninstitutionalized, vi) the president nominates isolated and shielded *técnicos* to office, vii) extremely weak or nonexistent horizontal accountability and viii) swift policymaking – a higher likelihood of gross mistakes, hazardous implementation, and the president taking responsibility for the outcome" (González 2013: 7). The index of Latin American presidents' legislative powers and partisan powers provided by Kitschelt et al. (2010: 222; cf. Shugart and Carey 1992) reaches similar conclusions for almost every case besides Uruguay, whose presidency seems stronger. Of course, many institutional changes occurred in most South American countries from 1985 to 2013, so this indicator – like any other – must be taken as an approximation of the concept of hyperpresidentialism.

15 Although this article does not aim to discuss the Brazilian case, this country exhibits a particular history. Even though Brazil saw one president ousted, in 1992, its domestic politics changed dramatically after the Plano Real and economic stabilization (Panizza 2000), becoming those of a very unitary actor. In line with our hypothesis, it was only in this late period that Brazil started behaving as an emerging power.

policy inconsistencies. During the period analyzed here, Venezuela moved from the openly neoliberal and pro-American discourse of Carlos Andrés Pérez to calling George W. Bush “the devil” himself in the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Argentina shifted from a policy of “carnal relations”<sup>17</sup> with the United States to a Chavez-like paranoia and harsh discourse.<sup>18</sup> The changes in Ecuador were no less remarkable. Domestic considerations have been preeminent in these three unstable countries, resulting in overall foreign policy behavior that overtly disregards structural factors. In Argentina or Venezuela, then, the bandwagoning of Brazil has been driven by ideology and presidential preferences rather than long-term strategic concerns.

Finally, there are three cases that cannot be clearly defined as “unitary” or “divided” actors: Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru. Their foreign policies are neither consistent with nor completely at odds with neorealism.

These domestic similarities in South America have long been acknowledged. David and Ruth Collier’s seminal book on party-systems formation and evolution in twentieth-century Latin America pointed out that Brazil and Chile, by incorporating the labor movement through the state, as well as Colombia and Uruguay, by doing so through traditional parties, developed a totally different party-system structure and domestic politics dynamic than those countries where labor was incorporated through populist parties – Argentina, Peru, and Venezuela (Collier and Collier 1991). Many other historical similarities are also evident among our four “unitary” actors on the one hand and our five “divided” actors on the other.<sup>19</sup>

A celebrated study on the Latin American Left recently differentiated between Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay on the one hand and Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela on the other, in terms not only of their ideological discourse but also of their political institutions

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16 “The devil came here yesterday, and it smells of sulfur still today, this table that I am now standing in front of,” in “Hugo Chávez compara a Bush con el demonio desde el estrado de Naciones Unidas” (*El País*, 20 September 2006).

17 Those were the words of the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs during a meeting held in the Inter-American Development Bank in 1991 (cf. Escudé and Cisneros: 216).

18 “Cristina acusa a ‘sectores concentrados’ de ‘querer voltear al gobierno con ayuda extranjera’” (*Clarín*, 30 September 2014).

19 The former have demonstrated more cohesive political elite behavior since the very beginning of the twentieth century, when the conservative oligarchies managed to cooperate and keep workers under control. Thus, it was also in the case of “unitary” actors that the labor movement, initially excluded from politics, radicalized, almost achieving social revolution before bureaucratic-authoritarian coups d’état (O’Donnell 1973), as in Brazil in 1964 and Chile in 1973, or bipartisan agreements, as in Colombia in 1958, restored the exclusion of popular sectors and consolidated the control of an always cohesive political elite, the national bourgeoisie, and the military. With cohesive and conservative elites who were determined to repress social protest, Chile and Colombia were, not surprisingly, the first countries to implement consistent economic reforms in the 1980s, thereby avoiding great shocks during the Latin American debt crisis. Finally, unitary actors exhibited the aforementioned features in the last decades: executive–legislative relations where more cooperative presidents did not become delegative, while party-system institutionalization remained high and presidential crises were absent.

and economic policies (Levitzky and Roberts 2011). This section has shown that those conclusions could be extended to foreign policy as well.

#### 4 A Qualitative Analysis of the Neoclassical Realist Hypothesis

In the first section, this article considered a single variable or condition with which to explain South American foreign policies: national capabilities. A second section amended this simplistic view by adding three more conditions: party-system institutionalization, government stability, and presidential character. This section offers a far more complex understanding of regional politics, considering every other explanatory variable in a comparative test of the paper's hypothesis.

From an intuitive perspective, the above explanation of South American foreign policies seems to coherently describe the regional subsystem during the three decades of Brazilian unipolarity. However, a detailed and systematic examination of this argument should be undertaken in order to test the internal and external validity of the aforementioned hypothesis. So far, a relationship between the alleged "cause" and "effect" has been detected, but two things are still unknown: whether the presumed cause does temporally precede the effect<sup>20</sup> and whether there are alternative explanations for this same phenomenon. A comparative test is conducted here to solve the second of these remaining puzzles.

As is usually the case in IR, the number of cases – the nine South American neighbors of Brazil – is not sufficient to apply statistics. Among the comparative methods for small-N analysis, fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) also requires more than 25 cases. Therefore, crisp-set qualitative comparative analysis (csQCA) seems to be the most suitable method to test for alternative hypotheses (Rihoux and Ragin 2009).

Based on Boolean algebra and set theory, csQCA is a simple configurational comparative analysis of dichotomous variables – conditions that are either present or not present – for a small number of cases. If every alternative hypothesis has been introduced to the analysis, then this method compares on a case-by-case basis, giving a solution in terms of an INUS condition – that is, the insufficient but necessary parts of a condition which is itself unnecessary but sufficient to explain a certain outcome. Therefore, if low party-system institutional-

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20 An important contribution of this article has been to overcome theoretical underspecification and allow for replication and testing by developing a more observable account of causal mechanisms determining South American states' foreign policy stability and rationale. However, these mechanisms are far from proven. Even if it is well known that a set of South American countries has evolved similarly with regard to their party systems and political economy (cf. Flores-Macías 2012; Roberts 2012), there are competing explanations for these resemblances, and the link between these countries' paths and foreign policy behavior is far from evident. Process-tracing methodology (Beach and Pedersen 2013) could be used to check for the actual existence of these mechanisms, with each South American country taken as a case study. However, this would be impossible to do within a single article.



zation, government instability, and hyperpresidentialism remain the better configuration for explaining foreign policy when all other explanations are controlled, this would lead us to accept the nonspuriousness of the aforementioned relationship.

The question to be asked is the following: For what other reasons – besides these domestic variables – might Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay have behaved in the aforementioned way? In other words, why have Chile and Colombia integrated their economies with extraregional powers and maintained the highest military budgets in South America? Or why has Uruguay been so unproblematic for Brazil, in comparison with other small states in the region?

There are possible alternative explanations for such behaviors. For example, liberals would argue that regime types, the level of economic interdependence, and the presence of international institutions could affect bilateral cooperation (Keohane 1989). In Table 3 below, these alternative explanatory variables are introduced into a broader test that considers democratic scores (Freedom House 2014), membership in intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) (SIPRI 2014), and exports as a share of GDP (World Bank 2014).

Additionally, since military spending is a dimension of our dependent variable, the power of the military, the existence of latent territorial disputes, and the presence of internal security problems could be said to affect the level of expenditure (Isacson 2011). Therefore, the csQCA analysis also considers the relative strength of the military within the Ministry of Defense (Pion-Berlin 2009: 580), the number of dormant territorial disputes for each country (cf. Mare 2001), and the levels of internal violence (UNODC 2011).

Furthermore, since trade flows – to Brazil – are another dimension of our dependent variable, it could be said that the presence of protectionist interest groups may affect trade volumes. Therefore, the strength of trade unions is introduced to the analysis by considering trade union density and trade union concentration scores (Roberts 2002: 15; cf. Kitschelt et al. 2010).

Finally, geopolitical factors like the Pacific or Atlantic orientation of each case as well as its geographical proximity to the United States are also included in the test.

Table 3 contains several alternative responses to the main question posed by this article. However, a csQCA analysis of these conditions presents a “limited diversity” problem since there are too many conditions for too few cases (Rihoux and Ragin 2009: 27).<sup>21</sup> Therefore, we proceed with two analyses.

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21 Conditions (14) exceed the number of cases (9). This makes it impossible to control for every combination of conditions: there are  $2^{14}=16384$  logical possible combinations and therefore  $2^{14}-9=16375$  logical reminders.

**Table 3: Presence or Absence of Contesting Conditions (First Test)**

	ARG	CHI	COL	PER	VEN	BOL	ECU	PAR	URU
Government stability									
Institutionalized party system									
Representative president									
Weak trade unionism									
Unconstrained military									
Low democratic score									
Limited IGO membership									
Inward-oriented economy									
Member of the Pacific Alliance									
Member of MERCOSUR									
Proximity to the United States									
Pacific-oriented country									
Internal security concerns									
Many latent disputes									
Realist behavior towards Brazil									

Notes: Government instability, electoral volatility, and delegative democracies data was transformed into dichotomous data to permit csQCA analysis. Countries are considered to have weak trade unionism if they score less than 6.5 in the aforementioned index based on Kenneth Roberts (2002). Countries are considered to have an unconstrained military if they score 2 or less in Pion-Berlin's (2009) index. A low democratic score represents a score of 3 or more in Freedom House's Freedom in the World index (2014). Members of eight or fewer IGOs are considered to have low membership (SIPRI 2014), and those countries that export less than 30 percent of their GDP are considered inward-oriented (World Bank 2014). Countries where homicide rates are over 12 deaths for every 100,000 inhabitants are considered to have internal security concerns (UNODC 2011), and states with three or more boundary conflicts are considered to have many latent disputes (Mares 2001).

Sources: Georgetown Political Data of the Americas' database (2014), delegative democracies index (González 2013), labor strength index (Roberts 2002), defense ministries classification (Pion-Berlin 2009), hemispheric boundary disputes (Mares 2001), World Bank database (2014), Freedom House (2014), SIPRI (2014), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013).

First, we analyze every single alternative hypothesis *versus* our main hypothesis, including four conditions in each test. When the test is run with the Kirk software (Reichert and Rubinson 2013), the results remain consistent. Government stability, institutionalized party systems, and a constrained president remain necessary conditions for neorealist behavior when any other single explanation is considered. Furthermore, the combination of government instability with low party-system institutionalization and the combination of government instability with hyperpresidentialism are both INUS conditions for foreign policies to be unconcerned with the distribution of material capabilities in the region. However, the disadvantage of this approach is that even if it allows for the rejection of a single alternative hy-

pothesis, it will not be able to discard the possibility that a combination of these factors could also explain neorealist behavior.

Given the fact that a combination of other conditions could still explain the outcome, we proceed with a second analysis, combining all liberal explanations and all military-related explanations into two new categories and testing whether these combined explanations can compete with our main hypothesis.<sup>22</sup>

**Table 4: Truth Table (Second Test)**

Unified Elite	Strength of the Military	No Liberal Constraints	N	Cons.	Outcome	Observation Consistent	Observation Inconsistent
True	True	True	1	1.00	True	COL	-
True	False	True	1	1.00	True	URU	-
False	True	True	1	0.00	False	-	VEN
False	False	True	1	0.00	False	-	BOL
True	True	False	0	n/a	Rem.	-	-
True	False	False	1	1.00	True	CHI	-
False	True	False	1	0.00	False	-	ECU
False	False	False	3	0.00	False	-	ARG, PER, PAR

Notes: For this test the categories *government stability*, *institutionalized party system*, and *representative president* are all combined into the new label “unified elite,” which is positive when at least two of the previous categories were positive too. Applying the same rule, *low democratic scores*, *low IGO membership*, and *inward-oriented economy* are all combined into the category “no liberal constraints.” Finally, all military-related explanations – *unconstrained military*, *internal security concerns*, and *latent disputes* – are combined into one category labeled “strength of the military.”

Sources: Georgetown Political Data of the Americas’ database (2014), delegative democracies index (González 2013), labor strength index (Roberts 2002), defense ministries classification (Pion-Berlin 2009), World Bank database (2014), Freedom House (2014), SIPRI (2014), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013).

When this second test is run with the Kirk software, the results are consistent again. A necessity test shows a “unified elite” – that is, government stability, institutionalized party systems, and representative presidents combined – as the only necessary condition for neorealist behavior. Because there are zero cases with a unified elite, a strong military, and liberal constraints – that is, the true/true/false configuration is a logical remainder as shown in Table 4 – we cannot be sure that this is a sufficient condition for such behavior. However, the test also shows that a divided elite is a sufficient condition for non-neorealist behavior. In other words, a sufficiency test, when asked for a parsimonious solution, also shows “unified elite” as the unique INUS condition with full consistency and coverage (1.00).

<sup>22</sup> I would like to thank Aníbal Pérez-Liñán for the idea of undertaking this overarching analysis by combining previous categories into three broad hypotheses.

## 5 Conclusion

In recent decades, many have argued that neorealist interpretations of international politics have not applied to South America after democratization. However, this article shows that the balance-of-power logic still applies, though it is filtered by specific domestic constraints.

The paper's argument has been carefully developed. The first section analyzed the question of whether there are international incentives for secondary regional powers to balance or to bandwagon, reaching the conclusion that *ceteris paribus* – that is, in the absence of an explicit threat – the distribution of capabilities generates no clear incentives to ally with Brazil. Since Brazil's primacy is overwhelming – and steadily increasing – there are instead incentives to balance or at least secure military and economic autonomy. For small states, there are incentives to bandwagon with Brazil.

Having identified Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay as consistent neorealist players, the second section arrived at the conclusion that government stability, party-system institutionalization, and “representative” presidents – as opposed to delegative presidents or hyperpresidentialism – are necessary to explain neorealist behavior. These findings were tested, in the third section, against alternative hypotheses using csQCA analysis. The results held, showing that government stability, institutionalized party systems, and a constrained president are INUS conditions for explaining foreign policies' consistency with neorealism.

However, csQCA methods have important shortcomings. First, they do not allow for generalization, which means that these results are valid only for South American international politics from democratization onwards. Second, in the process of dichotomizing independent variables or conditions, much information has been lost. Third, much work still needs to be done to better specify the causal mechanisms connecting the aforementioned conditions with foreign policy making. In this sense, this article is intended simply as a starting point for a debate on how the regional subsystem, together with domestic politics, affects international relations in South America.

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## Appendix

**Table A1: Raw Data for the Variables Dichotomized in the QCA Analysis**

	ARG	CHI	COL	PER	VEN	BOL	ECU	PAR	URU
<b>Presidential crises</b>	3	0	0	2	1	3	3	2	0
<b>Electoral volatility</b>	49.9	29.7	31.1	55.6	53.2	46.7	-	30.8	14.1
<b>Delegative democracy</b>	6.6	0.5	3	4.5	6.2	2.6	3.9	4.6	0
<b>Pres. Leg./power (K)*</b>	7	14	11	13	7	5	14	-	6.5
<b>Pres. party/power (K)</b>	3	1	2	2	3	2	1	-	3
<b>Military expenditures</b>	0.9	2.1	3.3	1.3	1.0	1.5	3.4	1.8	1.9
<b>Labor strength</b>	15	7	0.9	7.5	7.9	7.4	2.7	0.9	6.2
<b>Labor strength (K)</b>	15	7	0.9	7.5	7.9	7.4	2.7	0.9	6.2
<b>IGO memberships</b>	14	10	9	10	9	7	9	8	8
<b>Freedom House</b>	2	1	3	2	5	3	3	3	1
<b>Civil-military control</b>	2	1	3	1	3	3	3	3	1
<b>Exports as % of GDP</b>	20	34	18	26	26	45	31	50	26
<b>Exports to Brazil</b>	20.7	5.5	3.1	6.1	2.2	33.3	4.2	14.2	20.4
<b>Imports from Brazil</b>	29.5	8.3	5.0	6.4	8.6	18.1	4.5	26.3	21.1
<b>Homicide rates</b>	6.9	3.5	52.8	17.5	35.3	6.5	17.5	14.6	6.2
<b>Border disputes</b>	2	2	4	1	4	1	1	0	1

\*For this indicator, a high value means a low level of presidential power.

Sources: Raw data for the variables used in this article. Sources are listed under tables 1, 2 and 3. “K” stands for data from Kitschelt et al. (2010).



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