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The National Legislatures in the Enlargement of Mercosur: Paraguay's Acceptance of Venezuela and Bolivia

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Araujo Andre leite (2024). The National Legislatures in the Enlargement of Mercosur: Paraguay's Acceptance of Venezuela and Bolivia. *LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY*, 66(1), 51-76 [10.1017/lap.2023.23].

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/996947> since: 2024-11-20

Published:

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2023.23>

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The National Legislatures in the Enlargement of Mercosur: Paraguay's Acceptance of Venezuela and Bolivia

André Leite Araujo

ABSTRACT

Regional integration blocs are subject to the admission of new members, which must be approved by domestic institutions. This article analyzes how the incorporation of Venezuela and Bolivia into Mercosur passed in the Paraguayan Congress. While the first case lasted from 2007 to 2013, demonstrating parliamentary opposition, the second episode took place between 2015 and 2016, suggesting convergence between the executive and legislative branches on the issue. Using process tracing, the unveiled mechanism shows how government and opposition forces act to alter the duration of the bill in Congress and that political parties have a pendular behavior according to political cleavages. Moreover, the findings of this study suggest the existence of a parliamentary veto power in foreign affairs and the importance of having homogeneous coalitions to achieve faster approvals.

Keywords: Mercosur, Paraguay, parliaments, treaties

Treaties are one of the elements of foreign affairs. They are documents that bind the parties to international commitments and, as in other policies, these legal instruments need to be negotiated and approved to enter into force. In that vein, if a treaty is not ratified, it is not valid, and its goals cannot be formally pursued. Detecting possible obstacles to ratification and ultimately to foreign policy, is important to know how this process can be improved. Understanding the process also helps identify which factors influence decisionmakers in their resolutions. Hence, what prevents the approval of an international treaty is the guiding motivation for this research.

This article analyzes two episodes in the Paraguayan Parliament, the body responsible for deliberating on treaties signed by the executive branch. The comparison investigates how the parliament behaved toward the expansion of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur). Both Venezuela and Bolivia signed the accession to the regional bloc, but Paraguayan lawmakers reacted differently to each country. In the first case, they used their veto power and delayed the decision for almost seven years, which obstructed Venezuela from becoming a full member of Mercosur. In the second case, they quickly approved the accession of Bolivia without

major resistance. Thus, the central question of this article is why parliaments delay the ratification of international treaties.

To answer this question, I use process tracing and investigate how parliamentarians act toward international agreements and which instruments are used to support or oppose them. The in-depth analysis helps explain how legislators may use their veto power and under which conditions they do so by observing the presence or absence of conditions in the causal mechanism that explains this phenomenon. The findings indicate that the relationship with the executive branch and the partisan composition are decisive factors in using the veto power.

The relevance of this study is to comprehend parliamentary behavior in foreign policy by examining the process of treaty ratification, which is a frequent task of national legislatures. Although foreign policy is usually conducted by the executive branch, parliaments may act in this area by approving and legitimizing the signed treaties. Shorter or longer times to reach approval may indicate agreement with or resistance to the government's policy, affecting the procedure's time horizons.

Comparing the two cases of the Paraguayan ratification of the enlargement of Mercosur indicates that the parliament may rapidly agree with the executive policy, approving the treaty, when there is a parliamentary majority supporting the agenda proposed by the government. This is seen in the approval of Bolivia's accession to the bloc. In contrast, political fragmentation in the parliament and opposition to certain foreign policy priorities may trigger the legislature to block a decision, preventing the ratification, as seen in the incorporation of Venezuela.

Following the empirical discussion, the theoretical contribution of this article is that veto can be exerted by a national body (the parliament) and by a small state (such as Paraguay), impacting foreign policy and the international scenario in a region. Although this does not occur frequently, under certain conditions this behavior may take place and affect actors' initial expectations.

This article takes the form of eight sections. First it presents the theoretical framework and state of the art, followed by the methodology used for this study. The fourth section is concerned with the evolution of Mercosur and its dynamics, while the fifth section deals with Paraguayan politics in the twenty-first century. The empirical analysis of parliamentary behavior in deliberation and decisions on the accession of two candidates to Mercosur occupies two sections—one dedicated to the Venezuelan incorporation and another to the Bolivian entrance into the bloc. The parliamentary behavior is then compared, followed by conclusions and suggestions for further research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The large and growing academic literature on foreign policy analysis has revealed the importance of legislatures. However, much of the literature lacks clarity regarding the legislature's potential veto power in treaty ratification and the management of time and duration of legislative procedures.

In several countries around the globe, the executive is entitled to negotiate and sign treaties with its international counterparts, and national parliaments are responsible for approving these decisions (Rezek 2011), giving them considerable power to alter international relations by either rejecting the treaty or slowing down the implementation of the decision. For this reason, parliaments are relevant actors when studying not only the signing of treaties but also their ratification and implementation.

Thus, international agreements demand a double approval: first, when they are negotiated and signed; followed by internal ratification. Particularly in the case of Mercosur, its intergovernmental framework demands consensus on every decision, not only to negotiate a new act but also in the ratification phase (Pennetta 2009; Gardini 2011). Therefore, to implement the agreements, domestic bodies need to ratify them. Nonetheless, empirical evidence shows that the internal process is not the same across the member states (Ventura et al. 2012), with a difference in the time taken by each part to approve it and the resistance of domestic actors.

A note of caution is due here to mention that even if parliaments may oppose certain foreign policy agreements, this happens in special situations—with more politicized bills (Migliorati and Vignoli 2022; Kesgin and Kaarbo 2010; Duina and Raunio 2007). This caveat helps to distinguish between ordinary legislative procedures, where parliamentarians tend to agree with what the government puts forward, and a few bills that attract more attention and become divisive issues or are rejected (Ribeiro et al. 2020; Ribeiro and Oliveira 2018; Wildavsky 1966). This assertive position is not a frequent phenomenon, but it does happen and needs to be analyzed to understand why this difference occurs. Why do parliamentarians oppose certain bills and not others?

Even if Latin American presidents hold strong legislative powers—allowing them to get a significant share of their initiatives approved (Figueiredo and Limongi 2000)—parliaments do not always simply ratify what presidents propose. They may react using the powers vested in them, leading to legislatures' broader participation, as far as they are potential veto players, according to the checks and balances principle (Martin 2000). In Tsebelis's perspective, a veto player is an individual or collective actor needed to take a political decision (Tsebelis 1997; 2011). He highlights the importance of the number of veto players, the convergence among the actors, and the cohesion in collective actors. In addition, Tsebelis (2011) suggests that two dimensions influence the probability of vetoing: ideological distance between the two branches and institutional procedures to set the parliamentary agenda. In view of that, the veto conditions are a reflex of both the party system and the institutional environment. Following this argument, the number of veto players limits the size of a win-set; that is, which policy outcome is acceptable to the players, even if it does not reach their ideal preference (Clark et al. 2013; Mansfield et al. 2007).

As a result of the veto power, parliamentarians may postpone a decision. In legislative scenarios, this delay can be a political bargain (Manow and Burkhart 2008; Patty 2016; Giannetti and Pedrazzani 2016). For instance, opposition parties could obstruct a bill that is of interest of the government in order to negotiate their interests. Diniz (2005, 2012) remarks that the undefinition about a project is an

indicator of the difficulty faced by the executive branch in getting its bills approved. In addition, she points out that the preferences of the executive to have some bills positively deliberated might mean submitting them to the parliament because it intends to receive a favorable vote, or if it considers not reaching approval acceptable. In her study, this reflects executive priorities on the parliamentary agenda. Since interbranch relations are a matter of constant negotiation, resources should be mobilized in an intelligent way so as not to “waste” a vote.

The composition of the parliament affects the extent to which the executive can influence the legislature (Alemán and Calvo 2010; Masuyama 2000). The parliament has a partisan nature, and the expected behavior of the coalition is to favor the bill if it is of interest to the government. This is based on the functional assumption that members of the coalition would have cohesion when voting the topic (Hiroi 2008). However, the consensus needs to be built by articulating the interests between both branches, preventing polarization.

Regarding how parliamentarians face international affairs, several works have discussed the particularities of dealing with foreign policy and how legislators behave over time, impacting the international system (Oliveira 2003; Rosati and Scott 2011; Merle 1976; Duina and Raunio 2007). In particular, Henehan (2000) affirms that critical issues cause changes in parliament. This explanation is appropriated to explain long-term patterns, clarifying that salient issues transform parliamentarians' behavior. Referring to the cases analyzed here, Paraguay's suspension from Mercosur in 2012 can be considered one of these watershed events. In view of this, the legislature cannot be seen as isolated from society, as it is subject to pressure from domestic actors, stimulating legislators to have greater participation in foreign affairs (Hofmann and Martill 2021; Lima 2000; Evans 1993; Vigevani et al. 2001; Milner and Kubota 2005).

Bearing this in mind, we would expect that legislators will vote according to their party affiliation—which determines their stances for or against the government. However, in fragmented multiparty presidential systems, coalitions are not constant and have to be negotiated over time, leading to bargaining between the two branches of power. These negotiations also incorporate the pressure from domestic groups interested in the external environment. Thus, the constraints discussed here give legislators room to veto or slow down processes. Such mechanisms are a lever for the legislature to react to an international project proposed by the president.

All the studies reviewed here recognize legislatures as political actors that influence foreign policy through their role in ratifying treaties. Nevertheless, the decisionmaking process is not directly motivated by international conditions but has its sources in the domestic political game. The evidence suggests that the behavior of parliamentarians is oriented by partisan positions; that is, voting for or against what the government proposes. This theoretical assumption guides this article, which aims to test it in the context of a presidential Latin American country. Given the presence of a strong international event (the suspension from Mercosur), the empirical section aims to understand whether the parliamentarians acted on the basis of what was

happening in the international sphere or whether their motivation was based on the government-opposition cleavage.

METHODOLOGY

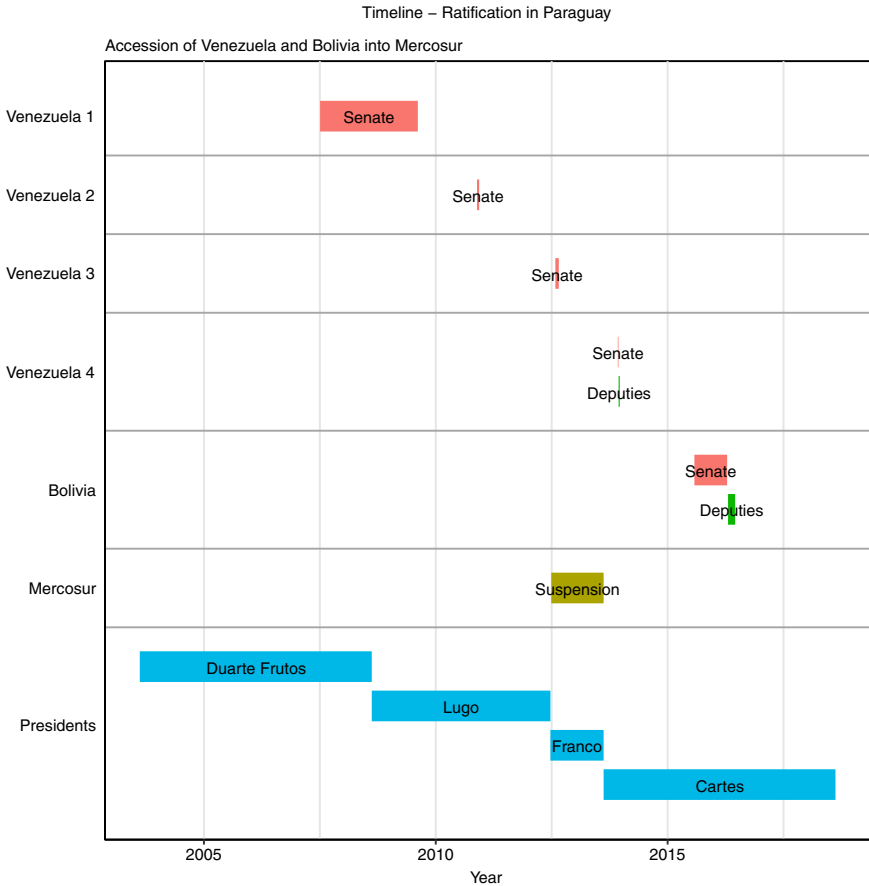
Recognizing that in-depth case studies unveil details and allow the emergence of knowledge and theory, the empirical section compares case studies (Della Porta 2008). Process tracing was adopted in two observations, which are reconstructed to better analyze causal mechanisms through case-based research (Tilly 2001). The comparison is composed of the Paraguayan approval of Venezuelan and Bolivian accessions to Mercosur; that is, treaties that belonged to the same category and passed through the same parliament, with a timeframe that is almost continuous: 2007–2013 (Venezuela) and 2015–2016 (Bolivia). Figure 1 illustrates how the main events, analyzed in the empirical sections, are distributed through time.

To provide a detailed analysis, the two episodes in the Paraguayan parliament are compared by observing the causal mechanisms that operated in each case and the variation between them (Bengtsson and Ruonavaara 2017). The political features in Paraguay are suitable for selecting this country as the basis for comparison. The bicameral congress has constitutional powers to approve international agreements, even if it cannot directly interfere in the negotiations. The interbranch balance of power is relevant to assess how much the legislators can influence international relations using their veto power. In comparison to other Latin American presidential democracies, the Paraguayan president is less powerful, giving room for a more decisive role for the congress. Moreover, these institutional arrangements occur in a consolidated party system, where traditional parties are preponderant in the state structure. This fact relates to the importance of the partisan composition in both the executive and the legislature.

In addition, the cases selected fall into the same category—enlargement of Mercosur—but they passed in different political scenarios and were approved with different speeds. The variation in the duration of these cases is wide (which is not seen in the ratification by other Mercosur members), justifying the selection and motivating the understanding of these differences. If the Venezuelan entrance faced strong opposition in the parliament, taking more than six years to be approved, the incorporation of Bolivia was comparatively fast, lasting about one year. From this empirical analysis, it was possible to elaborate a mechanism with positive and negative results.

Beach and Pedersen (2019) argue that the process-tracing method empirically details how a causal mechanism operates, explaining how an outcome is produced. That said, this method also explains what happens between a cause and a result by observing the “fingerprints” left on the process. Moreover, Collier (2011, 824) defines process tracing as “an analytical tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence—often understood as part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena.” Another definition is offered by Bennett and Checkel (2015, 6),

Figure 1. Ratification of the Enlargement of Mercosur in Paraguay



Source: Author, based on Paraguay 2020.

stating that this technique examines intermediate steps, allowing scholars to draw inferences about how the process and the outcome took place, employing a handful of materials to explore the sequence of facts, bearing in mind a mechanistic perspective.

Following Beach and Pedersen’s methodological guidelines (2016), the aim of case-based research is not to purely describe the phenomena in a temporal sequence but to shed light on why specific social processes take place. The purpose is to develop narrative structures that unpack the causal mechanisms of action, from the trigger that initiates a sequence of steps to the outcome (Machamer et al. 2000). For the current research, after reviewing theoretical aspects of political science and international relations, the analysis is performed with the mechanism emerging from the empirical cases, as a way to contribute to these fields and “abstract from the specific instantiation(s) more general

propositions about foreign policy making” (van Meegdenburg 2023, 405). The choice of two divergent cases allows the investigation of how the outcome was reached, but also how the absence of certain conditions prevented it.

For the process tracing, to understand the outcomes produced in each parliament, the most straightforward indicator is the votes, which are accurate to quantify individual positions concerning the project of enlargement and legislators’ relationship with the government. The votes thus not only prove the existence of the phenomena but also show political parties’ and legislators’ behaviors, which are raw material for our analysis. However, votes are not available for every session, as some sessions had symbolic votes and not roll-call ones.

Because of that, the speeches delivered during plenary or committee sessions (commonly available in the format of transcriptions or meeting minutes), formal procedures, and actors’ background complement them. Given that discourses can be evidence of particular processes, it is vital to situate who speaks, to whom they are speaking, under what circumstances, and for what reason, due to the risk of bias (Beach and Pedersen 2019; Yin 2013; Dunn and Neumann 2016).

MERCOSUR

Latin America experienced three waves of regional integration processes (Mariano and Menezes 2021; Perrotta and Porcelli 2016). Previous research has established that the success and failure of the several experiences were directly related to the political and economic conditions in the involved countries (Luciano and Campos 2021; Fernandes and Wegner 2018; Doctor 2013; Malamud 2015).

A large body of scholarship is dedicated to understanding the member countries’ foreign policy toward the bloc (Jenne et al. 2017; Briceño-Ruiz 2018; Malamud 2019; Mariano et al. 2021; Malamud and Gardini 2012). Nevertheless, the membership is a topic to be further analyzed. Founded by four states in 1991, the accession of Venezuela and Bolivia expanded this regional scheme over South America. But in both cases, the delay in parliamentary ratification prevented the enlargement. Even if the presidents signed the Protocol of Accession of Venezuela in 2006, it was blocked by the Paraguayan Parliament. The Bolivian entrance was signed in 2012, but as of 2023 still is under parliamentary consideration by the Brazilian Congress. The incorporation of new member states became a symbol of the Pink Tide—the regional movement implemented in the 2000s, with several leftist Latin American governments promoting the integration of the region (Gratius and Gomes Saraiva 2013; Sanahuja 2011; Lima 2014; Dabène 2007; Riggirozzi and Grugel 2015).

Referring to Paraguay, the hesitation toward the incorporation of Venezuela may be read as a cautious movement of Paraguayan diplomacy to distance itself from the traditional partners—Argentina and Brazil (Kfuri and Lamas 2008). Given the veto power that each member has in Mercosur, Venezuela would be an additional actor to balance the bloc. Smaller countries, such as Paraguay and Uruguay, could find in Venezuela an alternative to compensate for the existing asymmetries and propose new directions to Mercosur, instead of following the two larger members.

To this end, an enlarged Mercosur was an arrangement to bring closer Asunción and other partners without being tied to the historical pendulum between Argentina and Brazil (Melo 2009; Kfuri and Lamas 2008; Baer and Birch 1987; Lambert 2016). Moreover, Venezuela's diplomacy toward the Caribbean included economic, political, and social enterprises that reduced disparities in that region (Benzi and Zapata 2013; González Urrutia 2006). As one of the smallest states in the region, Paraguay could benefit from a similar strategy in South America.

PARAGUAYAN POLITICS

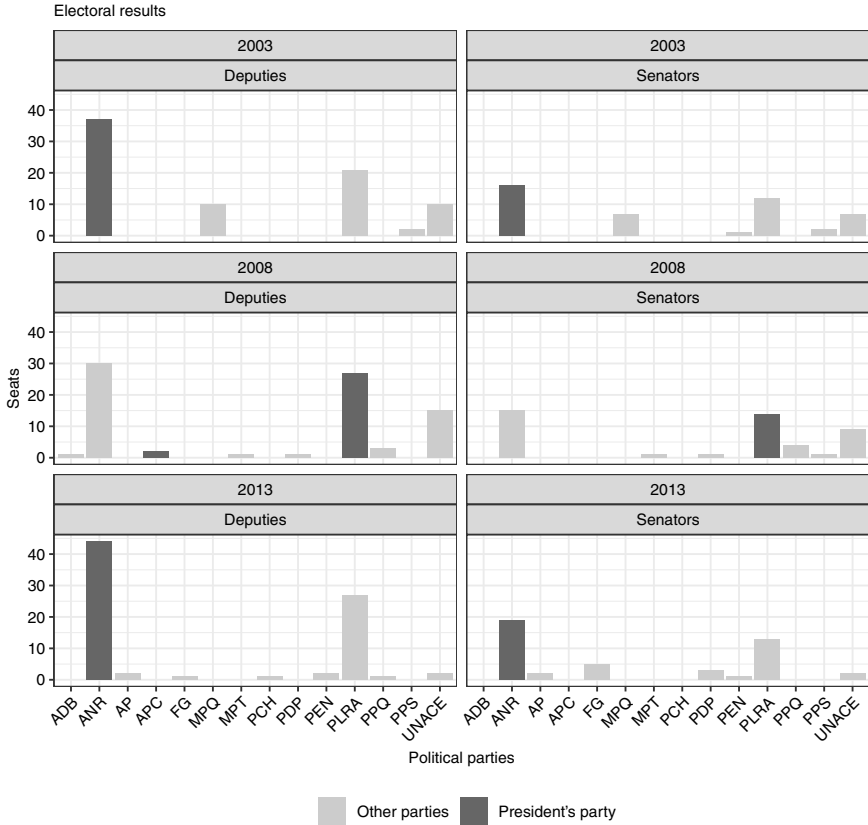
Paraguay transitioned from the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner to democracy in the 1990s, retaining some characteristics of the previous period—such as the dominance of the ANR-PC party in politics (Arditi 1990).¹ At the end of the twentieth century, the domestic reforms in Paraguay allowed the emergence of a multiparty system in the parliamentary arena. That is, although the executive branch remained largely controlled by the ANR-PC, the congress saw the election of new political groups, creating, to a certain extent, an institutional opposition (Molinas et al. 2004). Studies suggest that Paraguay usually has three main parties, with ANR-PC and PLRA always the leading forces, while the third political party varies over time (Duarte Recalde 2012; Ribeiro et al. 2021; López 2010).

ANR-PC controlled several other state bodies, beyond the traditional authority of the presidency (Duarte Recalde 2017; Pérez Talia 2017). In recent years, the opposition gained institutional positions and elected seats in the parliament but remained a minority. Since leftist parties were minorities throughout most of Paraguay's history (González Bozzolasco et al. 2019), the political spectrum is strongly aligned to the right (Martínez Escobar 2013). Even the parties opposed to ANR-PC—such as PLRA and UNACE—are situated in this ideological field, while the leftist opposition organized around FG occupies few parliamentary seats (Toledo 2015).

Figure 2 illustrates the composition of the bicameral parliament, which is reelected every five years and comprises 80 deputies and 45 senators. For the timeframe of this article, three elections are considered: 2003, 2008, and 2013. The ANR-PC remained the main political force in both chambers, even in the 2008 election, when the party lost the presidency for the first time in decades. This condition gives the ANR-PC a powerful position, although in recent years Paraguay has seen some degree of partisan fragmentation, which increases the need for composing coalitions to ensure parliamentary majorities.

President Nicanor Duarte Frutos was elected in 2003 with 37 percent of the votes, the lowest vote for a Paraguayan president since the 1980s. This happened due to the emergence of the UNACE, fragmenting the right wing (Duarte Recalde 2012). Although the ANR-PC was the major political force in the congress, the presidency of Duarte Frutos did not have full support in the upper chamber, as 36 percent of the senators were from the ANR-PC. This increased the need to form coalitions and negotiate with other parties. On the other hand, in the lower chamber, 46 percent of the deputies belonged to the same party as the president.

Figure 2. Electoral Results in Paraguay



Source: Author, based on Paraguay 2019.

Between 2008 and 2013, Paraguay had two presidents. Fernando Lugo was elected in 2008 from the APC (later FG). From 2012 to 2013, Vice President Federico Franco (PLRA) held the presidency. A representative of the Pink Tide movement, Fernando Lugo’s center-left government was a minority coalition. He was elected with 41 percent of the votes, with Franco as his running mate. Together, Lugo’s party and his vice president’s party had 36 percent of support in the lower chamber and 31 percent in the upper chamber. Yet the majority of this group was not directly associated with the president’s party but with that of Vice President Franco. The FG elected only two deputies, and every other deputy and senator belonged to the PLRA. These figures are crucially relevant because the vice president turned against the president in 2012, begetting a severe political crisis.²

This unstable coalition posed challenges to executive-legislature relations, as the president was forced to build parliamentary support issue by issue. Even if this

legislature was more diverse—in terms of number of parties—compared to the one elected in 2003, considering the influence of the private sector (agriculture and transnational companies), President Lugo lacked its support, while facing the fragmentation of his parliamentary coalition (López 2010; Ribeiro and Oliveira 2018).

Between 2013 and 2018, Horacio Cartes was president. Affiliated with the ANR-PC and elected with 45 percent of the vote, Cartes's party held the majority in parliament. However, as Figure 2 shows, the 2013 elections did not guarantee more than 50 percent of the Senate for the ANR-PC. Nonetheless, it was the largest political force among the senators, and the historical opposition party, PLRA, was the second-largest in the legislature. The FG held 11 percent of the seats in the upper chamber but only 1 percent in the lower chamber.

In regard to international affairs, historically the US influence and relations with the neighbors (Argentina and Brazil) constrained Paraguay's margin to maneuver (Winand et al. 2016). In the twenty-first century, Paraguay's foreign policy included initiatives beyond its membership in Mercosur, as a mechanism to reduce its structural dependence in the international scenario.

Under Duarte Frutos's government (ANR-PC), Asunción approached the bloc to improve the conditions for economic development, which resulted in the creation of the Focem (Mercosur Structural Convergence Fund) as a strategy to address the dissatisfaction toward Mercosur (Kfuri and Lamas 2008). In parallel, Duarte Frutos negotiated the relationship with Washington, particularly in the field of security, leveraging it as a bargaining power with Paraguay's South American partners (Lemgruber 2007). Overall, Duarte Fruto's diplomacy aimed to increase the country's negotiating capacity on bilateral and multilateral levels (Arce 2011).

With Lugo (FG), Paraguay sought a position independent from the United States while fostering its proximity to Mercosur and strategic partners—the renegotiation with Brazil around Itaipu hydroelectric dam issues is a remarkable example (Arce 2011). The following government, under Franco (PLRA), kept its distance from Mercosur, due to the suspension, and took the opportunity to approach the Pacific Alliance (Chile, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico) and extraregional partners in Europe and Asia (Heduvan 2019). Cartes (ANR-PC), instead, looked to normalize the interaction with South America by reintegrating with Mercosur and taking part in multilateral forums such as Unasur (Union of South American Nations) and CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) (Heduvan 2020).

THE VENEZUELAN ACCESSION

As shown by Rodríguez Díaz (2014), the presidency submitted the Protocol of Accession of Venezuela four times to the Paraguayan Congress before it was approved. Considering these four times as a single process, the duration was more than six years.

The first two attempts were sent to the legislators but rapidly withdrawn, since the executive realized that there was not enough support to approve the treaty and the risk of rejection was high. The first attempt (Paraguay 2007) to approve the

Venezuelan admission was on July 4, 2007. Despite being debated in 2007, it saw no action in 2008 and ultimately was withdrawn by the executive on August 13, 2009. At that point, Duarte Frutos had already finished his term and Lugo had been elected.

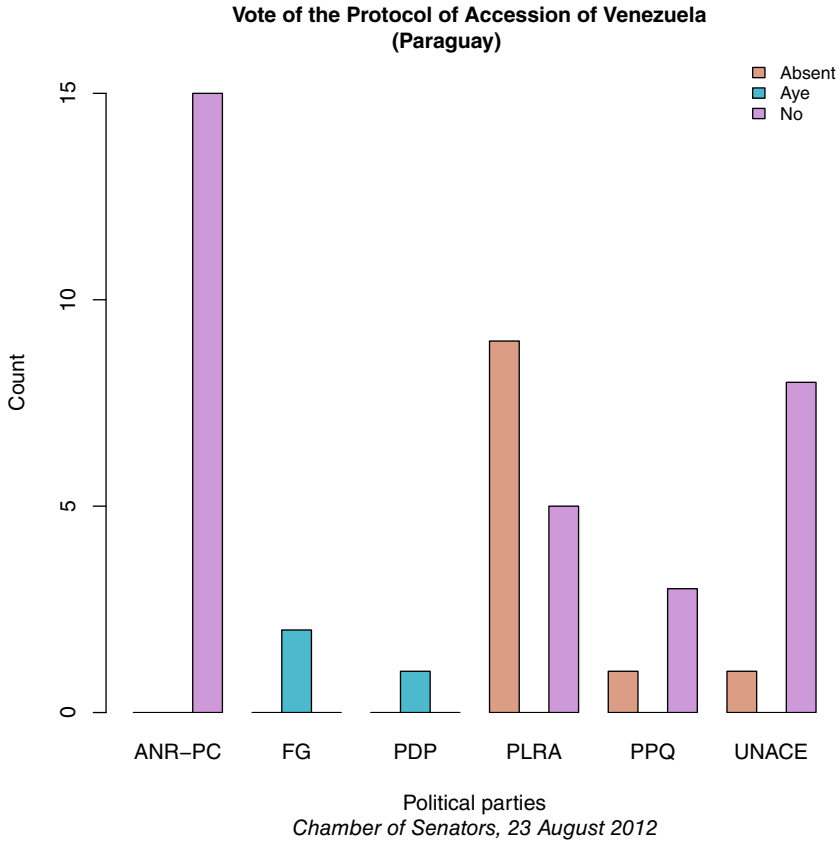
Even though it included favorable international conditions to approve, such as the positive trade balance with Mercosur and the ideological proximity between the governments, the bill did not pass. The reason can be inferred from the domestic political scene, such as the fragmentation of the party system, which could not provide a majority to the government. Thus a complex issue of regional integration did not have the margin of maneuver to be negotiated with opposition sectors. Heduvan (2020) highlights that from 2007 on, Duarte Frutos was focused on domestic politics and internal disputes in his party. For this reason, foreign policy was not a priority, unlike his first years as head of the government. This explains the initial impetus of signing the protocol and submitting it to the parliament but not putting in the effort for its approval. That is, the bill was no longer of prime concern to the executive.

On November 22, 2010, under Lugo's government, the Chamber of Senators received the protocol once more (Paraguay 2010). The leadership sent it to five committees. This number of committees is higher than what is observed in other legislatures and can be interpreted as an instrument to hinder the administrative procedures with more veto players. On December 1, the bill passed through a single committee. This was the only procedure during this second time that Asunción deliberated about the incorporation of Caracas, as on December 9, the bill was again withdrawn by an executive decision. A significant contrast in the partisan composition of both chambers of the congress and the president's political base characterized this episode. Therefore, the lack of parliamentary majority, the imbalance between president and vice president, and the strength of the opposition (particularly the ANR-PC) created conditions to obstruct the president's initiatives.

Following an accusation of being responsible for a conflict between farmers and police officers that resulted in 17 deaths, on June 22, 2012, President Lugo was impeached, and subsequently, Asunción was suspended from Mercosur. The other member states concurred that a violation of the democratic clause had been committed, according to the Protocol of Ushuaia. Furthermore, on July 31, 2012, Venezuela formally became a full member state of Mercosur. With Asunción suspended, the other members understood that there was no need to have the Paraguayan approval, and therefore, Venezuela could formally enter without the ratification of the remnant member (Frizzera 2013). That is, before Lugo's impeachment, Venezuela did not participate in Mercosur with full rights (voice and vote), due to the political impasse posed by Asunción, and after the suspension Venezuela was able to enter the bloc.

The suspension triggered the need for the new government, with Franco, to seek international legitimacy, and can be considered a tipping point in the relations between Mercosur and Paraguay, triggering a different behavior regarding the enlargement (Henehan 2000). It was in this scenario that, for the third time, the Congress of Paraguay decided about Venezuela's accession to the bloc. Different from the unfinished processes in previous years, it was conclusively resolved in 2012. It was

Figure 3. Vote in the Senate (third time)



Source: Author, based on Paraguay [2020](#).

rejected, aiming to invalidate the resolution that approved Caracas’s entry and to assertively oppose it. The bill was referred to Congress on July 31, 2012 and concluded a month later (Paraguay [2012](#)).

As seen in figure 3, against Caracas, 31 senators voted no (68.89 percent), while 3 voted yes (6.67 percent)—in favor of the enlargement. Eleven senators (24.44 percent) were absent from the session.

During the period when Federico Franco (PLRA) was in charge of the presidency, there was a closer alignment between executive and legislature, converging on a critical position against Mercosur and Venezuela. Franco’s party was the second main political force in the congress, with almost the same number of legislators as the ANR-PC. Thus, although Franco did not control a parliamentary majority, the ideological proximity favored a cooperation with other parties, such as the ANR-PC. Considering the diplomatic tensions with Mercosur, the opposition to Hugo Chávez’s government, and

the domestic economic interest in fostering relationships with other markets, it was possible to reach a quick decision, but rejecting the bill. In this episode, the parliament clearly applied its veto power, blocking an international protocol (Tsebelis 1997, 2011).

Finally, the executive branch submitted the protocol a fourth time, after the suspension from Mercosur was lifted and with Horacio Cartes as president. The proposal entered the Paraguayan Congress on December 5, 2013 (Paraguay 2013a), seven years and five months after the document was initially signed in Caracas. The entire process took approximately three weeks, being published on December 27, 2013 and ending the long-lasting impasse.

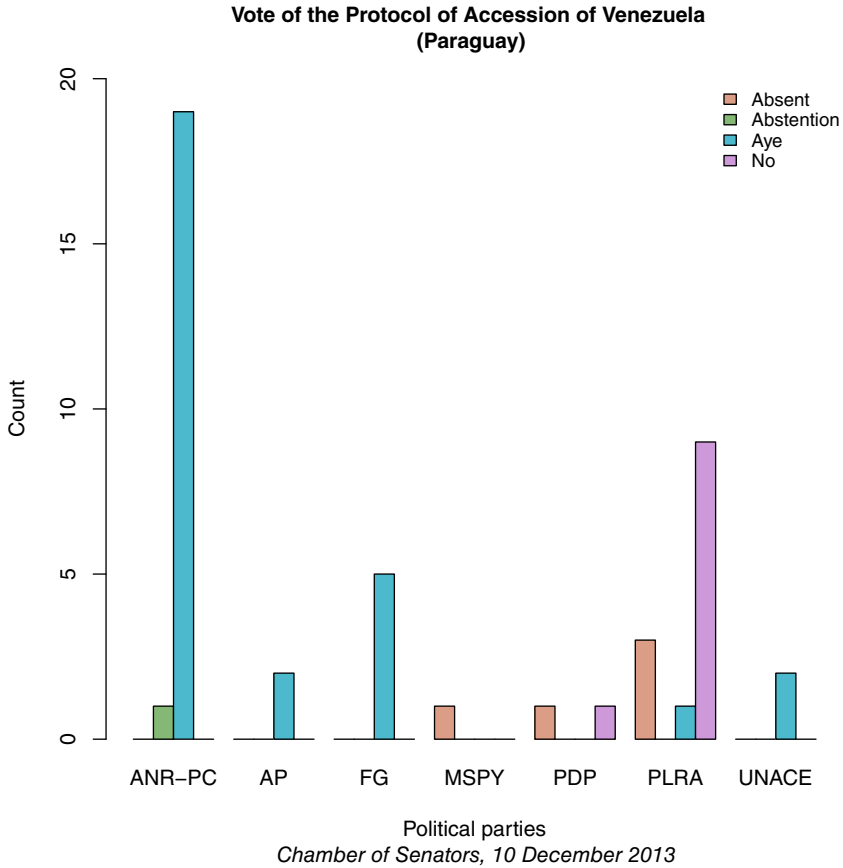
Therefore, despite ideological divergences from the other Mercosur members, the regional and domestic scenarios contributed to the positive outcome. Heduvan (2020) points out that the government realized that being out of Mercosur meant to be out of the benefits offered by the bloc, such as trade negotiations with extraregional partners. In addition to the foreign policy, the domestic political scenario also favored a fast approval, with a more cohesive system.

In the last time in this parliament, the agreement passed through the Chamber of Senators and the Chamber of Deputies. In a debate about the bill on December 10, 2013 (Paraguay 2013b), Senator Desirée Masi (PDP) criticized the deliberation about the Protocol of Caracas, after it was rejected by the very same parliament and Paraguay sanctioned. Although this perspective issued from the minority group, this argument recurs in several speeches; that is, that suspending Asunción to integrate Caracas was unfair and that Paraguay “deserved more” to concede its approval of Venezuela. Senator Carlos Amarilla Cañete (PLRA) contended that legalizing Venezuela in Mercosur would be a way for the Paraguayan Congress to acquiesce the suspension. Senator Emilia Alfaro de Franco (PLRA) criticized President Cartes for having a double standard by not respecting the previous decision to reject the Venezuelan incorporation and adopting a new posture in Paraguayan foreign policy in favor of reintegrating into Mercosur and agreeing with decisions taken during the suspension.

In this context, the Chamber of Senators approved the protocol. As figure 4 shows, 29 senators voted for the approval (64.4 percent), while 10 voted against (22.2 percent).³ Furthermore, there was 1 abstention (2.2 percent), and 5 senators were absent (11.1 percent).

Following the suspension between 2012 and 2013, Cartes’s government accomplished the objective of reintegrating Asunción into Mercosur and into international society (Heduvan 2020; Trindade 2021). Considering this, as seen in the next section, Paraguayan diplomacy was not seeking to create a new conflict over the Bolivian accession, as in the Venezuelan case. Paraguay’s approval of Bolivia’s accession can be understood from the international context and the political and economic motivations to be reinserted in Mercosur. After the controversial rule of Federico Franco, Cartes faced a regional context of political isolation, with Venezuela and Nicolás Maduro now part of Mercosur. With this in mind, Asunción realized that it could not challenge Caracas alone, and that its previous reluctance was implicated in its isolation from its South American partners.

Figure 4. Vote in the Senate (fourth time)

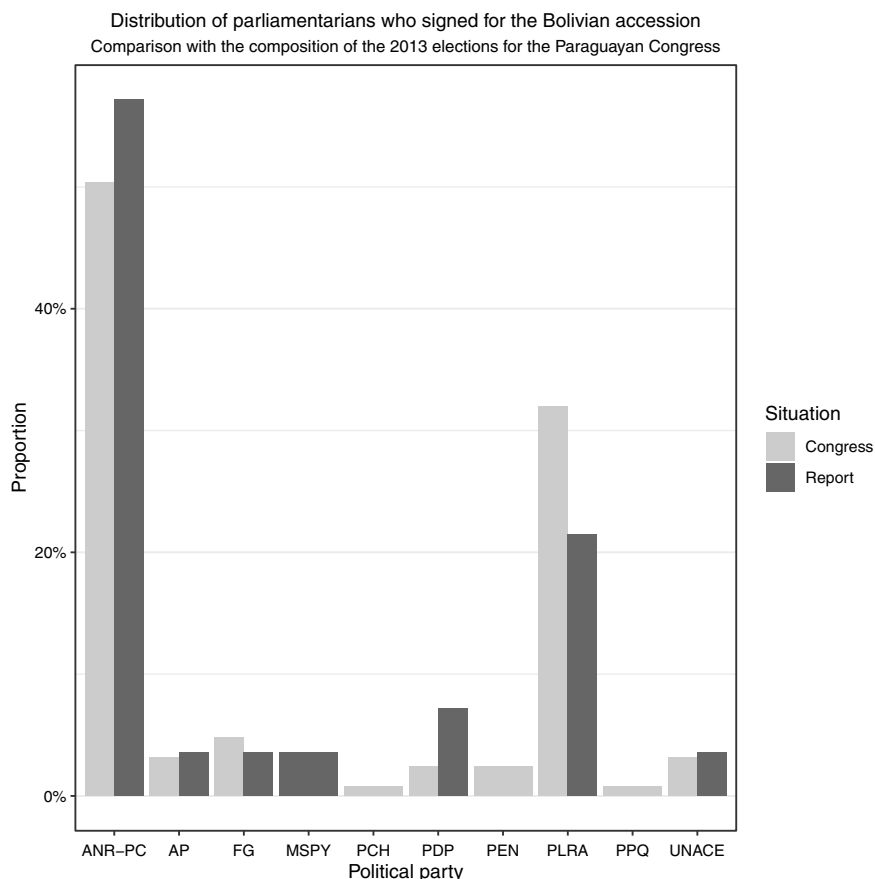


Source: Author, based on Paraguay [2020](#).

THE BOLIVIAN ACCESSION

The Paraguay's approval of the accession of Bolivia to Mercosur took from July 2015 to June 2016. The ANR-PC had been the ruling party since 2013, and Cartes still was president. The executive branch sent the bill to the Chamber of Senators in July 2015 (Paraguay [2015](#)). Following the ordinary process, in August the leadership sent the bill to three committees. Seven months later, on March 16, 2016, a favorable report was issued by the Committee on Foreign Relations and International Affairs. On the same day, the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, National Defense, and Public Security also issued a report for approval. The document was signed by seven senators. Soon afterward, on March 30, 2016, the Committee on Legislation, Regulation, Justice, and Labor issued the third favorable report. Finally, the protocol was congressionally enacted on the Senate floor on March 31.

Figure 5. Vote on the Protocol of Bolivia

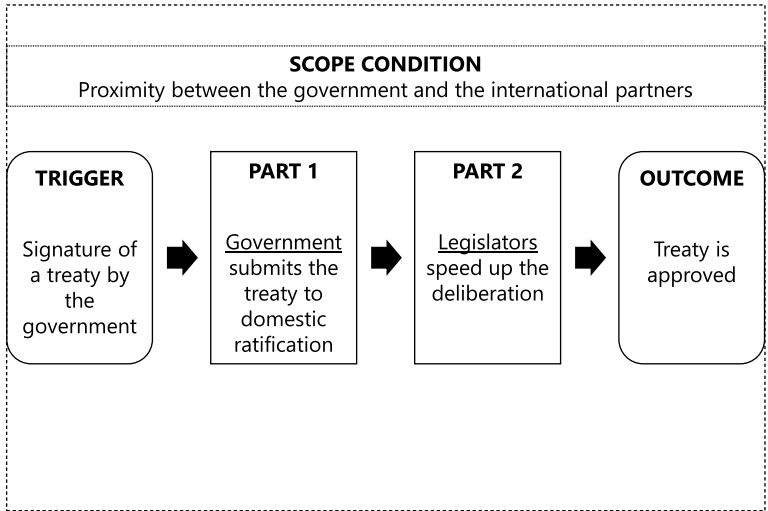


Source: Author, based on Paraguay 2020.

In the lower house, the proceeding lasted for nearly three months. On April 21, 2016, the bill entered the Chamber of Deputies and, after passing in the first committee, went to the floor. On May 12, 2016, the Chamber of Deputies approved it. During this session, the members of congress debated the accession (Paraguay 2016). Generally speaking, the discourses were favorable to the incorporation of La Paz, as exemplified by Deputy José María Ibañez (ANR-PC), who supported the strategic partnership with Bolivia. He stood for the physical integration of markets and cooperation in energy production. In the following month, the bill was promulgated as law by the executive.

Without a roll-call vote to analyze this sequence of evidence, this study employed the committees' reports on this bill to enable the comparison, observing that every party endorsed the reports in favor of the accession of Bolivia to the bloc, as shown in figure 5. The number of legislators who signed for the bill is compared to the seats held

Figure 6. Causal Mechanism



by each party in the parliament. Broadly speaking, it is possible to note a similar distribution in both categories, meaning that the reports reflected the partisan composition of both chambers.

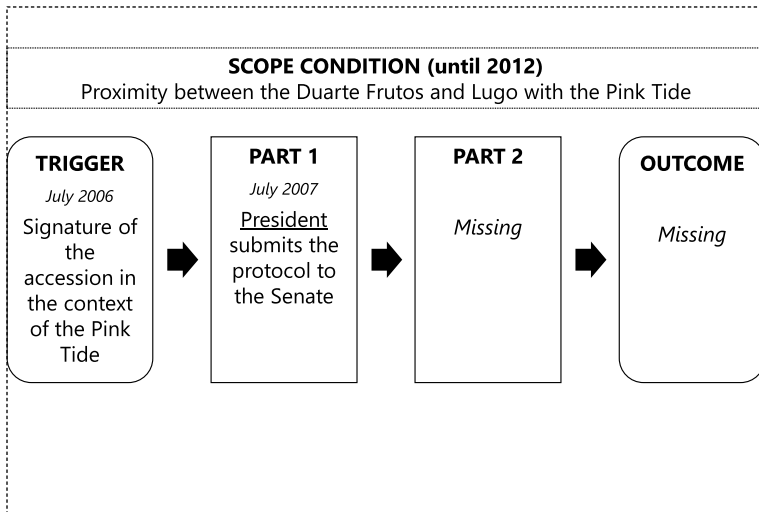
DISCUSSION

Observing both cases reveals a handful of differences in the context. First, Paraguayan foreign policy and the country’s situation in the bloc changed after the suspension. Second, the neighboring partners—Argentina and Brazil—had new governments, closer to Paraguay.⁴ Furthermore, Bolivia differed somewhat from Venezuela in terms of the politicization of society. In other words, the deliberation was not a polemical process because La Paz was not perceived negatively. Plus, Caracas was being increasingly isolated in South America under Maduro’s administration.

In view of the above and following process-tracing practices (Beach and Pedersen 2019, 2016; Collier 2011), this study elaborated a mechanism that summarizes the phenomenon and explains how each part is connected to the others, pointing to the importance of having parliamentary support to speed up the approval. Figure 6 illustrates this causal chain.

Considering the two cases, the Venezuelan incorporation is considered a negative case; that is, it did not reach a successful outcome. The fact that the process was divided into four submissions to Congress is relevant to the analysis of the functioning of the mechanism. Although the Protocol of Accession of Venezuela was finally approved in 2013, the deadlock in Congress in the first steps shows how this can be a negative case for this process-tracing analysis. By contrast, the fast approval of the

Figure 7. Causal Mechanism: Accession of Venezuela



Source: Author

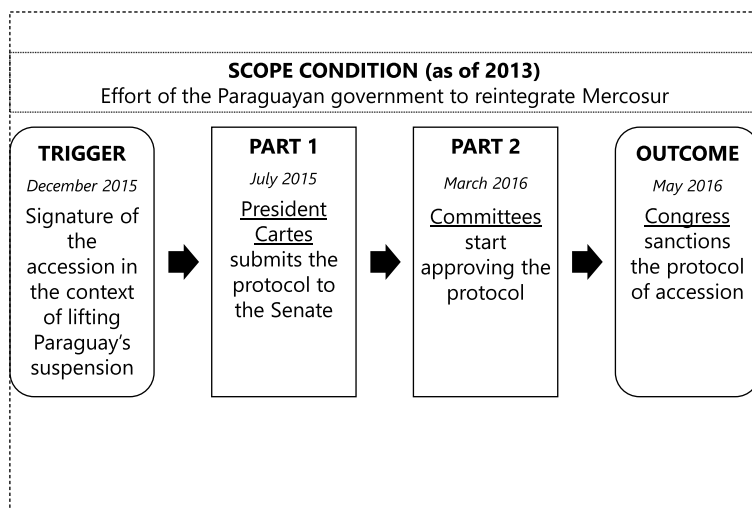
Protocol of Accession of Bolivia is considered a positive case, as it fulfills all the steps to produce the successful outcome.

In figure 7, this mechanism is applied to the Venezuelan case—in particular to the first attempts when it did not reach a conclusion, before the critical issue—the suspension from Mercosur. There are missing parts in the mechanism; namely, the fragile coalition, the difficulty of anticipating legislative preferences, and the struggle to reach a minimum consensus on the issue, all of which prevented the mechanism from working. Without parliamentarians propelling the bill in Congress, it could not be ratified and remained without a conclusion for years.

Despite the positive relations between the president of Paraguay and the neighboring governments, the process in the congress did not run smoothly. The internal conditions showed the lack of parliamentary support, which is seen as fundamental for carrying out the government's priorities. This is seen in the mechanism with the absence of part 2; that is, not having political forces to advance the bill. At several moments a strong opposition postponed the decision. Also, a fragmented party system led to a longer time for approval, since there were more agents with veto power to block passing the protocol.

In the third submission to the congress, the mechanism was again stopped because of the absence of part 2; that is, without legislators fostering its approval. There was a coordinated movement to veto the Protocol of Accession, which created a parliamentary majority, but to give a negative answer. Only in the last attempt, in 2013, did the mechanism operate to reach an approval under very specific scope conditions. In this fourth moment, the legislature was aligned with the interests proposed by the executive.

Figure 8. Causal Mechanism: Accession of Bolivia



Source: Author

On the other hand, the entrance of Bolivia represents a positive case in this study, as seen in figure 8. This indicates how an individual bill is propelled in the congress and at which point the parliamentarians have the opportunity to enact it.

The trigger, which puts the process into action, is the achievement of an international agreement sought by the government. Here, it corresponds to the signature of the Protocol of Accession of Bolivia, which was negotiated to fit the Paraguayan requirements in 2015. Furthermore, the scope condition in which the trigger is embedded is the proximity between the government and the regional partners in the bloc.

Considering that the agreement must be ratified, step 1 of the mechanism is the submission to national consideration; in this case, sending the bill to the Chamber of Senators. Indeed, it was quickly referred to the congress, demonstrating the government's willingness to approve it and the confidence that it would be approved. The second step is the parliamentary deliberation, with government legislators speeding up the process. In considering the enlargement, this is represented by few discussions in the sessions and by a fast move from one committee to another. With this phase concluded, the outcome was reached; that is, the protocol was approved.

In view of the above, the case of Bolivia represents how the political conditions favor a fast approval, with the legislative branch agreeing with the executive about regional integration. On the other hand, there are exceptional cases, like the Venezuelan accession, "that demonstrated how Congress can exercise its veto power on an essential topic of Paraguay's foreign policy agenda" (Ribeiro et al. 2020, 13). The main piece that was not present in the incorporation of Caracas was the alignment between both branches, leading to conflicting views on this topic of regional

integration. For this reason, there was no consistent group in the parliamentary arena to lead a rapid approval against the opposition lawmakers. The yearslong stalemate created this impasse not only in the congress, but also in Mercosur.

When observing these processes, the pendular behavior of the parties in government (namely, ANR-PC and PLRA) can be explained by the government's foreign policy concerning Mercosur. When the executive distanced itself from the partners (the position that reached its peak with the suspension of Paraguay), the parliamentarians supported it by voting against Mercosur. After the suspension and realizing the negative impact of international isolation, the new government looked for a reconciliation with Mercosur, and the parliament supported this movement. This relates to the historical "fear" of being isolated, as during the Stroessesner dictatorship, and the knowledge of the benefits of democratization provided by Mercosur (Kfuri and Lamas 2008; Mora 2003).

This pendulum indicates that for the larger parties, ideology was not entirely determinant in the two cases. Other variables motivated voting for or against the enlargement of Mercosur. As the accessions attracted strong opinions about regional integration, the Paraguayan international strategy and economy, the legislature's relationship with the presidency, and the opportunities for Paraguay played a role in how legislators shaped their preferences.

Given the circumstances, the case studies confirm what the literature theorizes. They have shown the importance of the veto players, either to reject a treaty or to execute a political bargain. The negotiations between government and opposition parties and between executive and legislature clarified the role played by the parliament, the agenda power of key actors, and the importance of having a supporting coalition. The domestic scenario is coupled with the international conditions and the goals of Paraguayan foreign policy.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

These case studies have demonstrate how the Paraguayan Parliament managed to exercise its veto power, indicating its importance in international affairs. When the parliamentarians reacted to the president's foreign policy—as in the Venezuelan case—they interfered in the country's international strategy and the course of regional integration. By contrast, the comparative study demonstrated that interbranch convergences can be found, as in the approval of the Bolivian accession.

This study raises important questions about the nature of parliamentary participation. Foreign policy issues may become an instrument of national politics, demonstrating that even when ratifying international treaties, legislators' priorities lie on the domestic level. The motivation for approving or delaying the approval of a treaty is related to the interests in executive-legislative relations. These findings complement those of earlier studies, contributing to existing knowledge by providing evidence in a Latin American presidential context.

One interesting finding is that even if it is a possibility, the veto is not always applied, suggesting that the legislative branch identifies the situations that call for a

stand against the government. The accession of Bolivia provides support for this, as seen in the causal mechanism, when the parliamentarians fostered its approval. The explanations for that approval include not only systemic and international factors but also domestic variables. The interbranch relations and the partisan composition of the parliament defined to what extent the legislature can affect foreign policy.

This investigation of the enlargement of Mercosur contributes to analyzing the importance of counting on domestic support to conduct international actions. Therefore, this article will be of interest not only to scholars of Paraguayan politics but also to those who study foreign policy analysis and regionalism. These results add to the rapidly expanding subject of legislatures and foreign policy. They confirm that national actors, represented by parliamentarians, can influence foreign policy—either allowing or preventing it to be enacted—questioning the perspective that these two realms are separate. The results confirm that the government has its own preferences about regionalism and international politics, but to be implemented, they need to be operationalized with a parliamentary coalition that ensures the executive's success.

More broadly, future studies are needed to determine whether parliamentarians behave in the same way on less salient bills. Given the importance of the enlargement of a bloc, it is understandable that divergent perspectives emerge and that the parliament becomes an arena for political disputes on the issue. However, the ratification process for other international agreements may be less contentious. A natural progression of this work would be to extend the *N* to include non-Mercosur agreements and to cover other issues beyond acceding members. Despite the centrality of South America to Paraguayan foreign policy, the country is present on the international scene, and an extensive analysis of the relation between the congress and other treaties could produce interesting findings.

The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Bologna for the author's doctoral thesis, from which this article is derived.

1. The political parties and alliances mentioned in this article are ADB (*Alianza Departamental Boquerón*, Boquerón Department Alliance); ANR-PC (*Asociación Nacional Republicana—Partido Colorado*, National Republican Association—Colorado Party); AP (*Avanza País*, Country Forward); APC (*Alianza Patriótica para el Cambio*, Patriotic Alliance for Change); FG (*Frente Guasú*, Guasú Front); MPQ (*Movimiento Patria Querida*, Beloved Fatherland Movement); MPT (*Movimiento Popular Tekojoja*, Tekojoja People's Movement); MSPY (*Movimiento Somos Paraguay*, We are Paraguay Political Movement); PCH (*Alianza Pasión Chaqueña*, Chaqueña Passion Alliance); PDP (*Partido Democrático Progresista*, Progressive Democratic Party); PEN (*Partido Encuentro Nacional*, National Encounter Party); PLRA (*Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico*, Authentic Radical Liberal Party); PPQ (*Partido Patria Querida*, Beloved Fatherland Party); PPS (*Partido País Solidario*, Party for a Country of Solidarity); UNACE (*Unión Nacional de Ciudadanos Éticos*, National Union of Ethical Citizens).

2. To learn more about Fernando Lugo's impeachment and the transition to Federico Franco, see Duarte Recalde 2013; Marsteintredet et al. 2013.
3. MSPY was formerly known as PEN.
4. In 2015, Argentina elected Mauricio Macri to the presidency, and in Brazil, Michel Temer stepped in, following an impeachment process in 2016. Both were aligned with the right wing and favored relations with President Horacio Cartes.

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