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Duration of the legislative approvals of international agreements: Evidence from Mercosur

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Abstract

Why do some agreements take longer to be approved by national legislatures than others? This question motivates this research, which aims to understand how the nature of coalitions influences the time for the approval of international agreements. To this end, the analysis covers all agreements signed within Mercosur between 1995 and 2019 and the internalisation processes in four member states. This study provides insights into which variables define motivation when voting regionalism bills, concluding that the government-opposition cleavage drives the parliamentarians' behaviour on this topic, with the size of the president's party being the decisive factor in parliamentary procedures.

Keywords: Coalitions; Foreign Policy Analysis; Mercosur; Parliaments; Regionalism; Treaties.

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Introduction

This research is dedicated to investigating the parliamentary behaviour on agreements ratification, examining the Southern Common Market (Mercosur). Typically, the ratification of an international agreement follows a set of steps: once signed by an Executive official, it moves on to the national legislature, where it should pass by committees and the floor; if approved, the head of government then ratifies it and, finally, the agreement enters into force. Naturally, these procedures have to be accomplished by each party that consented with the agreement. Given this basic workflow, the study focuses on the legislative phase of the domestic ratification, aiming to understand why the duration of

the processes varies. Therefore, the object is not the initial negotiation between states, but rather the subsequent process necessary to put them into force.

Ratification plays a crucial role in international relations as it is essential for formalising and institutionalising agreements negotiated between parties, whether in bilateral or multilateral arrangements. Beyond its legal components, it is a political mechanism that requires the consent of various bodies with decision-making and veto powers. For this reason, international relations are not concluded upon the signature of an agreement, but demands passing through a determinant phase to enter into force. This fact establishes its importance for the society, and understanding how this happens is a continuing concern within the discipline.

This topic has been part of the policy discussion in the past years, aiming to identify what causes the resistance to regional integration. Although Mercosur has existed for decades (and previous regional arrangements before that), much has been discussed on why South America has not deepened its integration as expected (Briceño Ruiz 2011; Luciano and Mesquita 2023; Mariano and Ramanzini Júnior 2012). While negotiations may advance, the ratification of agreements, in some cases, took years to complete due to delays at the parliamentary stage. In view of that, what guides this research is to understand the obstacles preventing the ratification of Mercosurian agreements more quickly, with a specific focus on the legislative branch.

In Mercosur, each State must approve a rule for agreements to enter into force, in a consensus-based decision-making process (Fernández Reyes 2019; Ventura et al. 2012). Nonetheless, in practice, there are no specified deadlines regarding when and how it should take place, leading to recurrent discussions among its members (Coral 2013). Therefore, this study contributes not by analysing what has been approved, but by paying attention to the difficulty or ease of passing bills through legislatures. It is important to note that the scope of this analysis is limited to the legislative step of deliberation, and other important moments of regionalism, such as negotiations between partners, are beyond the ambit of the study.

The data collection performed for this research resulted in an original dataset, which covers four parliaments over three decades. Although Political Science works have analysed legislative approvals, the frame on foreign policy and, more precisely, on Mercosur gives originality to this research.

The dependent variable (approval) is important for understanding the factors that influence national legislatures to consent with the agreements presented to them. Moreover, it aids in comprehending the conditions under which legislatures can operate in international relations, given that treaty ratification is one of their functions. Delays of agreements by legislatures can significantly impact the execution of foreign policy.

The legislative process for ratifying an agreement is well-defined, but the factors driving legislators' behaviour remain unclear. While these individuals are national political actors expected to consider domestic variables, the decision-making process also involves international elements due to the nature of regional integration and foreign policy. These two sets of motivations are taken into consideration in the modelling.

On the national level, the study focuses on the nature of coalitions, exploring the presence and number of parties in parliament and their relationship with the Executive branch – among other variables that may influence the velocity with which legislators approve Mercosurian agreements. When analysing international variables, I investigate the impact of regionalism, observing the phase of integration, the signing date of the agreement, the trade performance within Mercosur, and the category of what is in discussion.

In view of what has been said, the main question that guides this research is: why do some agreements take longer to be approved by national legislatures than others? To address this puzzle, the empirical analysis is conducted by studying the legislative approvals of Mercosurian agreements from 1995 to 2019 in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. These states have been part of the bloc since its foundation, allowing a longitudinal comparison. Institutionally, they share similarities, such as presidential democracies with bicameral parliaments (Jones 2012), but they present different socioeconomic and political conditions that introduces variation among the cases. Their shared membership in the same bloc allows for a comparison, as they operate under the same institutional umbrella and approve the same agreements. This is a comprehensive research strategy to control for both similarities and differences among the countries (Axline 1971).

Theoretical framework

As a general rule, international organisations produce agreements that need to be incorporated to the national judicial orders (Almeida 2013). The choice for Mercosur over other international organisations is not only based on the fact that it is one of the most institutionalised bodies in the Global South. The number of members and degree of institutional homogeneity among them create good conditions for comparisons, minimising the number of external variables. Despite the different partisan realities and socioeconomic conditions in each member, they all operate as multi-party presidential systems with bicameral parliaments, with constitutional requirements for legislative consent of international agreements. The formal roles of parliament in these countries show similarities, such as the veto power when deliberating on international agreements. Even though most of the decisions made at the Mercosur-level via the national Executives are rubber-stamped by parliaments, this does not imply they are dispensable. Thus, there is no constant clash between the two branches, but parliamentary assent is necessary to advance with Mercosur, which risks paralysis of certain decisions.

Agreements can be defined as legal written instruments from international law celebrated between international actors, thus creating binding duties and rights for the parties (United Nations 2021). Corrêa (2010) argues that judicial and legislative harmonisation is essential to advance economic and political topics. Thus, agreements within the bloc constitute legal sources of Mercosur, establishing the long-term goals of the bloc (Pennetta 2009; Basso 2000). They fall into a different category than Common Market Council (CMC) decisions, Common Market

Group (GMC) resolutions and Mercosur Trade Commission (CCM) directives, which are the daily normative production, executing what is outlined by the agreements. Usually, as they have greater impact, agreements need to be enacted by national parliaments. This is the reason why the universe I look at are agreements, not Mercosur's remaining legal production. Bearing in mind that the regional parliament (Parlasur) has limited powers (Mariano 2011), the scope of the article remains directed at the national parliaments.

Perotti (2007) argues that two situations of veto may occur, because each member can block a Mercosur decision during the negotiations and, internally, can veto or delay the transposition to the domestic legal order. Therefore, even if presidents and ministers have more interest in fostering the judicial framework of integration, they need domestic support in their parliaments to implement these policies. In this sense, the deepening of regional integration depends on how the issue is processed by other domestic institutions.

Domestic ratification is what defines the success or failure of an agreement, formalising foreign policy and regional integration (Goldstein et al. 2000; Schneider and Urpelainen 2013). For this reason, there is increasing concern to go beyond studying the signing of agreements and to analyse how they enter into force (Haftel and Thompson 2013). In some countries, the phase of ratification is one of the few moments that parliaments have a decisive role in defining foreign policy and other international affairs (Merle 1963) – although parliamentarians participate in other international activities that do not involve decision-making power (Malamud and Stavridis 2011). As a consequence, they can interfere with the Executive's project of foreign policy, even if legislatures are not the central actors in international affairs (Merle 1981; 1963). Certainly, parliamentarians represent social sectors and with this influence they can be pressured by non-state actors to affect foreign policy.

The primary theoretical contribution of the current work lies in understanding the legislative ratification of international agreements, analysing domestic influences on the parliamentary behaviour. Existing conceptual and theoretical literature on this subject analysed the incorporation of agreements by parliaments, seeking to elucidate the motivations of parliamentarians and the roles played by both international and domestic levels (Ribeiro and Urdinez 2017; Feliú and Onuki 2014). While there have been studies examining specific and more salient bills (Araujo and Mariano 2022), it is necessary to perform a longitudinal research encompassing the Mercosur agreements throughout its three decades of existence and comparing member States. That is to say, there is a need to go beyond individual case studies. Although there are studies about other regions (Golub 2008; Golub and Steunenberg 2007; Klüver and Sagarzazu 2013; Winzen 2010), there is a gap in validating their findings in other contexts, such as Mercosur, where legislative procedures have proven to impede important decisions. Therefore, this article empirically investigates the rationale behind ratification in presidential systems.

One of the axes of this analysis is the intergovernmental approach. In this perspective, regionalism occurs due to rational choices made by national politicians who pursue economic interests and manipulate institutions, with convergent interests to influential economic producers.

The overall process of integration is propelled by grand bargains – interstate commitments that may be irregular on time, contingent upon the bargaining power of important governments. In this context, Moravcsik (1999) advocates that international negotiations unfold in three stages. First, the formulation of state preferences, followed by interstate bargaining and, finally, the decision to institutionalise the reached agreement. When abstracting the intergovernmentalist framework (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2019), it can be applied to the current research on South America, with a particular emphasis on the final stage, when, *post-factum*, parliaments deliberate on the possibilities to enter into force.

It is known that domestic political actors and institutions affect the formulation of preferences concerning international agreements (Rosendorff 2015). Under this reasoning, when negotiating and signing an agreement, political leaders calculate the impact it will have on their constituencies and the likelihood of implementation.

The impact of not having legislative support could result in blocking a country's foreign policy, as the government may be unable to execute agreements made at the international level (Krutz and Peake 2009). For this reason, delays not only affect the internal scenario, but also convey diplomatic signals to foreign partners. If ratification faces obstacles and lacks consensus, the external credibility of the commitment would be compromised (Martin 2000). Therefore, the failure or success of bills is not only related to the final vote, as the timing and duration of the decision-making process also play a crucial role (Hiroi and Rennó 2018).

According to Merle (1978; 1976; 1981; 1963), as political parties are organised at the national level and are responsive to national constituents, their primary focus is on the gains at the domestic level. However, they can leverage elements of international politics for internal power dynamics, i.e., the opposition parties may use complications arising from the international level to highlight government failures, while pro-government parties may emphasise achievements. Thus, the competition between the parties is reflected in how they stand regarding the foreign policy, which is conducted by the government. This perspective helps comprehend how domestic politics affects international politics, and how international politics affects domestic politics.

This happens even if some foreign policy-related topics are polarising (Onuki et al. 2009; Ribeiro 2019). Legislatures might react to the government and demonstrate their role in international affairs (Lagassé and Saideman 2017). To explain these cases, scholarly research has also examined partisan ideology (Wenzelburger and Böller 2020; Joly and Dandoy 2016; Merke and Reynoso 2016), and this is a factor considered in the current analysis.

Given its relevance on politics, coalitions in Latin America have been extensively studied in the last decades. The scholarship has consistently highlighted that, whether in a single-party majority, multi-party majority, or minority forms of government, members of parliament cast their votes based on government-opposition interests (Clerici 2015; Nicolau 2004; Figueiredo et al. 2009; Cheibub et al. 2004; Albala 2013). As a consequence, having a majority in parliament favours the success of the government.

In regard to coalitions, a higher number of parties can obstruct fast approval. This concerns not only the seats distribution, but also partisan polarisation – as more heterogeneous legislatures may hamper approvals (Binder 2004; Däubler 2008). Thus, conflicts might arise between the coalition and the opposition, but also within the coalition itself. For this reason, maintaining the consistency of the coalition is a way to prevent legislative obstructionism.

The number of parties in the system alters the ability for the head of government to create a trustworthy coalition (Mainwaring and Shugart 2002). The initial expectation is that fewer parties will expedite approval because there would be fewer diverging opinions and veto points, while more parties represent more bargaining interests. Among all the parties composing the legislature, the president's party is probably the most important – particularly in systems with strong presidents (Alemán and Navia 2009). If it controls a larger share of seats, it increases the possibility of having bills approved in a shorter period, as there are incentives to have the president's agenda implemented (Lebo and O'Geen 2011).

In view of the above, scholarship has demonstrated that parliamentarians primarily form their preferences based on the government-opposition cleavage. This is the key operator in the political dynamics within parliaments and in the interbranch relations. Building on the revised studies, this approach is taken one step further by testing it with international agreements, and analysing whether this relationship remains valid. Therefore, the hypothesis for this article is that legislators are guided by domestic political factors when deliberating on international agreements.

The assumption is that, despite the nature of agreements, international elements are not the main drivers of the parliamentarians' behaviour, since their focus lies on the immediate surrounding political environment. It is expected that the current study will contribute to refine the understanding of the nature of coalitions and how they impact foreign policy.

Having discussed the theoretical framework, in the section that follows we will discuss the operationalisation of the concepts and the data collection, before proceeding to the empirical analysis.

Methodology

Given that the dependent variable has two available alternatives (approved or non-approved), I employ a logistic model (logit), which estimates the probability of occurrence of “1” (approval). Discrete logit models are flexible and can handle both time-varying and time-independent variables, which is appropriate to the existing dataset. That said, bearing in mind that the dependent variable is categorical, to understand under which conditions the bills are approved by the parliament, logit is adequate for this analysis (Best and Wolf 2013; Agresti and Finlay 2009). Approval was coded only in the year that the bill was accepted, while for the other years (during the legislative procedures), each line was coded as “0”, since it was not approved at that time. The logistic model has been widely used in legislative studies to investigate political

behaviour (Palanza and Sin 2014; Pedrazzani and Zucchini 2020; Strobl et al. 2021; Dockendorff 2021; Malang 2019).

It is important to take note that this type of regression and the available data have limited predictive and generalising power; for this reason, the findings from this study should be carefully applied to other contexts when aiming to infer causal interpretations.

The original dataset¹ used in this research is primarily based in the official repository of Mercosur agreements (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores del Paraguay 2023). In June 2023, I systematically reviewed all the entries, identifying those which have been approved by national parliaments. As the focus is on legislative procedures, ratification by executive decree or other administrative measures was not considered. Therefore, the dataset comprises 144 observations, corresponding to 36 agreements (each agreement being subject to a separate process in each country, resulting in a multiplication of the number by 4). In other words, these are the agreements that have been approved by legislative measures in the four countries. All the agreements have been approved, meaning that they were coded “1” in the year of conclusion (144 lines), while the years on which they were under deliberation were coded as “0” (208 lines).

Given that the research focuses on how long it takes to be approved, cases of non-approval were not included. These could be divided in two groups: agreements that are still under consideration, and since they have not finished it is not possible to define their length; and agreements which have been rejected, where their time in parliament led to a different outcome. Establishing the same scope conditions for all the cases, i.e., being approved by national parliaments, justifies the case selection, even if it demands the exclusion of other observations, such as rejections.

This selection is relevant because not every agreement is internalised by parliament – particularly in Argentina due to its Constitution. Furthermore, agreements that have not yet been submitted to the parliaments have not been included, since it is not possible to locate the starting date. It is important to note that numerous observations spanned more than a year. Although the duration, age, and time before submission were counted in days to offer a refined measure of time (Figure 1 provides the distribution of the length of the processes in each member state), other economic and political indexes are available on a yearly basis. For this reason, they were treated as time-varying indicators based on the duration of the bills spent in the parliaments.

¹ “Replication Data for: Duration of the legislative approvals of international agreements: Evidence from Mercosur” *Harvard dataset*. <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/08WK4W>.

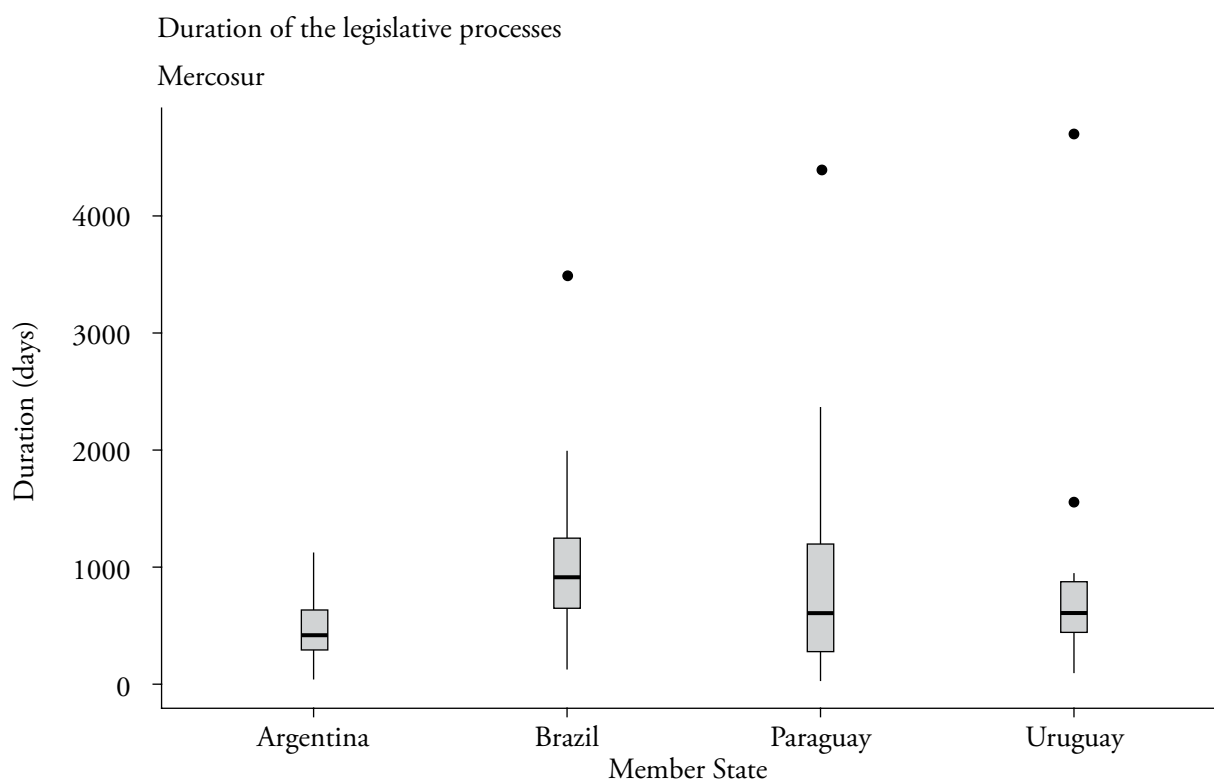


Figure 1. Duration of the legislative processes in the Mercosur countries.

Source: Author's own elaboration

On economic topics, I collected GDP growth (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean 2023) to assess the performance on each year. Furthermore, as one of the interests is to measure the impact of coalitions, I look to the composition of the studied governments. In regard to political indexes, the Database of Political Institutions (Cruz et al. 2021) was consulted because it offers the four countries' information since the foundation of Mercosur. With this data, it was possible to calculate the size of coalition in parliament, as well as the president's party share of seats, the political ideology of the head of State and the number of parties in the coalition. For this timeframe, data was available only for the lower chamber, which was used as a proxy for the entire period.

Finally, the original dataset is composed of a third section dedicated to within region interdependence. The intra-region trade flows are defined as the exports from each member state to the Mercosur countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay). It was measured in percentage to the total of the state compared to the world, that is, how large was Mercosur's share in the country's foreign trade (World Integrated Trade Solution 2023).

Data distribution is featured in Figure 2. For all these variables, the chart illustrates that data is unevenly distributed, reporting a certain degree of heterogeneity in the cases of this study.

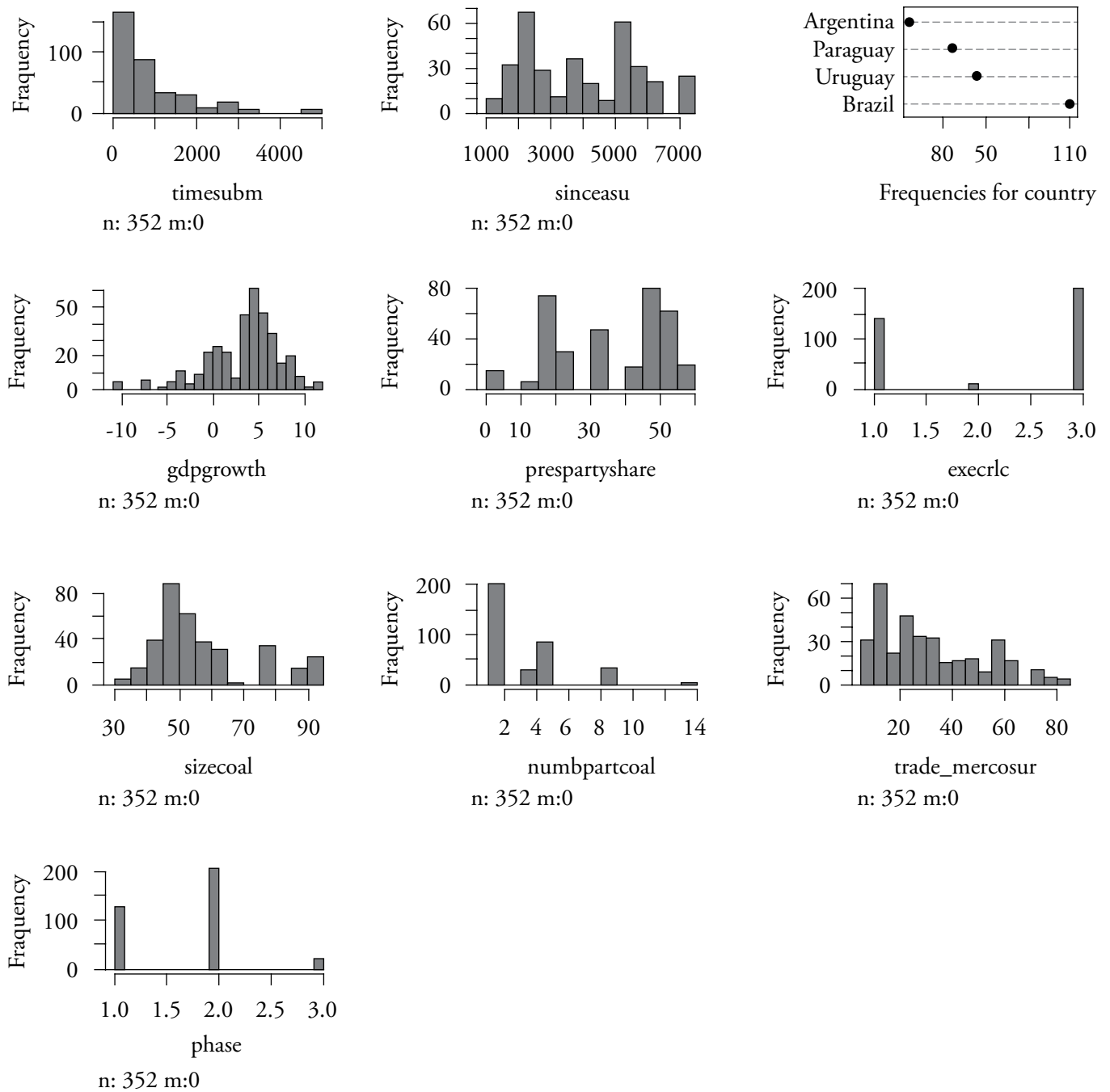


Figure 2. Data distribution

The following section is dedicated to model this observational data to a logistic regression, aiming to estimate the probability of approving Mercosur agreements by the national legislatures.

Empirical analysis

In this section, a logistic regression is applied to the cases. In order to find a model to isolate the variables and infer what is more decisive, I have elaborated three models to test the hypothesis, controlling for other confounders. The first model includes all variables, aiming for a comprehensive

understanding of the phenomenon. The second model specifies the domestic political scenario, while the third examines elements related to the integration process. In all the models, fixed effects by country have been applied, controlling for characteristics of each member state that do not vary over time.

When focusing on evaluating timing, there are two measurements: how long the Executive took to refer the bill to the congress and the age of the agreement, calculated from 26 March 1991. The first measurement addresses whether the agreement was “shelved”, waiting for a convenient moment to be deliberated by parliamentarians. A prolonged waiting period before initiating legislative procedures might indicate that the subject was sensitive and susceptible to rejection. The second measurement assesses whether newer or older agreements receive different considerations in parliament. The intention is to analyse if parliamentarians were more prone to the ratification in the beginning of the integration process, when everything related to Mercosur was novel, or if the benefits of integration became more apparent, leading to greater favourability in subsequent years. Moreover, the model controls whether or not the agreement is foundational. The foundational ones are more important and, as such, are more susceptible to discussions and opposition.

Regarding political system characteristics, ideology indicates if the head of government belongs to the left-wing (3), centre (2) or right-wing (1) – although simplified, this three-category division allowed the longitudinal comparison of the four countries and their parties. The president’s party size calculates the percentage of seats in parliament, while the coalition size calculates the percentage of seats in parliaments for all the parties aligned to the government. Additionally, there is a variable counting the number of parties in the coalition. Moreover, a binary variable detects if it was an electoral year.

About regional integration, one of the variables corresponds to the phase of integration, dividing the history of the bloc in three parts: open regionalism, post-hegemonic regionalism, and liquid regionalism (Riggirozzi and Tussie 2021; Mariano et al. 2021; Junqueira et al. 2020; Petersen and Schulz 2018; Deciancio 2016). There is also the measurement of intra-Mercosur trade. Finally, GDP growth acts as a control variable for economic effects. The coefficients and the standard errors for all the models are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Results for the logit regression

	Results		
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Approval		
	<i>logistic</i>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Argentina	1.458** (0.661)	0.814 (0.555)	1.002*** (0.387)

Continue

Continuation			
Paraguay	2.672** (1.110)	0.944 (0.631)	1.246 (0.823)
Uruguay	1.298* (0.675)	0.502 (0.494)	0.723 (0.464)
Time for submission	-0.0004** (0.0002)	-0.0002 (0.0002)	
Time since the Treaty of Asuncion	-0.0002 (0.0001)		-0.0001 (0.0001)
Foundational (1=Yes)	0.042 (0.294)		0.142 (0.270)
Ideology (2=Centre)	-1.092 (0.807)	-0.861 (0.763)	
Ideology (3=Left-wing)	0.159 (0.473)	0.210 (0.399)	
President's party share	0.050*** (0.017)	0.045*** (0.015)	
Size of the coalition	-0.005 (0.014)	-0.007 (0.011)	
Number of parties in the coalition	0.289** (0.131)	0.246** (0.104)	
GDP growth	-0.066* (0.037)	-0.057* (0.033)	-0.028 (0.032)
Intra-Mercosur trade	-0.034* (0.019)		-0.017 (0.016)
Phase of integration (2=Post-hegemonic regionalism)	0.395 (0.531)		0.080 (0.398)
Phase of integration (3=Liquid regionalism)	1.364 (0.979)		0.706 (0.699)
Electoral year (1=Yes)	0.446 (0.281)	0.464* (0.273)	
Constant	-2.007* (1.182)	-2.675** (1.094)	-0.368 (0.529)
Observations	352	352	352
Log Likelihood	-224.549	-228.450	-233.134
Akaike Inf. Crit.	483.098	480.900	486.268

Note: * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

Based on the Akaike information criterion (AIC), Model 2 (domestic politics) was selected. The choice for this model is also due to it being a simplified selection of variables compared to Model 1, and on the statistical significance of its results compared to Model 3.

Bearing this in mind and proceeding to the interpretation of results, two findings in the model are particularly relevant to understand the impact of domestic politics in the ratification of treaties. First, there is strong evidence that an increase in the size of the president's party enhances the likelihood of agreement approval. Second, there is also evidence that an increase in the number of parties composing the coalition extends the chance of approval.

This is unexpected, given that as the president's party has a larger share of seats, it will not need more political parties to ensure the approval of bills. As a matter of fact, one could expect that a large party would reduce the fragmentation of parliament, meaning a smaller number of parties. What might explain this difference is the relatively limited sample and the presence of outliers. In particular, the fact that Brazilian coalitions are always fragmented, and the president's party is of limited size. This contrasts with the three other countries. Even if they also present multi-party coalitions, they are never as fragmented as the ones seen in Brazil. On this line, it has been checked that there is moderate collinearity between country and number of parties in this model. Moreover, Model 1 points out to other variables that also have wide variation between the four countries, as the intra-Mercosur trade.

In view of this, the condition to foster positive deliberation on international agreements does not lie only on the coalition, but also on the nature of the coalition. It suggests the relevance of one specific political party, the one to which the president is affiliated. The larger it is in the parliament, the more likely it is to succeed in advancing the government's agenda. Since the expectation is that the party be aligned to the president and without disputing power (as could happen with other parties that are in the coalition), this bench of legislators not only votes for the bill, but may actively advocate for garnering the necessary votes. The findings also present evidence for another variable: electoral year.

After testing the data in the regression analysis, next section sees a closer inspection of variables of interest to evaluate the support to the hypothesis.

Discussion

According to these data, the most relevant finding from this analysis pertains to the president's party share of legislative seats. This result, pointing out that when a single party holds larger control of parliament it expedites the approval, confirms this study's hypothesis, i.e., that legislators are guided by domestic political factors. When following the orientation from this party, the legislators facilitate a faster approval.

If it is a single-party majority, it does not need to negotiate with other legislative political forces, which might have divergent interests. Nonetheless, bearing in mind that a higher number of parties also increases the chance of a fast approval, in case of multi-party coalitions, the president's party members may have greater incentives and possibilities to articulate the support of other lawmakers, as suggested by existing literature (Kreppel 1997; Alemán and Calvo 2010; Hiroi

and Rennó 2018). This party assumes a pivotal role liaising both the Executive and Legislative branches, representing the interests of the government.

When inspecting the distribution of the data, it can be seen that the majority of the cases have a coalition size of above 50%, but the same is not true for the size of the president's party – most of the cases do not present a party holding more than 50% of the seats. Indeed, the phenomenon of having one party controlling the majority of the Legislative has occurred in Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, but was never experienced in Brazil in this timeframe.

There were 23 agreements approved in Brazil with the situation of a coalition size larger than 50%, but with a president's party that is minoritarian. This occurred also in Uruguay (16 agreements) and Argentina (8 agreements). On the other hand, 20 agreements were approved in Uruguay with a president's party that is majoritarian, which has also been seen in Paraguay (18 agreements) and Argentina (6 agreements). These figures reflect the imbalance in the distribution of cases, since Brazilian political organisation diverges from the others, as well as the fact that Argentina does not approve a large number of agreements through the legislative mechanism.

A case that exemplifies the interaction between domestic and international politics and the importance of having a strong coalition is the Protocol of Accession of Venezuela to Mercosur. In Brazil, where the president's party had a small share of seats (16%) – but with a multi-party majoritarian coalition – the process lasted almost 3 years in Congress. On the other hand, in Uruguay (single-party coalition of 52%), and Argentina (single-party coalition of 44%), the accession was approved in the same year. In Paraguay, this episode was more complicated and took over four governments to be completed, but the lack of legislative support has also been appointed as one of the reasons for this longer process (Araujo 2024b).

In view of the above, further studies should explore how the causality between the president's party and the approval of Mercosurian agreements operate. More information on the parliamentary dynamics, among the parties that compose the coalition, would help to understand how negotiations among legislators take place. The interests and preferences of the government, represented in the president's party, ease the convergence between branches. Given that the legislative participation in foreign affairs is lightly institutionalised, having Legislative and Executive interests aligned is key to ensure that the process run without major oppositions (Neves 2003; Santiago 2019). It should be noted that other studies have started to contribute to this topic in this emerging field (Araujo 2024a; Ribeiro et al. 2020; Spohr 2019).

Hence, while it is commonly understood that government support from parliament is crucial for faster approval of foreign policy decisions, the results reveal that support by itself does not suffice, as who sustains the government matters. In this sample, composed by multi-party systems, the findings highlight the pivotal role of the party to which the president is affiliated in securing a legislative support to the bills. As it is expected, there is a political and ideological convergence between the head of government and the parliamentarians from this party, making it easier for them to agree and create conditions in the parliament to cooperate with other parties that are necessary to reach a positive vote.

In view of that, during the legislative procedures, the government seems to play an important role in accelerating the approval of these agreements, negotiating with other parties present in parliament. Therefore, understanding Executive-Legislative relations, emphasising key parties, is essential for a detailed examination of how this dynamic operates. Regarding this aspect, it is important to consider differences in national party systems, especially given Brazil's highly fragmented multiparty system, which contrasts with other states.

The main goal of the current study was to assess what drives parliamentarians to decide faster on the approval of Mercosur agreements. The puzzle set out at the beginning aimed to understand how they behave by integrating inputs from both domestic and international politics. The evidence presented here argues for the preponderance of national political variables to define the duration of the approvals. In particular, having a coalition with strong party was the key finding to contribute to this theoretical debate.

Aiming to provide an answer to the research question “Why do some agreements take longer to be approved by national legislatures than others?”, it is possible to infer that the nature of the coalitions defines the duration of legislative procedures. The president's party points out to the preponderance of a government-allied party to foster the Executive agenda, offering solid support. This finding helps to understand that the absence of qualified legislative support is a scenario that delays ratification.

In view of the above, the findings from this article contribute to the literature, confirming how domestic politics influence international agreements (Moravcsik 1997; Putnam 1988; Merle 1981; Martin 2000; Haftel and Thompson 2013). The theoretical implication of this evidence is that the speed for approval is associated with the interbranch constraints and how the Executive manages to anticipate obstacles in the legislative phase of internalisation. Within the Latin American reality, it confirms that presidentialism continues to have substantial influence on regionalism.

A limitation of this study lies precisely on being concentrated on the ratification phase. Therefore, the debate between domestic and international politics is less generalisable to the broad debate of regionalism in Latin America. Also, it did not evaluate how other international agreements (unrelated to Mercosur) are adopted, and neither how it compares with domestic policies which are also legislated by parliaments.

Conclusion

In this concluding section, I offer a summation of the key findings discussed throughout the article, and a few final reflections for further studies. The selection for a regional organisation such as Mercosur allowed for the examination of similar agreements across four member states. The comparison encompassed 36 agreements, investigating the time taken by parliamentarians to approve them in order to identify factors that increase or decrease the duration of the processes. From this analysis, I expect to have contributed to understanding how domestic politics affect international politics.

In view of the above, this study has found that domestic political variables have significant impact on the speed for approval. The most robust finding indicates that the size of the president's party has an important effect, suggesting that the parliamentary support to the Executive branch expedites foreign affairs-related actions. While the Presidency holds a central role in managing this field, internal support, not just from a pro-government coalition, but from a strong party, is essential to advance the government's agenda. However, further research is necessary to comprehend how this specific party orchestrates vote convergence to secure a fast bill approval.

Bearing in mind the contrasting findings of the president's party size and the number of parties in the coalition, a natural progression of this study would be to analyse the relationship between variables across countries. Another suggestion for further studies is to perform an in-depth analysis of how single-party majorities expedite the approval, comparing to multi-party majorities and minority governments, which could include the ideological distance between the parties. It is important to highlight that the generalisability of the results is constrained by some particularities of each case, making it challenging to formulate a comprehensive understanding of parliamentary behaviour regarding Mercosur.

Nevertheless, all things considered, the relevance of domestic politics is supported by the current findings, emphasising the importance of having a legislative shield to ensure fast approval of government bills. This finding aligns with intergovernmentalist theory, as parties represent domestic interests. Furthermore, the conclusions of this investigation complement prior studies on legislatures and international affairs, extending the existing knowledge on the reality of Latin America. Given the relevance of the domestic level to advance and institutionalise regional integration, conjugating Foreign Policy Analysis and Regionalism studies is increasingly important. Moreover, the article has provided a deeper insight into the field of agreements ratification in Mercosur, documenting and explaining how the South American bloc interacts with national institutions and how parliaments respond to regional integration.

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