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PRESIDENTIALIST DECISION MAKING IN LATIN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

Examples from Regional Integration Processes

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Presidentialism has been long defined as a regime type based on the principle of separation of power. However, most times actual presidential systems have performed on a different basis, closer to concentration rather than separation of power. This is especially the case in most Latin American countries. Ever since Simón Bolívar asserted, as early as 1826, that “the new states of America . . . need kings with the title of President” (Sondrol 1990, 426), the region has been identified by its propensity toward the accumulation of power in the top executive office. *Hyper-presidentialism*, as this phenomenon came to be called (Nino 1992), is at odds with the original, U.S. concept of presidentialism, which Woodrow Wilson (1885) defined as “congressional government”—as he argued that Congress was “fast becoming the governing body of the nation.” Such an unexpected evolution was a combination of two factors, one institutional and the other cultural.

Institutionally, the metamorphosis of presidentialism was due to the adaptation of the U.S. constitution of 1789 to the Latin American context, first executed by the Chilean constitution of 1833 and then followed by the Argentine one of 1853. Most South American constitutionalists, led by Diego Portales and Juan Bautista Alberdi, considered that the major threat their new countries faced was anarchy rather than tyranny, because the difficulties of governing an uneducated population dispersed over a vast area far exceeded the dangers of a monarchical restoration. Consequently, their proposed constitutional design strengthened executive powers at the expense of congress and of subnational (state or province) authority.

Culturally, the tradition of *caudillismo*—or, man on horseback—pervaded a region characterized by low demographic density and a mostly rural environment. The urbanization and industrialization of the twentieth century allegedly changed the forms of *caudillismo* but not its substance, now relabeled populism. Government of men rather than government of laws largely prevailed, and the combination of charismatic personal rule with strong executive institutions produced a concentrationist rather than balanced type of presidentialism.

Beyond these features, which are distinctive of Latin America, presidents generally enjoy greater room for maneuver from both institutional and political constraints in the foreign policy area. As Schlesinger (1974, 279) pointed out, even in separationist presidentialism such as in the United States, “it was from foreign policy that the imperial Presidency drew its initial momentum.” Hence, in this chapter, first the main features of Latin American presidential systems is

elaborated, and a few crucial cases of foreign policy decision making are scrutinized. The goal is to pinpoint the international expression of concentrationist presidentialism, namely, presidential diplomacy, and to analyze its relational outcome, namely, interpresidentialism.

Latin American Presidentialism: Institutional Features

Presidentialism has been charged with an alleged poor record regarding democratic stability. According to Linz (1990), it brought about dual democratic legitimacy, suffered from temporal rigidity, fostered winner-take-all politics, and fostered personalism and decisionism. However, these characteristics are not always reckoned as negative; it can even be argued that they should be considered advantages instead of pitfalls.

Presidentialism, because of its practice of popular elections for the head of government, has been said to provide additional democratic legitimacy for the system and, hence, for the overall decision-making process. It offers a more direct mechanism of *vertical accountability*, together with a greater identifiability of its top official, than in parliamentary regimes. However, the other advantages advanced by Shugart and Carey (1992)—the presence of checks and balances and the role of arbiter—are rather weak in many presidential regimes: in fact, several Latin American democracies fall rather short in practice, even though checks and balances are formally inscribed into their constitutions. In O'Donnell's (1999) terms, they lack *horizontal accountability*. What defines presidentialism, regardless of its subtypes, is the fixed term for office that allows social and economic actors to plan their activities and investments over a known timetable.

Latin American new political instability (Pérez-Liñán 2007), which set foot in the late 1980s and endured for little more than a decade, somehow questioned the previous assertion. The successful impeachment or early resignation of near a dozen presidents showed that institutional instability was far from over. However, its return was due to policy failure rather than to policy deadlock, as the traditional argument claimed. The consequence is that democracy survived, as presidential successions were managed by congresses through constitutional procedures. Yet, executive offices did not lose competences, so it could be said that, in concentrationist presidentialism, concentration of power stays even when presidents go. Since the early 2000s, though, favorable international conditions contributed to restore political stability and even promoted more frequent presidential reelections. Concentration of power and stability in power thus rebuilt their elective affinity.

Presidential power can be divided into constitutional and partisan powers (Shugart and Mainwaring 1997). The former is the result of three legislative powers, that is, legislative initiative, decree power, and veto power, plus a rather politically loaded agenda-setting capacity. In turn, partisan powers depend on the party system and the degree of party discipline (relative not only to party structure and organization but also to institutional rules).

Concentrationist presidentialism involves the reduction of veto points in several or all of these dimensions, thus potentially increasing the capacity for presidential initiative, rapid response, and executive-driven decision making. These characteristics are more likely to be effective in certain policy areas than in others, depending on a set of diverse variables. Blondel and Cotta (1996) underline three cases in which the government acquires greater autonomy with respect to the supporting parties: emergencies, technical cases, and implementation. As mentioned, presidents tend to enjoy greater room for maneuver from both institutional and political constraints as foreign policy regards. For instance, Rogowski (1999) claims that more secure terms of office enhance foreign policy credibility. Although he acknowledges that the presence of fewer veto points may undermine such credibility, this would be compensated by improved stability and policy coherence.

Beyond their differentiated performance across issue areas, concentration and diffusion of power also have a diverse impact on general governmental capacities. As Weaver and Rockman (1993, 454)

stated, “those arrangements that concentrate power . . . tend to perform better at the steering tasks of government than those that diffuse power.” Concentration of power is seen as more able to deal with active policy making, whereas its diffusion is more closely related to maintenance—stick to commitments—and political—wide representation and social peace—capacities (Rockman 1997). The application of these propositions to Latin America may well be a fruitful endeavor: when the region was suffering from political instability, preeminent or *concentrationist presidencies* were unable to solve social conflicts and even to persist. Once traditional causes of conflict had receded and new challenges for governance had to be faced, *steering capacity* (effective decision making) developed an increasing importance, sometimes even more significant than *political capacity* (legitimate representation). Only recently did some scholars begin to pay greater attention to the link between presidentialism and public policy (Haggard and McCubbins 2001), although they do not focus on foreign policy but on budgetary and regulatory policies. This chapter moves a step forward and analyzes how external state behavior has had an impact on the type of presidentialism that prevails in Latin America. It does so by approaching a critical foreign policy area: regional integration, the only one in which the very nature of the state is challenged as parcels of sovereignty are voluntarily relinquished.

What are the institutional capabilities that foster higher effectiveness in the field of regional integration? Three domains are involved: foreign affairs, trade policy, and maintenance of international commitments. Although the former may be considered as encompassing the other two, by foreign affairs I refer to the overall capacity of targeting priorities and selecting macro-orientations in world politics. By contrast, maintenance of international commitments means continuation rather than targeting, whereas trade policy is within the realm of so-called low politics, that is, matters that are not vital to the survival of the state, and implies micro or meso-orientations that are substantively and analytically different from grand strategy.

In one of the few investigations linking executive format with international performance, Milner has argued that “differing political institutions in Great Britain, France, and the United States have not led to major differences in their ability to make and maintain international commitments in the trade sector” (1993, 347). The fact that the United States does not outperform parliamentary democracies is not surprising, because presidentialism is not better equipped than parliamentarism is regarding maintenance capabilities. However, regional integration is much more complex and daunting an enterprise than just sticking to commitments already attained. Moreover, only one case of presidentialism was analyzed by Milner, and it was the archetype of the separationist type. The question is how concentrationist presidentialism would have performed, whether regarding maintenance or steering capacities.

The argument advanced in this chapter is that the definitional characteristic of presidentialism—the fixed term of the president (Riggs 1994)—working together with the definitional characteristic of the concentrationist subtype, which is executive concentration of power, has allowed for a higher probability that decisions regarding foreign issues would be made without facing institutional blockades. Simultaneously, concentrationist presidentialism has provided relevant actors with direct access to top decision makers and has permitted a rapid response from the latter. In most of Latin America, and especially the Southern Cone, concentrated rather than separated power has proved well suited to deal with integration, at least in its first stages, because it managed to overcome obstacles presented by legislatures, cabinets, and regional institutions.

Latin American Presidentialism: Cultural Roots

The executive concentration of power is historically rooted. Sondrol (1990, 417) has distinguished the unique tradition of Latin America as made up of three key aspects: *caudillism*, *personalism*, and *elitism*, whose outcome would be an *ejecutivismo* allegedly intrinsic to the region.

According to this approach, during the nation-building period, “*ejecutivismo* in Latin America has been a device to guide and control the extremist and centrifugal forces characteristic of the region, and to forge unifying symbols essential to nationalism in lands rife with separatist tendencies and political factions” (Sondrol 1990, 419).

Caudillism can be defined as a type of charismatic leadership exerted by a landowner or a likewise grand man over his subordinates or neighbors, based on de facto power and personal worship. *Personalism* consists in the identification of the *caudillistic* leader with the state itself, thus erasing any difference between the person and the institution, paving the way for clientelism as a social structure founded on a personal and asymmetric exchange relationship. *Elitism*, on the other hand, refers to the intellectual orientation of most founding fathers of the Latin American states; in their view, the only conceivable rule was the rule of reason, an idea that distanced them from a purely democratic conception and dragged them closer to a more aristocratic one.

The concept of *populism*, with its long history and many allocated meanings, captures most of the above. Sometimes it is understood as a social structure that combines certain political, economic, and cultural characteristics (O'Donnell 1973; Germani 1978; Conniff 1982), while at other times it is defined in terms of socioeconomic policy (Sachs 1989; Dornbusch and Edwards 1991). Both interpretations have lately lost much of their conceptual grip. Weyland's definition of populism as a political strategy seems more suitable, provided that

a personal leader appeals to a heterogeneous mass of followers who feel left out and are available for mobilization; the leader reaches the followers in a direct, quasi-personal manner that bypasses established intermediary organizations, especially parties; if the leader builds a new or revives an old populist party, it remains a personal vehicle with a low level of institutionalization.

(1999, 381)

In turn, Alberti calls for the rehabilitation of the political culture approach as the necessary one to account for *movimientismo* in Latin America. He argues that “movement and institution are two different, contradictory and mutually exclusive principles of social life” (Alberti 1996, 261). *Movimientismo* is thus defined as “a particular way of playing politics in which all major interests in society are expressed and loosely organized in movements led by charismatic leaders, which claim to represent the ‘true’ interests of the nation . . . and identify personal leadership with State institutions” (Alberti 1996, 254). McGuire similarly defines political movements as “a set of people who share a common political identity and whose leaders aspire to full and permanent control of the state through the most readily available means, electoral or not” (1997, 7). It is simple to conclude that all the preceding phenomena are tightly related to each other, all them stemming from a common denominator: particularism, the hard core of Latin American politics. As Bolívar would have wished, most Latin American executives have become “kings with the title of president.” Unlike kings, however, they have to win periodic elections, and their mandates are limited in time.

Moreover, they are supposed to be checked by institutions such as congresses, cabinet ministers, and, in some cases, governors. But these institutions ended up being different from their U.S. predecessors, as they allowed presidents larger room for maneuver. With few exceptions such as Chile and Uruguay, historical practice did not tame executive autonomy in Latin America. After the Third Wave of democratic transitions, the persistence of executive supremacy led O'Donnell to speak of a “new animal”: delegative democracy, understood as a regime type in which

whoever wins election to the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally

limited term of office . . . In this view, other institutions—courts and legislatures, for instance—are nuisances . . . a mere impediment to the full authority that the president has been delegated to exercise.

(1999, 164)

Domestic institutional constraints were even weaker regarding foreign affairs. Furthermore, longer periods in office—facilitated by democratic stability and, in some cases, by constitutional amendments that allowed for consecutive reelection—allowed incumbent presidents to become more knowledgeable and assertive, as well as to create personal bonds and political solidarity with their fellow presidents in the region. This sort of “presidents’ club” constituted a newly grown, particularistic base of support that contributed to further untie the presidents’ hands from national and regional institutions.

Latin American Presidentialism and Foreign Policy

The prominent role that Latin American presidents have played in crafting and implementing foreign policy is well established. For example, Keller (2012) shows how presidents Adolfo López Mateos (1958–64) and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964–70) personally shaped Mexican foreign policy to support Fidel Castro after the Cuban Revolution regardless of systemic or ideological factors. Likewise, Escudé (1997) explains how President Carlos Menem (1989–99) produced dramatic changes in Argentina’s foreign policy with disregard for political traditions and institutional constraints. Menem reneged on decades of confrontation with the West by undertaking a course of unilateral disarmament, leaving the nonaligned movement, reestablishing friendly relations with Britain, and unconditionally aligning with the U.S. in the Gulf War by executive decree. More crucial instances to test the significance of presidential influence over foreign policy are provided by the creation and operation of regional organizations: when international treaties constrain state action, presidents should dodge not only domestic but also international institutions in order to prevail. Therefore, the best cases to assess how effectively presidentialism and foreign affairs interact are institutionalized cases of regional integration. A brief comment on the Central American Common Market (CACM) and the Andean Community (CAN) follows, and then more emphasis is given to the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), once thought of as the most successful regional organization in the Western Hemisphere.

The CACM was founded in 1960 and performed remarkably well during its first years. Progress was due to technical—that is, non-politicized—management, as well as to the low political and economic costs of integration—since it did not threaten any powerful interests and administration expenses were paid by foreign sources (Wynia 1970; Mattli 1999). However, the fragility of the achievements became apparent as the task of holding the integrative structure together turned out to be the principal concern of regional leaders after the boom of the first years. The result was an expansion in the scope of the tasks performed by an increasing number of regional institutions, without a concomitant increase in the authority of such institutions. The stagnation of the process would last two decades, during which both interstate and civil wars smashed any illusion of integration.

In the early 1990s, pacification and democratization led to a revival of the bloc (Grugel 2006; Mattli 1999). The mechanism that linked democratization to integration had an institutional foundation: presidentialism. The relaunch of the organization stemmed from the institutionalization of presidential meetings, which was propelled by the personal compromise of the presidents. This innovation was “*a key factor in the renewed dynamism of Central American cooperation and integration processes, and it has allowed for meaningful progress in regional development*” (Comisión Económica

para América Latina and Bano Interamericano de Desarrollo [CEPAL-BID] 1997, 35, emphasis added). The hand of the chief executives over the regional architecture is noticeable in the institutional proviso that establishes that presidents become members of the Central American Parliament as soon as they end their term in office, thus offering their experience to the regional organization—and granting themselves the perks of the new position, including exemption from prosecution.

The CAN was established in 1969 and, just like the CACM, performed quite satisfactorily in its early years. However, the enlargement to Venezuela in 1973 and the withdrawal of Chile in 1976 generated a succession of major crises. Apart from the rigidity of the treaties, the failure was due to the unequal distribution of costs and benefits, the politicization of integration issues, great political instability, and the lack of regional leadership (Mattli 1999). In spite of the establishment of a court of justice and a regional parliament, the bloc stagnated until 1987, when a treaty reform rendered its working mechanisms more flexible. Still, it was not until all the presidents met in 1989 that the region embarked on a process of deepening and opening. The Andean Presidential Council, created in 1990, was to consolidate such a bid. It is comprised of the presidents of the member states and constitutes the bloc's highest-level body. However, in 1992 the Council was unable to prevent the crisis produced when President Alberto Fujimori staged a self-coup and retired Peru from the regional institutions. As it happens, presidentialist decision making may have negative as much as positive effects on regional integration. In any case, once Fujimori left office his country was promptly reaccepted into CAN institutions.

MERCOSUR was founded in 1991 and, unlike the previous cases, not even its first steps fit the mainstream theories of regional integration. The two major contemporary currents, namely, liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik 1998) and supranational governance (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1998), regard society as the point of departure for integration, because transnational transactors increase their exchanges and subsequently call on national or transnational authorities to adjust regulations and policies to the new situation. These approaches draw on evidence collected from the European experiences. MERCOSUR, however, arose from the political will of national governments, and only thereafter did it generate public demand for further integration (Malamud 2003).

Liberal intergovernmentalism sees economic interdependence as a strong precondition for integration. As trade liberalization augments export dependence and intra-industry trade, stronger pressure for integration arises. Regional institutions are thus conceived as mechanisms to lock in and enforce agreements rather than as political arenas or autonomous actors. In spite of the crucial weight this approach accords national states, the decision to either pool or delegate sovereignty to the regional level is regarded as unavoidable to allow for higher levels of complex interaction. The history of MERCOSUR, however, runs against these arguments: first, it did not emerge from either increased economic interdependence or social demands; second, it has not created any autonomous institutional structure. Instead, it is ruled by a council composed of the foreign and economy ministers, who by treaty proviso should meet at least once per year under the aegis of the presidents.

In turn, supranational governance theory stresses the significance of four main actors in pushing forward European integration: nation states, transnational transactors, the European Commission, and the European Court of Justice. The latter two are supranational institutions that do not exist in MERCOSUR, a fact that, added to the weakness of transnational transactors, has left exclusively the nation states as supreme actors. In considering the European Union, Stone Sweet and Sandholtz (1998, 19) called attention to “the rule-centered logic of institutionalization” that led transactors to demand clearer and more predictable rules as interdependence increased. In MERCOSUR, increasing interdependence has created the need to manage a rising number of crises

and coordination problems, but transnational transactors have demanded particular decisions rather than general rules. For such decisions, the national presidents have been perceived as more able—more accessible, more responsive, more effective, and faster—than any other actors.

It is commonplace to assert that the operation of MERCOSUR has fundamentally rested on presidential diplomacy (Núñez 1997; Danese 1999). This mechanism is understood as the customary resort to direct negotiations between national presidents every time a crucial decision has to be made or a critical conflict needs to be solved. In spite of the “presidential” adjective, this label references any form of political summit diplomacy—as opposed to bureaucratic process or professional diplomacy. Therefore, it is not conceptually different from the practice developed by prime ministers in parliamentary democracies. In MERCOSUR, successive chief executives have allegedly carried out presidential diplomacy with a free hand to accommodate the issues at stake in the way they saw fit. Malamud (2005) has reconsidered this argument on the grounds that, although not incorrect, it does not provide a truly accurate explanation of the proceedings and results of MERCOSUR. He argued that institutional incentives and constraints, shaped by the presidential format of member state institutions, have supported the process of regional integration, thus providing an institutional basis to apparently discretionary decisions.

The rapprochement between Argentina and Brazil began in 1979 under symmetric military rule, although cooperation was institutionalized only in 1985 when democracy was restored in both countries. Although bilateral collaboration had been attempted one decade before, military presidents Alejandro Lanusse and Emílio Garrastázú Médici failed to overcome bureaucratic interests in the armed forces and foreign ministries of both states. Darnton (2012, 120) argues that organizational politics, not presidential diplomatic errors, explains the persistence of the Argentine-Brazilian conflict in the early 1970s. The interpresidential argument, which assumes democracy as political regime, sheds light on why two other presidents succeeded in the following decade, even though they had to face the same vested interests embedded in the state apparatus that remained reluctant to engage in interstate cooperation.

Three events that have marked MERCOSUR’s history testify to the relevance of interpresidentialism. Two were the controversies over the only special regimes established at the beginning of the process, namely, for the automobiles and sugar sectors. The third concerns the temporary suspension of Paraguay’s membership in 2012, following a presidential impeachment. The analytical narrative that follows draws partly on the supranational governance approach, as it is especially sensitive to different policy areas and to day-to-day politics. At the same time, it draws on the intergovernmental approach to preference formation, for the hypothesis tested here challenges the liberal assumption that states act as agents of domestic social actors.

Between 1990 and 1996, there was a sharp increase in intraregional trade in cars as a consequence of tariff reductions and agreements to balance imports and exports. However, by mid-1995 Brazil and Argentina were suffering from economic distress because of the 1994 Mexican financial crisis. Automobile production remained stable in Argentina essentially because of its exports to Brazil, which generated a growing bilateral trade imbalance and raised complaints among Brazilian producers. The latter asked the Brazilian government for protective trade barriers, but these were not supposed to apply within MERCOSUR. The crisis came to a head when Brazil announced that it would limit automobile imports with no exceptions made for MERCOSUR partners, angering the Argentine authorities. The Brazilian cabinet was divided about the decision, as the finance minister opposed trade restrictions whereas the planning minister supported them. Both were close aides to the Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso so he usually mediated between them, but this time the hard-liners carried the day.

In response, Argentine president Menem threatened to boycott the presidential summit scheduled for the forthcoming MERCOSUR Economic Forum. Faced with this stance, Cardoso

postponed the enforcement of the decree for thirty days. The presidents themselves carried out the negotiations, excluding their cabinet ministers. The Argentine foreign minister was in Rome, and his deputy did not take part in the process either. The presidents held direct conversations to work out a solution. Fellow MERCOSUR presidents, Paraguay's Juan Carlos Wasmosy and Uruguay's Julio Sanguinetti, offered themselves as personal mediators in the dispute between their larger partners. It was agreed that all four presidents would meet and that Menem and Cardoso would hold a bilateral summit thereafter. Nobody mentioned the possibility of resorting to the Protocol of Brasília, the institutional instrument by which members were supposed to resolve their disputes. Cardoso asked Menem to act "politically, in order to restore a balance between the parts. The most important thing here is political will" (Malamud 2005, 145). The two presidents finally agreed to sign a declaration stating that negotiations were to continue. A temporary solution had come up, with neither regional institutions nor cabinet ministers having had any significant participation.

MERCOSUR's automobile conflict and its resolution question the validity of an alternative explanation: bureaucratic politics. In Allison's famous description, "The 'leaders' who sit on top of organizations are not a monolithic group . . . [but players] in a central, competitive game. The name of the game is politics: bargaining along regularized circuits among players positioned hierarchically within the government" (1971, 144). In the case at stake, however, bargaining took place between governments rather than within. Concentrationist presidents need not play the power game domestically, because they override any potential competitors.

The sugar regime is another prime case for gauging presidential intervention, for the inter-presidential argument faces a direct challenge. The reason is that this regime has often been selected to underline the importance of national parliaments, the joint parliamentary commission, or domestic social actors (Mustapic and Geneyro 2000; Vigevani et al. 2001).

Sugar has been a hot issue since the beginning of MERCOSUR. Argentina and Brazil had opposing interests resulting from a high productivity differential, which is an outcome of the Brazilian Programa Proálcool. This program subsidizes the production of sugar cane in order to use cane alcohol as a blend proportion in gasoline. As a consequence, Brazil's production of sugar was artificially increased and became a by-product tradable at marginal prices. Argentina, on the other hand, faced a difficult situation because of the domestic conditions for the production of sugar. Sugar crops are spread over five provinces located in the poor northwestern region. Given the federal arrangements established by the Argentine constitutional regime the senators and deputies representing the northwestern provinces constitute a solid bloc in Congress to defend their "sugar constituents."

In 1997, the Argentine Congress passed a law imposing the same tariff on imports of Brazilian sugar as that applied to non-MERCOSUR countries. Although the Brazilian authorities denied having exerted any pressure on the Argentine government, President Menem vetoed the law. Shockingly, the Senate unanimously rejected the veto. The electoral campaign for midterm elections was under way, and no lawmaker wanted to be exposed to criticism for having paved an open road for Brazilian sugar imports. The argument escalated after the overriding of the veto. In the Brazilian Congress, there were retaliation threats. The executive adopted a prudent stance, however. President Cardoso was aware that the Argentine legislators were acting under pressure of the electoral campaign, so he opted to trust the efforts that the Menem administration was making to limit the damage. The Argentine executive condemned the congressional position and requested to its Brazilian counterpart more time to fix the problem. Some officials on the Brazilian side—notably the foreign minister—were not convinced of the sincerity of the Argentine position, but Cardoso gave Menem the benefit of the doubt.

As the situation approached an unbearable point, a presidential meeting was agreed upon. In November 1997, after elections were held, Menem traveled to Brasília. This trip reversed the

negative atmosphere, and the Argentine president eventually adopted a formula that dated back to the Viceroyalty of La Plata: “acátese, pero no se cumpla” (acknowledge the rule but do not obey it). In ancient times, this practice worked well for rulings coming from Spain; now, it worked against the laws originating in the Argentine Congress. The tariff was never applied.

Successful presidential circumvention of both national congresses and MERCOSUR’s Joint Parliamentary Commission is best underscored by a second sugar episode. In August 2000, the Argentine Congress enacted another law aimed to protect Argentine cane from Brazilian competition. Brazilian officials issued condemnatory responses, whereas the Brazilian Congress threatened to limit imports of food containing sugar from Argentina. Argentine president Fernando de la Rúa was upset about the Argentine legislative decision. He was expected in Brasília, where a South American summit was set to take place, and was not pleased to be received in an unfriendly climate. After a bitter cabinet meeting, he sent his foreign minister to negotiate with the deputies from the northwestern provinces to avoid a war between the Brazilian and Argentine congresses.

Although President Menem’s visit of November 1997 had allowed the softening of tensions between the two assemblies, providing a temporary resolution for the first sugar episode, this time resolution appeared to be more difficult. The risk of an outbidding conflict that could jeopardize the integration process looked greater. MERCOSUR had not yet overcome the effects of the 1999 Brazilian financial crisis and currency devaluation that had affected the balance of trade within the bloc, and legislators from both countries were now threatening retaliation though when no electoral campaign was under way. Members of the Joint Parliamentary Commission attempted to mediate to no avail.

Just when it seemed that things could get no worse, President de la Rúa surprisingly vetoed the law, only to sign a resolution with the same contents. The goal was twofold. On one hand, this decision prevented an open-ended escalation between the congresses, expediently removing the issue from the legislative arena. On the other, a decree in place of a law improved the executive’s negotiation power, as it enabled the Argentine president to ensure his Brazilian counterpart that the decree would be lifted as soon as an agreement was reached, without having to go through an uncertain legislative process.

This event shows how the presidents have chosen to take all responsibility whenever MERCOSUR faces a serious conflict. They have done so even at the expense of relinquishing the likely benefits that could be extracted from a two-level game (Putnam 1988). When negotiating with foreign partners, the presidents can no longer argue that domestic institutions keep their hands tied, as they have made it clear that no actor stands above presidential competences.

The most recent manifestation of interpresidential supremacy was the process that led to the suspension of Paraguay’s membership after the congressional ousting of President Fernando Lugo in June 2012. The congressional proceedings had been hastily carried out in forty-eight hours, which raised widespread criticism that due process had not been respected. However, the Chamber of Deputies impeached the president by an overwhelming majority of seventy-six votes to one, while the Senate removed him from office by thirty-nine votes to four. Lugo himself publicly accepted the impeachment and its eventual result, although he later called it a “parliamentary coup.” The Supreme Court endorsed the decision as constitutionally valid and the vice-president, who had been elected on the same ticket as Lugo, replaced his predecessor as constitutionally mandated. However, the remaining MERCOSUR presidents did not agree with the legality of the process. After sending their foreign ministers in an attempt to prevent the impeachment or reverse its outcome, they met a week later in Mendoza, Argentina, and suspended Paraguay, alleging that a coup d’état had taken place and thus MERCOSUR’s democratic clause should be activated. The provision allowed the organization to suspend any of its members if an elected leader was overthrown. In a trilateral meeting at which the Paraguayan representative was stopped

at the door, Brazil's Dilma Rousseff, Argentina's Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, and Uruguay's José Mujica outvoted the Paraguayan Congress, its Supreme Court, and the constitutionally elected vice-president—now in charge of the presidential office—by three votes to zero. Ironically, this decision was made with the same haste imputed to the impeachment process, although with less attachment to legal procedures. Consultations with the target state were not conducted, as the treaties mandated, and the juridical instrument of the suspension was not a legal instrument but a press release. Some legal niceties were attempted later, but the fact remains that the decision has no code number within MERCOSUR body of law and that the three signatory states rejected that it could be reviewed via a judicial process—for example, the MERCOSUR's Permanent Review Court. In sum, three foreign presidents overruled the domestic checks and balances of the fourth member state and successfully circumvented all regional institutions.

MERCOSUR has been a case of supply-side integration (Perales 2003). The decision to establish the organization was not made in response to previous economic interdependence or societal demands but by the lone decision of its member states' presidents, in some cases against the will of their aides and diplomats. Malamud (2005) shows how the presidents have contributed to shape the integration process and to make it work by making use of their institutional and political capacities. Whereas MERCOSUR was intentionally created and kept as an intergovernmental organization, the working processes of the bloc have developed as an extreme type of intergovernmentalism that has been called interpresidentialism (Malamud 2003). It results from the combination of a domestic institution, that is, concentrationist presidentialism, with an international strategy, that is, presidential diplomacy. Unlike liberal intergovernmentalism, interpresidentialism is supported domestically by political institutions rather than by societal demands, and it is propelled by political preferences rather than social preferences. Besides, it is proactive and thus autonomous from previous levels of international interdependence. And, unlike bureaucratic politics, it does not involve bargaining among several players because one of them overrules all others, be they cabinet ministers, parliamentary majorities, the diplomatic corps or even supranational authorities. Paraphrasing Allison, politics is still the name of the game, only it is played among peer presidents rather than between domestic agencies.

Conclusion

Summit diplomacy is not a feature exclusive to Latin America. The originality of this region resides in its being the largest area whose chief executives are all presidents and whose regional institutions come in all forms and colors. Provided that domestic regimes have an impact upon international relations, it is conceivable that not only the democracy–autocracy dichotomy but also the presidential–parliamentary distinction is likely to make a difference.

Presidential regimes in Latin America are commonly described as asymmetric, unbalanced, hyper-presidential, or concentrationist when compared to the U.S. case. This chapter has shown that Latin American democratic presidents concentrate enough power to either prevail over or circumvent veto players such as the cabinet and congress, other potential veto actors such as national bureaucracies, and regional institutions, in a way unthinkable for either parliamentary executives or *balanced* presidential systems. In this chapter, the performance of presidents as both policy crafters and dispute settlers has been examined, and the role played by chief executives in key policy areas has been assessed. The institutional features that shape presidential intervention were identified, because interpresidentialism is based not only on individual discretion but also on constitutional and party resources.

Presidential interventions were successful because they were backed by institutional capabilities such as veto and decree powers, because the presidents' survival was not dependent on the legislature, and because cabinet ministers and their bureaucracies were subordinated to the chief

executive. Given the institutional characteristics of parliamentary regimes, no prime minister could have dodged his or her cabinet or challenged a parliamentary decision without risking his or her position. Moreover, the presidents also prevailed over regional institutions, which were weaker than the national executives when they were not integrated by the presidents themselves.

I have advanced an argument to account for the management of regional organizations without significant regional institutions. It posits that these organizations do not float on an institutional vacuum but are upheld by domestic institutions. The “interpresidentialism” argument states that the coexistence of regional cooperation (some would say integration) with a minimum set of regional institutions has been possible due to a key broadly common Latin American national institutions, namely, the format of the presidency. This chapter has shown the extent to which the interaction of concentrationist presidentialism with presidential diplomacy has shaped international politics in the region and, to a certain point, has operated as a functional equivalent to regional institutions.

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