

South-South Coalitions, Bilateral Agreements, and Regional Coordination: Public Opinion and Brazilian Foreign Policy

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Emerging powers suffer the effects from the resource deficits in attempting to project their power globally. The developing nations are faced with difficult choices in determining their resource allocation strategies when compared to the already established powers. This article uses Brazil as a case study to analyze how emerging powers articulate strategies to conduct operations across the distinct areas of the international stage, paying special attention to regional and global arenas. Our interest is to analyze how power projection strategies are articulated and formed. More specifically, our research works to understand how a country compares and relates its regional operations to its global ones.

Keywords: regional integration, foreign policy, public opinion, emerging powers, Brazil

Introduction

Established powers' distinctive characteristic is their ability to project their power resources simultaneously across global, regional, and bilateral arenas. Despite the dilemma that these nations face in determining how to allocate these largely finite resources, they are still able to cast an undeniable presence across these three areas. What's more, emerging powers—without the luxury of deep resource pools like the established powers—suffer the effects from these resource deficits in attempting to project their power globally.

In this context, aspiring developing nations are faced with categorically more difficult choices in determining their resource allocation strategies when compared to the already established powers. It is unlikely that a developing nation possesses the requisite resources to maintain, let alone create, its presence on regional and international stages. As such, developing nations' power resource allocation decisions are categorically more complex than those faced by the great powers.

This article takes Brazil as a case study to analyze how emerging powers articulate strategies to conduct operations across the distinct areas of the international stage, paying special attention to regional and global

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arenas. This analysis operates under the assumption that games carried out in these distinct arenas overlap with one another, where games in one area of operations directly affect the end result in another. To illustrate an example, a nation's leverage in the regional arena, for example, affects its relative position in the global arena, and vice-versa.

Our interest is to analyze how power projection strategies are articulated and formed. More specifically, our research works to understand how a country compares and relates its regional operations to its global ones. We do not wish to study the substantive makeup of these strategies, despite the potential for future scholarship in this field. Rather, we seek to understand the factors relating to a country's foreign comportment in a more general way.

Such comportment, thus, in terms of governmental operations, will be compared with public opinion from the common populace and the elite to better understand a country's strategic priorities in inserting itself in international governance. This project does not attempt to prove causality between governmental strategies and popular support. Rather, it only works to clarify the extent to which popular support constricts or mobilizes support for a country's strategic decision-making.

Our empirical analysis regarding popular and elite opinion relies extensively on surveys carried out by the Institute of International Relations of the University of São Paulo in a multinational collaboration with Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) of Mexico. Surveys from 2011 and 2014 contain the most relevance for our project, although we also use additional complementary research to augment our empirical analysis.

Literature

The structure of international trade underwent a radical shift at the onset of the 1990s. Many countries embraced trade liberalization, which combined with changes in political regimes and a restructuring of international negotiation mechanisms to gave way to a new trade strategy—one that still revolved around the two centers of the world's economy, the United States and the European Union.

Regional, bilateral, and multilateral agreements took form either directly or indirectly using trade liberalization standards and regulatory agreements fashioned from these two gravitational centers-cum-nations. Some bilateral and regional agreements appeared on the margins of the traditional standardized structure promulgated by the two power centers, but even they faced the opportunity costs arising from not adhering to the preferences set forth by the two power centers.

Even with more countries participating in these relevant international negotiations, the operations of global governance and trade still channeled the share of international trade to pass through the established powers. Given this environment, the debate regarding Brazil's position in the framework of trade diplomacy revolved around two structural, if not politically exclusive ideas: North-South integration or "peripheral" integration with South-South partners.

The Brazilian diplomatic apparatus always looked to merge the two ideas without abandoning opportunities with either side. Outside of its active participation in multilateral negotiations, Brazil structured its trade negotiation dynamic primarily around regional integration (Flemes, 2009).

Mercosur emerged as a representation of a new form of Latin American regional trade given its departure from the incentives proposed in previous decades that sought to create an import-substitution model of a protected market. The belief that such a concept had since become outdated allowed for the creation of "open

regionalism”, where the integration process would base itself in the opening of markets designed for greater international integration amongst member-states.

Despite the liberalization era’s lack of a defined set of rules, the trade between Mercosur nations was extremely positive due to a favorable international climate and economic stability. By the end of the 1990s, Brazil saw itself amongst a gamut of regional and multilateral negotiations contextualizing a general shift toward economic decentralization and including the emergence of new dynamic centers that had previously been seen as peripheral. These factors gave rise to a demand for new global governance schemes in trade relations.

Within this new picture, even with the changed trade negotiation standards, the international trade structure faced significant transformations, not the least of which created more dynamic and expansive South-South trade relations—to the detriment of the regional integration process. At this time, the agreed-upon regional integration model took on new limitations and came to be known as “post-liberal integration” or “post-hegemonic integration” (Rigirozzi, 2012).

Pedro Motta Veiga and Sandra Rios would argue that “post-liberal regionalism” defines an era that has overcome integration, well-known in the 1990s but now at the end of the decade beginning to show signs of exhaustion. Such decline comes largely from the lack of desired results from Mercosur, on account of trade liberalization’s focus on substitution for greater social and political investments (Veiga & Rios, 2007).

Within this new context, elites fostered the opinion that Mercosur was unsustainable and thus unworthy to occupy such importance in the Brazilian foreign policy agenda, citing the bloc’s trade results and a new international climate.

Mercosur, when examined in the light of trade liberalization and longstanding beliefs about economic integration, does not seem to meet the needs of addressing inequality or implementing appropriate public policy that is most capable of overcoming domestic crises. Such a reading of Mercosur is augmented when examining Brazil’s increased international operations at the onset of the 2000s that emphasized the country’s leadership with international coalitions and investment in a regional integration model that has borne more political, rather than commercial fruit, such as Unasur (Malamud, 2013).

Understanding how power distribution matters are tied to Mercosur perception is a fundamental point to contextualize Brazil’s new foreign policy strategy and international presence that the country uses to combine its actions in both regional and global spheres.

Perception of the BRICS

As the last section discussed, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) is an international coalition that acts as the organ with the most potential to project Brazilian activity in the global arena. Such potential comes primarily by way of China, which serves as the first primary challenger to American hegemony, but also Russia, which, together with China, holds ambitious and reformist international goals. While similar to BRICS, IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) was a smaller project operating along these same terms and can be said to have been absorbed into the former.

The evidence pointing to the BRICS’s diluting, if not absolving, IBSA comes from the fact that the organization’s executive trilateral meetings diminished as soon as the BRICS took on its heavier political role. IBAS’s operating principle was normative and rule-based, primarily with the trilateral partnership’s composition of the larger democracies of the Global South. Despite this standardized reality in the global arena,

this three-part alliance faces serious doubts for expansion due to a lack of resources and materials in the diplomatic corps to build and develop several diverse international coalitions at the same time.

It is the BRICS, but not IBSA, that has become Brazil's most influential and opportune diplomatic arrangement in the realm of global governance. From this, the BRICS has become the primary "soft balance" tool for use against the established great powers, especially the United States (Oliveira & Onuki, 2013). It is particularly within the area of finance and investments where the newly created BRICS Bank offers an alternative model to the historically established system laid out by the great powers.

BRICS's role as a counterweight to the great powers is narrative that has taken hold with the Brazilian government and part of the country's elite, as one is apt to see in the phenomenon's widespread coverage in the media. In this context, we ask, "To what extent is the perception of the BRICS as a great power counterweight shared with the Brazilian general public?" Outside of this general question, we wish to know if the general public form their opinions largely the same as the elites: structured by traditional left-right partisan ideology.

We present our expectations in Table 1. For this question, those interviewees were asked if they considered the BRICS a coalition acting to balance North American power or, in the opposing view, a negative entanglement for Brazilian foreign policy. Our graph reveals a divided perception with a prevalence of equal distribution amongst the three groups' brackets. Brazilian societal attitudes are polarized about the role of the BRICS in projecting the country to greater insertion into international governance.

One curious point that is also expressed in Table 1 is that such polarization is not correlated to the interviewees' political party orientation. This point stands out due to the fact that Brazil's participation in other organizations are strongly correlated to traditional left-right ideology, an example of which appears in examining attitudes on Mercosur.

Another aspect that is central to this work is the relation between interviewees' attitudes about Mercosur and BRICS. The intersection of support for both regional and global arrangements serves as an additional display that supports the hypothesis that there would exist a greater propensity of anti-hemispheric sentiment amongst Mercosur supporters. The inverse is equally as true. If support for Mercosur and BRICS shows an inverse relationship, one can interpret that as a signal that there does not exist an anti-hemispheric sentiment amongst supporters of sub-regional integration.

Table 1
Support to Mercosur and Level of Education

Mercosur	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
1. BRICS.	0.2049526	0.1217279	1.68	0.092	-0.0336296	0.4435349
2. Confiança nos EUA.	-0.0824738	0.0610898	-1.35	0.177	-0.2022076	0.0372599
3. Confiança na China.	0.0793624	0.0647276	1.23	0.220	-0.0475014	0.2062262
4. China crescer como EUA.	0.0460799	0.0667683	0.69	0.490	-0.0847836	0.1769434
5. Brasil: distribuição de poder.	0.2814658	0.1316216	2.14	0.032	0.0234922	0.5394395
_cons	-0.2200373	0.2267674	-0.97	0.332	-0.6644934	0.2244187

Source: Institute of International Relations (2014).

Table 1 shows the relationship between Mercosur support and related variables such as power and confidence in relation to developed nations. Using the logistic regression as a base, one can see that support for

Mercosur is positively associated with the assumption that the BRICS is a force capable of equalizing the power of traditional powers (the United States, Japan, and Europe) (item 1), as well as the assumption that Brazil desires to change the power balance amongst the world's nations (item 5). These two assumptions reinforce this work's hypothesis that there is a relation between supporting Mercosur and demanding a change in the world power structure.

The Table 1 reveals, above all, that there is not a relationship between Mercosur support and direct attitudes about the United States or China. Based on what we have discussed previously, we expected a positive relation between Mercosur support and distrust with the United States, otherwise known as an anti-imperialist attitude. A recurring debate in the literature and the national debate is the perception that Mercosur operates with other motives instead of its normal understanding as a hemispheric integration project, standardized by the United States. In the same line of reasoning, Chinese growth mirroring American growth can be positively associated to Mercosur. Neither of the two cases is supported by this hypothesis.

These figures support the general hypothesis defended in this work: There is a correlation between Mercosur support and attitudes about the distribution of power in the world. This is most true when one's perspectives on power involve Brazil, directly or indirectly via BRICS. Attitudes about China and the United States do not impact one's attitudes about Mercosur directly.

Mercosur Support According to "Leader" Countries

This section expands upon the relationship between perceptions about Mercosur and other sets of factors. The first set of socioeconomic factors is outlined in the graph below and relates to attitudes about power distribution in the international order. There does not seem to be evidence that the relationship between these factors is due to common left-right divisions amongst political groups.

A second group of factors is tied to respondents' attitudes about specific countries. Here the aim is to comparatively examine attitudes of those who self-identify as either left or right on the political spectrum. The objective is to evaluate to what extent Mercosur support is associated with attitudes about countries labeled hegemonic/counter-hegemonic, or developed/developing.

Figure 1 presents the regression coefficients where both the dependent variable (Mercosur support) and the independent variables (scores for each country) appear in a scale from 0 to 100. The displacement of the coefficients expresses a positive relationship between Mercosur support and a favorable evaluation for a country.

Thus, one can argue in this graph that the majority of the coefficients are positive. In the "left" group one observes Venezuela, while in the "right" group both that country and Bolivia are inversely proportional to Mercosur support. Outside of this, the statistically significant coefficients are not coincidental between groups from the left and right. In the left group the United States and Mexico are notable, while in the right group the former joins Chile and China to make up the most noteworthy data.

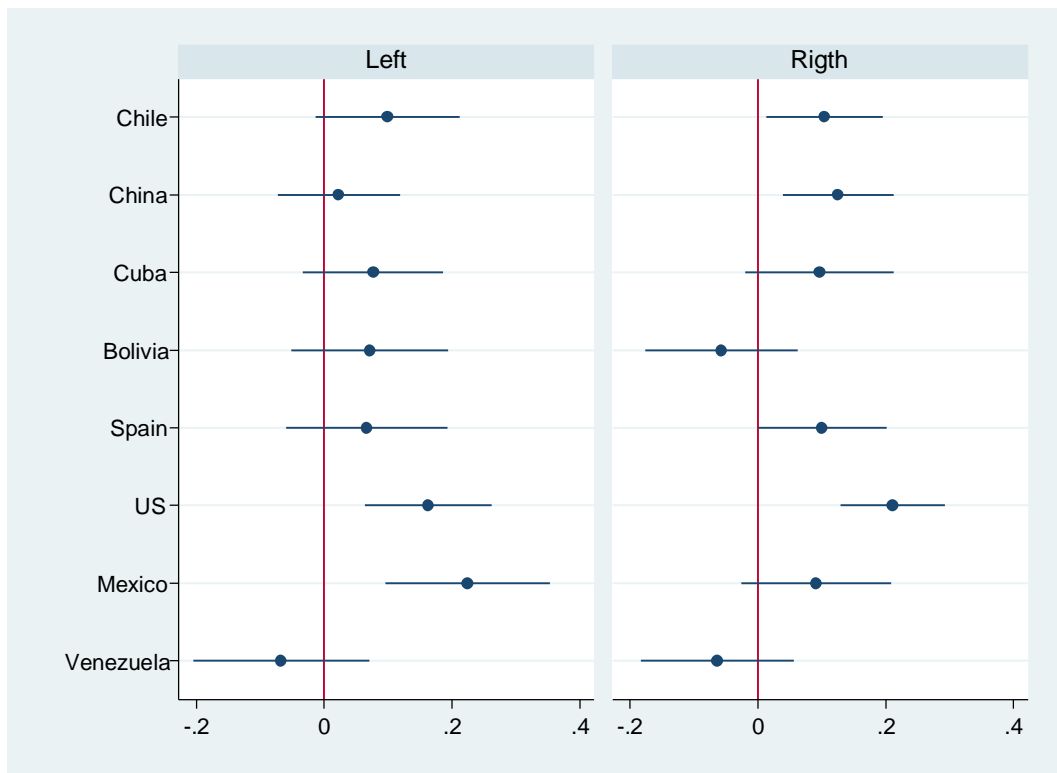


Figure 1. Correlation between support to Mercosur and evaluation about countries.

Source: Institute of International Relations (2014).

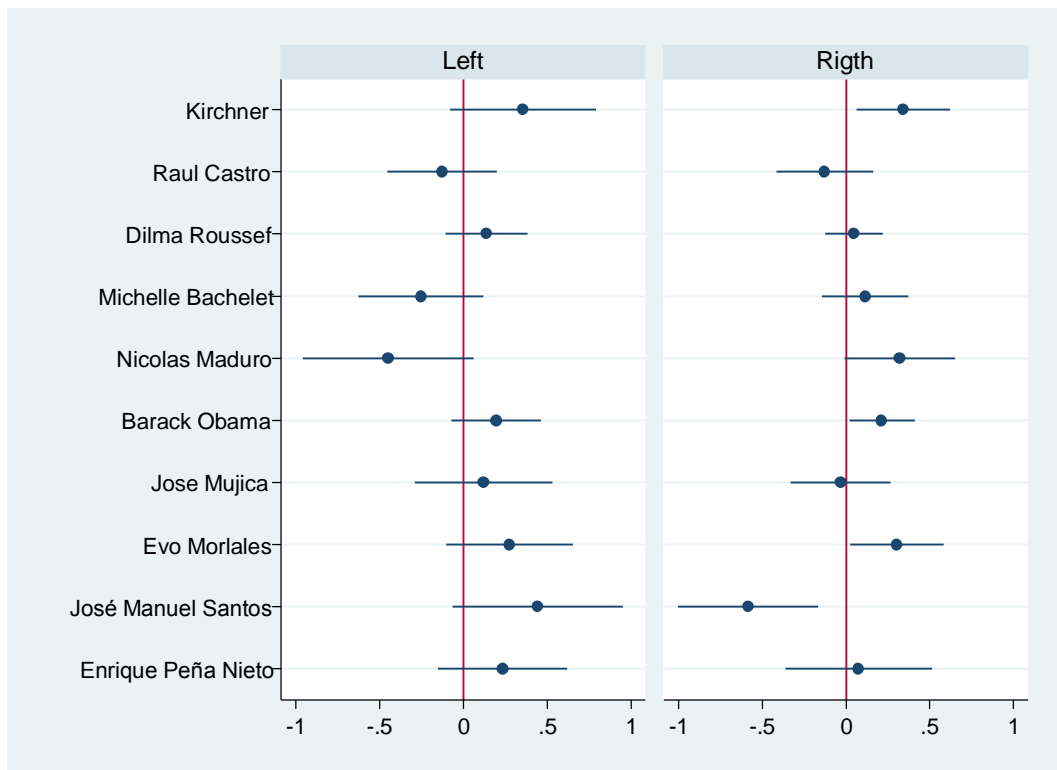


Figure 2. Correlation between support leaders and political orientation.

Source: Institute of International Relations (2014).

These data points amplify additional evidence that there is not a positive association between Mercosur support and anti-hegemonic or anti-American sentiment as the political debate suggests. An inverse relationship holds true even for leftist interviewees, where the better the perception of the United States was found, the better the perception of Mercosur.

Figure 2 undertakes a similar line of reasoning. It predicts interviewees' attitudes about other countries' leaders in the region at the time of the survey. This questionnaire reveals that positive opinions about leaders associated with the left (Raúl Castro, Michelle Bachelet, and Nicholas Maduro) diminish the likelihood of one's support for Mercosur. Notable exceptions are opinions on Christina Kirchner and Evo Morales. The positive relationship between attitudes about Barack Obama and Mercosur confirms the individual findings about each country. The fact that Barack Obama is a democratic president explains the foundation of this positive relationship.

Conclusion

The prevailing optics within academic works on regionalism focus on governments' strategies within the participating countries. In particular, the field produces recurring analyses studying country strategies in the context of their goals and interests. Outside of domestic factors, structural factors such as power distribution in the international system are examined as calculated decisions undertaken by governments.

Studies about public opinion attitudes and preferences regarding regionalism are still small in volume, in part due to the belief that public opinion is not capable of determining or influencing strategic government decisions.

This article sought to deepen the analysis about regionalism and its role in the optics of society. To carry out this goal, we used empirical data derived from opinion polls conducted by the International Relations Institute of the University of São Paulo. The work's fundamental question was to know how public opinion attitudes on regional integration were structured, using Mercosur, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), the Pacific Alliance, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) as reference points.

There are three constants we wish to highlight for this study. The first is that the manner in which public opinion forms its perceptions on regionalism is distinct from the form in which elites or international relations specialists form theirs. It is outside the scope of this article to compare these distinctions directly, but previous studies reveal that there is a clear political polarization with the ideological orientation of elites. Such polarization also exists within public opinion itself, but is not due to left-right political lines.

The second point is that public opinion does not distinguish at the level of what was expected amongst the different regional organizations included in this study. Mercosur, ALBA, the Pacific Alliance, and CELAC are organizations with distinct ideological identities. The variation of Mercosur attitudes as a function of the other organizations gives evidence that most respondents know little about the other organizations.

Finally, in an opposite finding to what we expected, it is clear that anti-hegemonic sentiment does not appear to be associated with support to Mercosur. This was tested both in relation to direct opinions about countries and their leaders. Such a finding is counterintuitive and deserves to be explored in future studies, which could take the form of comparative country studies or a historical time comparison (intertemporal study) focusing specifically on the Brazilian case.

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