

## President and Congress in Paraguay: legislative success in foreign and domestic policy

Pedro Feliú Ribeiro , Camilo Lopez Burian & Rodrigo Pedrosa Lyra

To cite this article: Pedro Feliú Ribeiro , Camilo Lopez Burian & Rodrigo Pedrosa Lyra (2020): President and Congress in Paraguay: legislative success in foreign and domestic policy, The Journal of Legislative Studies, DOI: [10.1080/13572334.2020.1818926](https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2020.1818926)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2020.1818926>



Published online: 17 Sep 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 38





View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



## President and Congress in Paraguay: legislative success in foreign and domestic policy

Pedro Feliú Ribeiro <sup>a</sup>, Camilo Lopez Burian <sup>b</sup> and Rodrigo Pedrosa Lyra <sup>c\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>International Relations, University of Sao Paulo (USP), São Paulo, Brazil; <sup>b</sup>Political Science, Universidad de la Republica (UDELaR), Montevideo, Uruguay; <sup>c</sup>International Relations, University of Sao Paulo (USP), São Paulo, Brazil


### ABSTRACT

The president's ability to legislate is a central element in studies of presidential regimes. A debate persists about the existence of 'two presidencies', that is, whether presidential legislative proposals are more successful in Congress when the subject is foreign policy compared to domestic politics. The article makes an empirical contribution in confirming the thesis of the two presidents in a case whose legislative powers of the president are the lowest in the region: Paraguay. Statistical analysis also reveals the importance of political and economic variables in the propensity to approve matters in the Paraguayan legislature, such as presidential popularity, unemployment and the effective number of parties. While the National Congress constrains the legislative production of the Paraguayan president in domestic issues, the president's foreign policy receives high support from legislators. The different characteristics of foreign policy stimulate congressional delegation of the matter to the president.

**KEYWORDS** Presidentialism; legislative success; foreign policy; domestic policy; Paraguay

### Introduction

In a recent interview regarding his presidential term in Paraguay, Fernando Lugo (2008–2012) said 'First of all, winning elections is not everything. You can win elections but at a very high price. And that price is not having governability' (Estrada, 2018). South America has shown several cases of presidential mandates interrupted by the political judgment of Congress after the 1990s (Pérez-Liñán, 2018). The region has presented a combination of stable regimes and unstable presidents (Pérez-Liñán & Polga-Hecimovich, 2012). The president's capacity to govern thus remains a central theme when it comes to presidential stability in the region. Several researchers have used a president's legislative success as a key indicator of governance capacity in Latin American presidential systems (Alemán & Tsebelis, 2005;

**CONTACT** Pedro Feliú Ribeiro  [pedrofeliu@usp.br](mailto:pedrofeliu@usp.br)  
\*Present address: King's College London, UK.

© 2020 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Amorim Neto, 2006; Arnold et al., 2017; Chaisty et al., 2014; Cheibub et al., 2004; Cox & Morgenstern, 2001; Figueiredo et al., 2009; Raile et al., 2011).

A president may have varying degrees of difficulty in getting approval for her proposals, depending on the subject being debated. Different types of policy proposals can generate different incentives for Parliament regarding the Executive political agenda (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2010). The difference between domestic and foreign policies is one of the most relevant in studies of presidential legislative success (Baldwin & Magee, 2000; Conley, 1999; Dahl, 1950; Mack et al., 2013; Meernik, 1993; Prins & Marshall, 2001). Foreign policy has a unique characteristic when compared to other public policies, since the decision-making calculus is highly affected by the anarchical structure of the international system (Amorim Neto & Malamud, 2015; Chaudoin et al., 2015; Gustavsson, 1999; Rose, 1998). This externality places substantial demands for supra-party support of presidential foreign policy (Huddy, 2013). When it comes to foreign policy, party politics stops at the water's edge (McCormick & Wittkopf, 1992).

In Latin America, the President is often regarded as the main leader in foreign policy making (Burges & Chagas, 2017; Jenne et al., 2017; Malamud, 2014; Mora & Hey, 2003). Congressional rejection of a given presidential foreign policy is likely to undermine the credibility of this central state agent in the international system (Ripley & Lindsay, 1993). This paper aims to analyse the political, economic and social factors associated with the Paraguayan president's ability to approve her bills, focusing on the difference between domestic and foreign policies. We seek to answer the following questions: in a multiparty context, what capacity does the president have to approve his or her foreign policy initiatives? What political, economic and social factors are associated with the president's legislative success in the international and domestic arenas?

Our empirical data include all 1516 presidential legislative proposals in both the Paraguayan Chamber of Deputies and Senate between 2003 and 2016. Paraguay is peculiar in the region in that its president has the weakest legislative power among her South American peers (Payne et al., 2003; Samuels & Matthew, 2003; Shugart & Haggard, 2001). Low legislative powers diminish the propensity of presidential dominance on the legislative agenda (Cox & McCubbins, 1992, 2005). On the other hand, presidents with strong legislative powers can limit the legislative role of parliaments and generate strong incentives for legislators to be strategically supportive of government, no matter the issue in discussion (Baldez & Carey, 1999; Chasquetti, 2014). Paraguay does not have this relevant institutional bias. Therefore it is a particularly suitable case to compare the legislative success of the president in domestic and foreign issues, capturing the difference between both policy dimensions without this very common (in South America) confounding institutional feature.

Through a logistic model, we find two presidents in one: a president constrained by the legislature in domestic affairs and another with broad conditions to approve the foreign policy agenda. Moreover, we find that political and economic factors such as popular approval of the president, unemployment and the effective number of parties (ENP) change congress' propensity to approve a president's legislative proposals.

This paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we present a literature review and research hypotheses. We focus on distinguishing foreign and domestic policy, as well as revising the main explanatory factors of presidential legislative success in presidential regimes. Then, we describe our data and methods. Afterwards, we present results and conclude with a discussion of our findings.

## Literature review and hypotheses

In presidential regimes, the executive and the legislative branches are separate and independent in their origin and survival (Shugart & Carey 1992). Inter-branch negotiations are needed because these independent branches need each other to achieve any policy goals that require passing legislation (Shugart, 2008). Notwithstanding, the ability of the president to approve legislation in Congress may have a great deal of variation depending on the policy area. Presidents may be more successful in getting approval for their foreign policy than their domestic policy bills. In this scenario, while there is presidential supremacy in matters related to foreign policy, the president suffers a strong congressional constraint when it comes to domestic politics (Milner & Tingley, 2015). Aaron Wildavsky (1966) called this phenomenon the two-presidencies thesis, alluding to the contrast between domestic and foreign policy in the president's ability to obtain majority approval in Congress.

Three main factors account for legislative delegation to the president regarding foreign policy. First, a high-skilled bureaucracy and thus privileged control over information. Second, low electoral incentive. Third, the demand for state secrecy and the speed of politics. (King, 1986; Mack et al., 2013; Milner & Tingley, 2015; Ripley & Lindsay, 1993; Rudalevige, 2002; Sinclair, 1993).

Because the president is such a dominant actor in the foreign policy policy-making process, many scholars argue for presidential supremacy over Congress with regards to foreign policy formulation (Escobar & Gonzáles, 2012; Lima & Santos, 2001; Monroy & Sánchez, 2017; Sanchez, 2014; Stuhldreher, 2003). For example, Alemán and Navia (2009, p. 413) show that international treaties in Chile are more likely to pass in Congress than legislative proposals on domestic and fiscal policy. Similarly, Feliú and Urdinez (2017) demonstrate the relevance of the two-presidencies thesis to the Argentine case, showing different levels of legislative support for presidential initiatives depending on whether the issue is a foreign or domestic matter.

The two presidency thesis can also be observed in different domains of presidential activity, lending robustness to the thesis in the presidential system. Marshall and Pacelle (2005) find the thesis is effective, demonstrating a difference in presidents' strategies in issuing executive orders between foreign and domestic policies. Canes-Wrone et al. (2008) argue that presidents have much more influence on foreign affairs budgets and administrative agencies than in the domestic sphere. By analysing Supreme Court rulings showing that judges are more likely to support the president in foreign policy matters when compared to other topics, Yates and Whitford (1998) conclude that even when it comes to the judiciary, the American president has greater support regarding foreign policy.

It is important to highlight that the two presidencies thesis is not entirely consensual. Some scholars advocate the idea that there is only a small difference between foreign policy and domestic policy, with no specific effects on legislative behaviour (Diniz, 2012; Fleisher et al., 2000; McCormick et al., 1997; Mello & Spektor, 2018; Neves, 2003). In the US case, the harmful repercussions of the Vietnam War (Lindsay, 2003; Meernik, 1993) and the end of the Cold War (Holsti & Rosenau, 1986; Kupchan & Trubowitz, 2007) are elements that would explain the disappearance of the two-presidencies thesis. In the context of multiparty presidentialism, the similarity between executive and legislative relations in domestic and foreign policies is described as a product of the president's legislative powers and her ability to form majoritarian coalitions in Congress, presenting high levels of legislative approval in both policy arenas (Feliú, 2019; Ferrari, 2011; Flores, 2008; Follietti, 2005; Onuki et al., 2009).

Regardless of the particularities of the Paraguayan case, the country shares one common feature with all other presidential systems: the president has the constitutional prerogative to initiate foreign policy, represent the country in an anarchic international system and operate the diplomatic apparatus. Thus, despite the fact that three out of four presidents in our sample lacked legislative majorities in Congress, the specificity of foreign policy and the exclusive prerogatives of the president on the subject generate the expectation of higher probabilities of approval in the country's foreign policy matters. On this note, we formulate the first hypothesis of our study based on the (in) consistency of the two-presidencies thesis for Paraguayan multiparty presidentialism:

H1: The Paraguayan president is more likely to approve his or her foreign policy proposals when compared to domestic policy matters.

The level of popular support the president received during his or her term is an essential factor in the president's relationship with parliament (Barrett & Eshbaugh-Soha, 2007). Popular presidents have more support from legislators in presenting their initiatives, since rejecting them can mean an electoral cost

to the legislator (Altman, 2000; Calvo, 2007; Mainwaring, 1997; Rudalevige, 2002). However, this positive relationship does not lead to consensus in the literature (Canes-Wrone, 2004). Some works show little or no effect of presidential approval on his or her legislative success (Alemán & Navia, 2009; Bond & Fleisher, 1990; Darrieux, 2019), making the relationship between popularity and legislative success still unclear. Nevertheless, because our main interest is to test the two presidencies thesis in Paraguay, we expect that if popularity of the president is relevant and positive to the probability of approving a bill, its impact will be lower on foreign policy issues. We develop an interactive hypothesis regarding presidential popularity, foreign policy bills and the probability of congressional approval of a presidential initiative. In line with our first hypothesis, we formulate the second hypothesis of the study.

H2: The marginal effect of the president's popularity on the probability of approving a bill is positive and higher on domestic issues when compared to foreign policy issues.

The president's legislative success in the framework of multiparty presidentialism can also be affected by the system's degree of multipartism (i.e. the effective number of parties (Alcántara Saéz & García Montero, 2008)). With a higher effective number of parties, majority coalition formation becomes harder, and ideological polarisation becomes more likely, making it difficult for the president to pass legislative proposals (Cox & McCubbins, 2001; García Montero, 2009; Santos et al., 2014). Following the same logic of the previous hypothesis, it is expected that an increase of the effective number of parties would have a stronger negative impact on the probability of passing a domestic policy presidential bill when compared with foreign policy bills. We formulate a third interactive hypothesis to test the validity of the two presidencies thesis:

H3: The marginal effect of the effective number of parties on the probability of approving a bill is negative and higher on domestic issues when compared to foreign policy issues.

In addition to the three main hypothesis described above, we include four important control variables that could have an effect on the propensity of approval of a presidential bill. The first is the duration of debate on a bill. Hiroi and Rennó (2018), drawing on a case study of Brazil, highlight political conflict as one of the main reasons leading to the increased time of legislative decision. Thus, it is expected a negative relationship between the time taken and the legislative success of the president. Second, we include economic and social variables that may affect the propensity to pass presidential proposals: unemployment and inflation. Generally, unemployment (Henisz & Mansfield, 2006) and inflation (Gibbs, 2009) are highly voter-sensitive

indicators. Their deterioration generates an impact in the evaluation of economic management and undermines the ability of the head of state to approve his or her proposals.

The third control variable is the house of legislative decision. The prerogatives granted to the Chamber of Deputies or Senate, as well as its internal regulations, vary in each country. In some cases, there may be an imbalance of functions between the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate or even different legislative procedures (García Montero, 2009). These distinctions can affect legislative behaviour and the relations between the two powers and, consequently, the legislative success of the president (Diniz, 2005; Neiva, 2011). The temporal distance of the president's election can also be an influencing element of legislative success of the president (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2005). Newly elected presidents may enjoy greater support from lawmakers due to the recent effect of the elections, called a 'honeymoon period' (Alemán & Navia, 2009; Altman, 2000; Cárdenas et al. 2008; Mack et al., 2013; Molinas et al., 2004). We include the 'honeymoon period' as the fourth control variable. In the next section, we present the data and methodology.

## Data and methods

The data in this article cover all presidential legislative bills, both in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, between 2003 and 2016, totalling 1516 legislative proposals initiated by the Executive branch. Our dependent variable is the approval or not of the presidential bill in each chamber. In order to distinguish foreign policy from domestic policy, we use the following definition: official activity formulated and implemented by authorised agents of a sovereign state directed at the external environment of states (Milner & Tingley, 2015; Tayfur, 1994). The above definition captures a central element that distinguishes foreign policy from domestic policy: the external environment. By classifying the legislative proposals discussed in the Paraguayan legislature based on this criterion, it is possible to preserve the specificity of foreign policy matters. Therefore, we coded foreign policy themes as one, and other topics as zero.

We obtained monthly presidential popularity data through the Executive Approval Project<sup>1</sup>, and also recorded monthly unemployment and inflation. Data was extracted from the Directorate of Statistics and Central Bank of Paraguay, respectively. To determine the effective number of parties (ENP), we use the widespread formula of Laakso and Taagepera (1979). The ENP provides a weighted count of the number of parties in the legislature, which we obtained from the Paraguayan Superior Electoral Court. To determine the president's honeymoon period, we adopted the same criteria as Alemán and Calvo (2008), coding the first year of the presidential term as '1' and

all others as '0'. Proposals in the Senate were coded as '1' while those in the Chamber of Deputies were '0'. The length of time of a bill in Congress is measured in months, being coded as 'time'. Table 1 below presents the descriptive statistics of all variables used in the statistical test. 'Approval' is the dichotomous dependent variable while the others are independent variables.

The dependent variable 'Approval' has 90% of approved legislative matters and, consequently, only 10% of rejected proposals. Our analysis removed the ongoing bills and presidential proposals started before 2003. Out of 14,482 legislative proposals from both branches between 2003 and 2016, 1516 presidential bills are covered. Economic variables – inflation and unemployment – averaged 0.4 and 6.9, respectively, with significant variability during the period. The popularity of Paraguayan presidents also varied considerably, both between presidents and within their terms. President Fernando Lugo (2008–2012), for example, had a minimum popular approval rating of 17% and a maximum of 93% during his tenure.

The effective number of parties, on the other hand, varied less – there were between 4.3 and 5.2 effective parties in the studied period. The average duration of a bill in Congress was around 5 months, with proposals that have been processed in less than one month and others over 7 years. The primary dichotomous variable, foreign policy, shows that 44 per cent of the presidential bills discussed in the Paraguayan Congress are foreign policy issues. Furthermore, almost one fifth of the bills were initiated during the president's honeymoon period. Finally, the Senate decided a little more than 50% of all presidential legislative matters.

To test the hypotheses of this research, we used logistic regression in our analysis of the data. Since our dependent variable is dichotomous, logistic regression is adequate to predict which of the two categories, approval or rejection, an observation is most likely to belong to, given the variables listed above. We have run two models, model 1 without interactions and model 2 with three interactions terms. Interaction terms between foreign policy and presidential popularity, and foreign policy and the effective number of parties are used to

**Table 1.** Summary statistics.

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
<i>Approval</i>	1516	.903	-	0	1
Unemployment	1516	6.94	.915	5.5	9.2
Inflation	1516	.413	.891	-2.2	3.7
President Popularity	1516	43.1	19.29	5	93
ENP	1516	4.91	.290	4.3	5.3
Time	1516	5.02	9.73	0	84.2
Foreign Policy	1516	.443	-	0	1
Honeymoon	1516	.196	-	0	1
Senate	1516	.511	-	0	1

Source: elaborated by the authors.



test hypothesis two and three, including one more interaction between foreign policy and the control variable ‘unemployment’. The SPost software for STATA (Long & Freese, 2014) was used to perform the statistical test and robustness check. Routines used for estimation as well as model robustness test results are available in a supplementary document. In the following section, we present the results of the estimated logistic models.

## Results

Table 2 presents the estimation results for model 1, without interactions, and model 2 with the three interactions described above.

Model 1 reveals that foreign policy issues have a positive and significant impact on the probability of approval of a presidential legislative initiative. The OR column in Table 2 reports the odds ratios. Foreign policy matters are 8.4 times more likely to be approved when compared to domestic policy matters, when keeping the other variables in the model constant on average in model 1. Presidential popularity has a positive and significant effect, indicating that the greater the popularity of the Paraguayan president,

**Table 2.** Results.

	Model 1		Model 2	
	$\beta$	OR	B	OR
Foreign Policy	2.13*** (.338)	8.42	-7.47 (5.38)	.0005
Unemployment	-.752*** (.151)	.471	-.942*** (.167)	.389
Inflation	.133 (.123)	1.14	.132 (.126)	1.14
President Popularity	.037*** (.009)	1.03	.040*** (.011)	1.04
Honeymoon	-.044 (.429)	.956	.044 (.407)	1.04
ENP	-2.63*** (.623)	.071	-2.68*** (.650)	.067
Time	-.091*** (.007)	.912	-.091*** (.007)	.912
Senate	.739** (.315)	.976	.742** (.319)	2.10
Foreign Policy x Unemployment			.834*** (.332)	2.30
Foreign Policy x President Popularity			-.011 (.015)	.988
Foreign Policy x ENP			.768 (1.0)	2.15
Constant	18.843*** (2.99)		20.378*** (3.31)	
Obs	1512		1512	
Log Likelihood	-309.260		-305.445	
Likelihood ratio test	342.29***		349.92***	
Pseudo $R^2$	0.35		0.36	

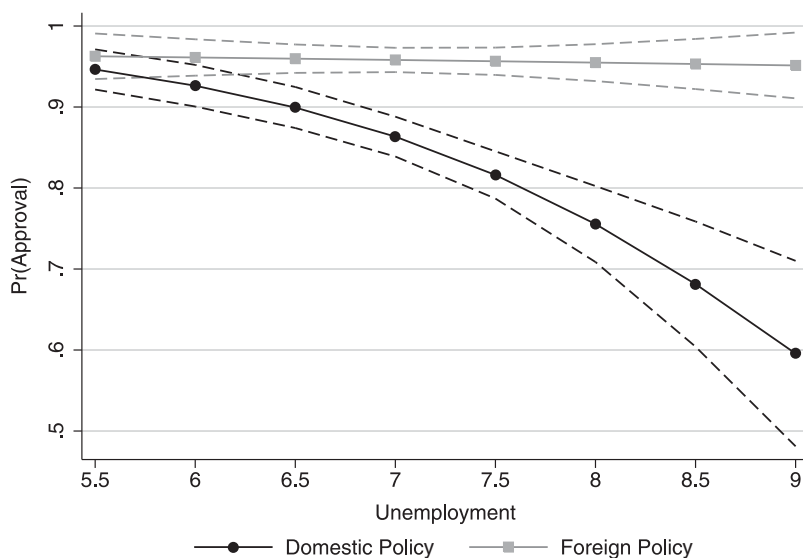
the greater the chances of approval. Among the economic indicators, unemployment had a more significant impact on the proposal's probability of approval. The higher the unemployment, the lower the chance of passing the proposal, as indicated by the odds ratio being lower than one in the model 1 in [Table 2](#).

Model 1 also confirms the expectation that a larger effective number of parties is associated with lower legislative approval of presidential bills. The Executive's initiatives are more likely to pass in the Senate when compared to the Chamber of Deputies. The time taken to process legislative proposals indicates that the longer the delay, the lower the chances of approval. Here the expectation is confirmed, a longer procedure time may mean a larger political conflict over the matter, increasing the probability of its disapproval. The honeymoon period and inflation, by contrast, are not significantly associated with the propensity of legislative approval.

To test our three hypotheses we need to extend our logistic model by adding some interaction terms. These interaction terms allow us to estimate the marginal effect of foreign policy on the probability of approval at different values of unemployment, presidential popularity and the effective number of parties. In logistic models with interactions, a statistically significant product term coefficient is not a sufficient condition for substantively meaningful interaction between independent variables in their effect on approval (Berry et al., 2010). Therefore, we present the probability of approval of bills in domestic and foreign matters at different levels of the interacting independent variables.

[Figure 1](#) shows the estimated marginal effects of foreign policy on the probability of approval at different levels of unemployment while holding other variables at their mean and other non-continuous variables at their mode. In the graph, the horizontal axis represents the unemployment rate; the vertical axis shows the probability of passing the legislation and the dotted lines show the 95 per cent confidence intervals. The grey line corresponds to foreign policy themes, while the black line corresponds to domestic policy themes.

As shown in [Figure 1](#), in cases where unemployment is low there is a high probability of legislative success (approximately 90%) in both foreign and domestic topics. As unemployment rates increase, differences become starker, and foreign policy proposals become more likely to be approved than domestic policy proposals in a statistically significant manner. Considering a rate at the upper end of distribution of unemployment (9%), the confidence interval of the probability of passing a foreign policy subject does not stray from 90%. On domestic matters, the confidence interval of the probability of passing a domestic policy matter falls between 50% and 70%. A deterioration of the Paraguayan economy affects the legislative approval chances of domestic policy matters but does not change legislative approval of foreign policy issues. This supports the argument that as economic conditions worsen, legislators are more willing to be deferential to the president

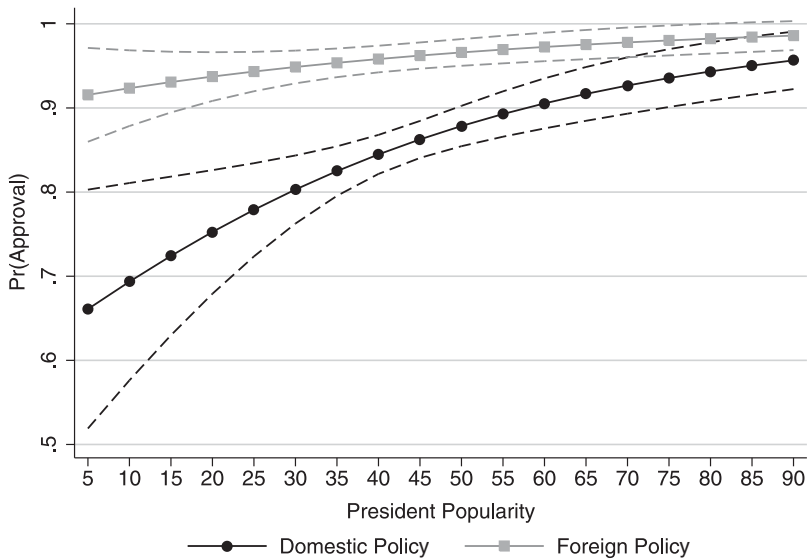


**Figure 1.** Marginal Effects of Unemployment and Type of Policy on the probability of Approval.

to avoid blame for a worsening economy (Gibbs 2009). But when it comes to foreign policy, its specificity when compared to domestic policy makes the effect of unemployment almost null in presidential legislative success, giving support for hypothesis one of this study.

Figure 2 exhibits the marginal effect graph for the interactions between presidential popularity and the legislative success of her proposals in both domestic and foreign matters.

Presidential popularity positively affects the legislative success of the president in domestic issues, while in foreign policy issues the effect is very small. As president's popularity rate increases, differences between foreign and domestic policies are less relevant, and foreign policy proposals have a similarly high probability of being approved compared to domestic policy proposals. For example, when the president's popularity is above 70%, differences are not statistically significant. On the other hand, if we consider a very unpopular president, with only 10% of approval rate, her domestic bill will have a 70% chance of approval in Congress, while foreign policy bills will have more than 90% probability of approval. The logic that connects presidential popularity to a greater probability of approval of executive matters, as mentioned earlier, is based on the legislative cost of opposing a popular president. Just as associating the image of the legislator with a popular president can yield many votes, the opposite is also true, causing the opposition to lose votes. This logic, though, does not apply to foreign policy. The analysis of Figure 2 supports hypothesis two and enhances the specificity of foreign policy.



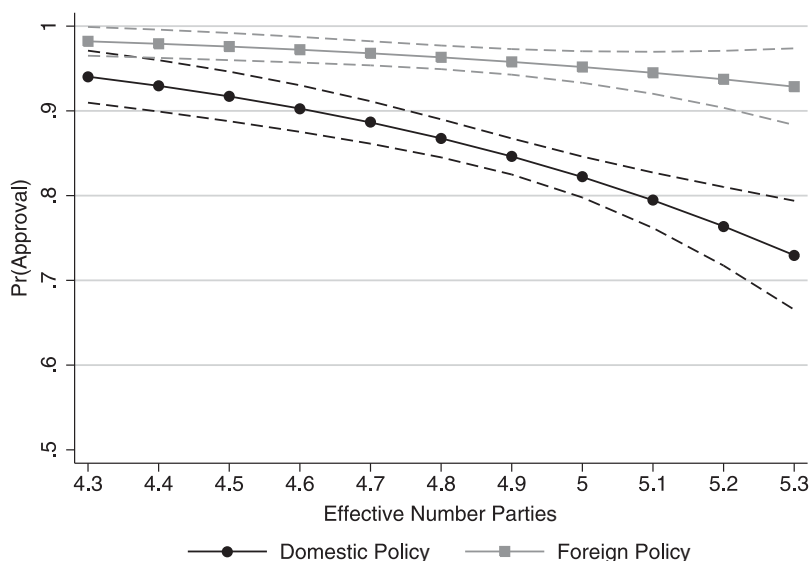
**Figure 2.** Marginal Effects of President Popularity and Type of Policy on the probability of Approval.

Figure 3 displays the marginal effect of the effective number of parties and the domestic/foreign policy dichotomy on the propensity of presidential legislative success.

The effective number of parties in Paraguay does not vary much across time. However, but similar to the other figures, the negative impact of the increase in the ENP on the probability of approval is more significant in domestic policy than in foreign policy. A large number of parties with legislative representation can be a hindrance to achieving the majorities needed for legislative approval. Considering the highest effective number of parties of the sample, 5.3, and keeping everything else constant, domestic policy proposals have little more than 70% chances of approval, while foreign policy proposals still have a more than 90% chance of approval.

The displayed figures show that the probability of legislative success of the president in foreign policy issues does not vary for different values of our main explanatory variables, presenting very high probabilities of approval, always around 90%. On the other hand, the probability of approval of domestic issues is more sensitive to variations on our main independent variables. This interpretation provides empirical support to the two-presidencies thesis for the Paraguayan multiparty presidentialism. The ability of the Paraguayan president to approve his or her foreign policy agenda is significantly higher when compared to that of approving other political issues.

In a context of a weak president in a multiparty system, foreign policy remains an area of high legislative success for the president. Seeking to



**Figure 3.** Marginal Effects of the Effective Number of Parties and Type of Policy on the probability of Approval.

overcome Alfredo Strossner's (1954–1989) authoritarian period, the 1992 constitution built a weak presidential figure and a legislature with broad control mechanisms over legislative production. A clear example of this setup is the ability to censure the ministers of state and the president's difficulty in governing by decrees. According to Molinas et al. (2004, p. 83), Paraguayan presidents dominate legislative production on broad national (including foreign policy) issues related to the public sector and budget, while legislators dominate individual, local, and the private sector.

President Fernando Lugo's mandate is a telling example which helps understand these results. The case is compelling given Lugo's turbulent relationship with the Paraguayan Congress and the gradual decline in his popularity throughout his term, driven by paternity scandals and difficulty in implementing campaign promises. President Lugo ended up initiating few legislative matters on issues central to his successful electoral campaign: land reform and social policies (Palau & Ortega, 2008).

In fact, it was not Lugo but Congress that initiated agrarian reform and social policy proposals. The PLRA (Authentic Radical Liberal Party) and the ANR (National Republican Party, best known as Colorado Party) were the authors of the vast majority of these. In contrast, the large amount of foreign policy matters approved by the Lugo government indicates the isolation of international issues from domestic political disputes. The first mover effect of the international commitment signed by the president is an important explanatory mechanism of the two-presidencies thesis. This

factor is explicit in the case of the ratification of the UNASUR treaty, signed in 2008 by Duarte and processed between 2009 and 2011 under Lugo's mandate. The case is interesting because the major political party in Congress demonstrated objections to the regional treaty, as declared in plenary by Senator Hugo Estigarribia (ANR):

The Colorado Party's foreign policy adviser has studied and the Executive Committee has studied this topic...we were against the integration of UNASUR ... (Diario de Sesiones 2011)

President's Lugo chancellery increased the level of previous international commitment by agreeing that Paraguay would assume the pro-tempore presidency of UNASUR in August 2011, succeeding Ecuador. In the face of legislative resistance, even the Ecuadorian ambassador in Paraguay intervened in the process by opening a dialogue with the president of the Colorado Party (ABC Color, 2011). After several negotiations, legislators supported the ratification of the treaty, which took place between June and August of 2011 in both houses. The high cost of rejection of the matter and its approval explain the functioning of the thesis of the two presidents.

Despite the greater probability of approval of the presidential when it comes to foreign policy, there are occasional critical congressional vetoes in the country's foreign policy direction. Based on our sample of bills, the rejection of Venezuela's entry into MERCOSUR is undoubtedly a relevant case that demonstrated how Congress can exercise its veto power on an essential topic of Paraguay's foreign policy agenda. According to Lambert (2016), in the last 60 years, Brazil has a huge influence on Paraguayan foreign policy, which characterises this bilateral relationship as extremely asymmetric. Given Brazil's relevance to Paraguay, the case of vetoing Venezuelan entry into the regional bloc is quite significant. Therefore, one should not interpret the two-presidencies thesis as the abdication by Congress of its prerogatives in foreign policy. Instead, it shows a higher propensity for cooperation with the president in international affairs when compared with domestic issues.

## Final considerations

Foreign policy is not entirely isolated from party political disputes in Paraguay. Regardless, this paper suggests that when it comes to foreign policy, parliamentary interference in presidential proposals occurs much less frequently when compared against domestic policy. The system of legislative delegation of foreign policy to the executive is based on the presidential capacity to initiate policy and generate a prior commitment of the country in an anarchic environment such as the international one.

Advancing debates on the two-presidencies thesis, we find evidence that the president's ability to pass his or her policy proposals is sensitive to

factors exogenous to the political system, such as presidential approval and unemployment. We also find strong evidence that the president has a broad capacity to conduct foreign affairs, even facing an institutional context of low presidential legislative powers such as the Paraguayan. In the delicate presidential-congressional relations, the president's foreign policy agenda has a high probability of legislative approval.

## Note

1. Available at <http://www.executiveapproval.org/>.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

**Pedro Feliú Ribeiro** (IRI-USP, Brazil) is an assistant professor in the International Relations Institute of the University of São Paulo (USP), Brazil. Researcher of the Center of Studies of International Negotiations (CAENI-USP). PhD in Political Science from the University of São Paulo, his research agenda covers foreign policy analysis in Latin America and legislative studies.

**Camilo López Burian** (ICP-FCS-UdelaR, Uruguay) is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of the Republic (ICP-FCS-UdelaR). Researcher of Uruguay's National Agency for Research and Innovation (ANII). PhD in Political Science from the University of the Republic, his writings cover a host of topics from foreign policy analysis and international relations.

**Rodrigo Pedrosa Lyra** (KLC, UK) is a PhD Candidate at King's College London and University of São Paulo (Brazil). Fellow at King's Brazil Institute. Researcher at the Center for the Study of International Negotiations (CAENI-USP). Professional experience at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brazil, working in the area of international trade, with an emphasis on trade defense, safeguards and bilateral trade relations.

## ORCID

**Pedro Feliú Ribeiro**  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6857-8683>

**Camilo López Burian**  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1185-854X>

**Rodrigo Pedrosa Lyra**  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8027-9555>

## References

- ABC Color. (2011, March 16). *Oficialismo negociará 'paquete' que incluya apoyo a Venezuela y Unasur*. <https://www.abc.com.py/edicion-impres/politica/oficialismo-negociara-paquete-que-incluya-apoyo-a-venezuela-y-unasur-258871.html>

- Alcántara Saéz, M., & Garcia Montero, M. (2008). *Institutions and Politicians: an analysis of the factors that determine presidential legislative success*. <https://kellogg.nd.edu/publications/workingpapers/WPS/348.pdf>
- Alemán, E., & Calvo, E. (2008). Analyzing legislative success in Latin America: The case of Argentina. In G. O'Donnell, J. Tulchin, & A. Varas (Eds.), *New voices in the study of democracy* (pp. 7–37). Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Woodrow Wilson Center.
- Alemán, E., & Navia, P. (2009). Institutions and legislative success of strong presidents: An analysis of government bills in Chile. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 15(4), 401–419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13572330903302471>
- Alemán, E., & Tsebelis, G. (2005). The origins of presidential conditional agenda-Setting power in Latin America. *Latin American Research Review*, 40(2), 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2005.0017>
- Altman, D. (2000). Politics of coalition formation and survival in multiparty presidential democracies: Uruguay 1989–1999. *Party Politics*, 6(3), 259–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135406880006003001>
- Amorim Neto, O. (2006). The presidential calculus, executive policy making and Cabinet formation in the Americas. *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(4), 415–440. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414005282381>
- Amorim Neto, O., & Malamud, A. (2015). What Determines foreign policy in Latin America? Systemic versus domestic factors in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, 1946–2008. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 57(4), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2015.00286.x>
- Arnold, C., Doyle, D., & Wiesehomeier, N. (2017). Presidents, policy Compromise, and legislative success. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(2), 380–395. <https://doi.org/10.1086/688080>
- Baldez, L., & Carey, J. (1999). Presidential agenda control and spending policy: Lessons from general pinochet's constitution. *American Journal of Political Science*, 43(1), 29–55. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2991784>
- Baldwin, R., & Magee, C. (2000). *Congressional trade votes: From NAFTA approval to fast-track defeat*. Institute for International Economics.
- Barrett, A., & Eshbaugh-Soha, M. (2007). Presidential success on the substance of legislation. *Political Research Quarterly*, 60(1), 100–112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912906298605>
- Berry, W. D., DeMeritt, J. H., & Esarey, J. (2010). Testing for interaction in binary logit and probit models: Is a product term essential? *American Journal of Political Science*, 54(1), 248–266. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2009.00429.x>
- Bond, J., & Fleisher, R. (1990). *The president in the legislative arena*. University of Chicago Press.
- Burges, S., & Chagas, F. (2017). The importance of presidential leadership for Brazilian foreign policy. *Policy Studies*, 38(3), 277–290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2017.1290228>
- Calvo, E. (2007). The responsive legislature: Public opinion and law making in a highly disciplined legislature. *British Journal of Political Science*, 37(02), 263–280. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123407000130>
- Canes-Wrone, B. (2004). The public presidency, personal approval ratings, and policy making. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 34(3), 477–492. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5705.2004.00208.x>



- Canes-Wrone, B., Howell, W., & Lewis, D. (2008). Toward a broader understanding of presidential power: A reevaluation of the two-presidencies thesis. *The Journal of Politic*, 70(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381607080061>
- Cárdenas, M., Junguito, R., & Pachón, M. (2008). Political institutions and policy outcomes in Colombia: The effects of the 1991 constitution. In E. Estein & M. Tommasi (Eds.), *Policymaking in Latin America: How politics shapes policies* (pp. 199–242). Inter American Development Bank.
- Chaisty, P., Cheeseman, N., & Power, T. (2014). Rethinking the presidentialism debate: Conceptualizing coalitional politics in cross-regional perspective. *Democratization*, 21(1), 72–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2012.710604>
- Chasqueti, D. (2014). *Parlamento y carreras legislativas en Uruguay. Un estudio sobre reglas, partidos y legisladores en las cámaras*. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales – Udelar.
- Chaudoin, S., Milner, H., & Pang, X. (2015). International systems and domestic politics: Linking complex interactions with empirical models in international relations. *International Organization*, 69(2), 275–309. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818314000356>
- Cheibub, J., Przeworski, A., & Saiegh, S. (2004). Government coalitions and legislative success under presidentialism and parliamentarism. *British Journal of Political Science*, 34(4), 565–587. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123404000195>
- Conley, R. (1999). Dreading presidential fast-track authority: The impact of constituency pressures and political ideology on trade policy in Congress. *Political Research Quarterly*, 52(4), 785–799. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591299905200406>
- Cox, G., & McCubbins, M. (1992). *Legislative Leviathan*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cox, G., & McCubbins, M. (2001). The institutional determinants of economic policy outcomes. In S. Haggard & M. McCubbins (Eds.), *Presidents, parliaments, and policy* (pp. 21–63). Cambridge University Press.
- Cox, G., & Morgenstern, S. (2001). Latin America's reactive assemblies and proactive presidents. *Comparative Politics*, 33(2), 171–189. <https://doi.org/10.2307/422377>
- Cox, G. W., & McCubbins, M. (2005). *Setting the agenda: Responsible party government in the US house of representatives*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dahl, R. (1950). *Congress and foreign policy*. Norton.
- Darrieux, R. (2019). Political institutions and the legislative success of Brazilian presidents: An analysis of the Cardoso, Lula and Rousseff Governments. *Brazilian Political Science Review*, 13(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1981-3821201900010004>
- Diniz, S. (2005). Interações entre os Poderes Executivo e Legislativo no Processo Decisório: Avaliando o Sucesso e o Fracasso Presidencial. *Dados – Revista de Ciências Sociais*, 48(1), 333–369. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0011-52582005000200004>
- Diniz, S. (2012). O senado federal e a deliberação de atos internacionais no presidencialismo brasileiro. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, 27(80), 169–184. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-69092012000300010>
- Escobar, F., & Gonzáles, C. (2012). El papel de los partidos políticos en la política exterior colombiana. In E. Jost (Ed.), *Colombia: ¿una potencia en desarrollo? Escenarios y desafíos para su política exterior* (pp. 227–248). Konrad Adenauer.
- Eshbaugh-Soha, M. (2005). The politics of presidential agendas. *Political Research Quarterly*, 58(2), 257–268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591290505800206>

- Eshbaugh-Soha, M. (2010). The importance of policy scope to presidential success in Congress. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 40(4), 708–724. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5705.2010.03807.x>
- Estrada, P. (2018, June 25). Fernando Lugo: O golpe do Paraguai foi contra a integração da América Latina. *Brasil de Fato*. Retrieved from: <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2018/06/25/fernando-lugo-o-golpe-do-paraguai-foi-contra-a-integracao-da-america-latina>
- Feliú, P. (2019). Partidos políticos y política exterior en América Latina. *Revista mexicana de ciencias políticas y sociales*, 64(235), 353–393. <https://doi.org/10.22201/fcpsy.2448492xe.2019.235.63207>
- Feliú, P., & Urdinez, F. (2017). ¿Hay dos presidentes en argentina?: un análisis comparativo del apoyo legislativo en las políticas exterior y doméstica (2001–2014). *Revista de ciencia política (Santiago)*, 37(1), 95–119. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2017000100005>
- Ferrari, D. (2011). O Congresso Nacional e a Apreciação de Tratados Internacionais entre 1999 e 2006. In J. Moises (Ed.), *O Papel do Congresso Nacional no Presidencialismo de Coalizão* (pp. 75–90). Konrad-Adenauer.
- Figueiredo, A., Salles, D., & Vieira, M. (2009). Political and institutional determinants of the executive's legislative success in Latin America. *Brazilian Political Science Review*, 3(2), 155–171.
- Fleisher, R., Bond, J., Krutz, G., & Hanna, S. (2000). The demise of the two presidencies. *American Politics Quarterly*, 28(1), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X00028001001>
- Flores, R. (2008). La Relación Entre El Ejecutivo Y El Congreso En Materia de Política Exterior Durante El Sexenio de Vicente Fox: Cooperación O Conflicto? *Política Y Gobierno*, 15(1), 113–158.
- Follietti, G. (2005). La participación argentina en Haití: el papel del Congreso. *Revista Fuerzas Armadas y Sociedad*, 19(1), 37–56.
- García Montero, M. (2009). *Presidentes y Parlamentos ¿quién controla la actividad legislativa en América Latina?* Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.
- Gibbs, C. (2009). Presidential success in congress: Factors that determine the president's ability to influence congressional voting. *Honors Projects*, 35. Retrieved from: [http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/polisci\\_honproj/35](http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/polisci_honproj/35)
- Gustavsson, J. (1999). How should we study foreign policy change? *Cooperation and Conflict*, 34(1), 73–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00108369921961780>
- Henisz, W., & Mansfield, E. (2006). Votes and vetoes: The political determinants of commercial openness. *International Studies Quarterly*, 50(1), 189–212. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2006.00398.x>
- Hiroi, T., & Rennó, L. (2018). Disentangling legislative duration in coalitional presidential systems. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 24(4), 475–498. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2018.1540118>
- Holsti, O., & Rosenau, J. (1986). Consensus lost, consensus regained? Foreign policy beliefs of American leaders, 1976–1980. *International Studies Quarterly*, 30(4), 375–409. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600641>
- Huddy, L. (2013). From group identity to political cohesion and commitment. In L. Huddy, D. Sears, & J. Levy (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of political Psychology* (pp. 737–773). Oxford University Press.
- Jenne, N., Schenoni, L., & Urdinez, F. (2017). Of words and deeds: Latin American declaratory regionalism, 1994–2014. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 30(2), 195–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2017.1383358>

- King, G. (1986). Political parties and foreign policy: A structuralist approach. *Political Psychology*, 7(1), 83–101. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3791158>
- Kupchan, C., & Trubowitz, P. (2007). The demise of liberal internationalism in the United States. *International Security*, 32(2), 7–44. <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2007.32.2.7>
- Laakso, M., & Taagepera, R. (1979). Effective number of parties: A measure with application to West Europe. *Comparative Political Studies*, 12(1), 3–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001041407901200101>
- Lambert, P. (2016). The myth of the good neighbour: Paraguay's uneasy relationship with Brazil. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 35(1), 34–48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.12410>
- Lima, M., & Santos, F. (2001). O Congresso e a Política Exterior. *Lua Nova*, 52, 121–150. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-64452001000100006>
- Lindsay, J. (2003). Deference and defiance: The shifting rhythms of executive – legislative relations in foreign policy. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 33(3), 530–546. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1741-5705.00005>
- Long, S., & Freese, J. (2014). *Regression models for categorical dependent variables using Stata*. Stata press.
- Mack, W., DeRouen, K., & Lanoue, D. (2013). Foreign policy and presidential support in Congress. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 9(1), 79–102. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2011.00166.x>
- Mainwaring, S. (1997). Multipartism, Robust Federalism, and presidentialism in Brazil. In S. Mainwaring & M. Shugart (Eds.), *Presidentialism and democracy in Latin America* (pp. 55–109). Cambridge University Press.
- Malamud, A. (2014). Presidentialist decision making in Latin American foreign policy: Examples from regional integration processes. In J. Domínguez & A. Covarrubias (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Latin America in the World* (pp. 112–123). Routledge.
- Marshall, B., & Pacelle, R. (2005). Revisiting the two presidencies The strategic use of executive orders. *American Politics Research*, 33(1), 81–105. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X04266816>
- McCormick, J., & Wittkopf, E. (1992). At The water's edge. Effects of party, ideology, and issues on congressional foreign policy voting, 1947–1988. *American Politics Quarterly*, 20(1), 26–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X9202000102>
- McCormick, J., Wittkopf, E., & Danna, D. (1997). Politics and bipartisanship at the water's edge: A note on Bush and Clinton. *Polity*, 30(1), 133–149. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3235323>
- Meernik, J. (1993). Presidential support in Congress: Conflict and consensus on foreign and defense policy. *The Journal of Politics*, 55(3), 569–587. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2131989>
- Mello, E., & Spektor, M. (2018). Brazil: The costs of multiparty presidentialism. *Journal of Democracy*, 29(2), 113–127. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0031>
- Milner, H., & Tingley, D. (2015). *Sailing the water's edge: American foreign policy and domestic politics*. Princeton University Press.
- Molinas, J., Pérez-Liñan, A., & Saiegh, S. (2004). Political Institutions, policymaking processes, and policy outcomes in Paraguay, 1954–2003. *Revista de Ciencia Política (Santiago)*, 24(2), 67–93. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2004000200004>
- Monroy, M., & Sánchez, F. (2017). Foreign policy analysis and the making of plan Colombia. *Global Society*, 31(2), 245–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2016.1269057>

- Mora, F., & Hey, J. (2003). *Latin American and Caribbean foreign policy*. Rowman and Littlefield.
- Neiva, P. (2011). Coesão e Disciplina Partidária no Senado Federal. *Dados – Revista de Ciências Sociais*, 54(2), 289–318. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0011-52582011000200003>
- Neves, J. (2003). O Papel do Legislativo nas Negociações do MERCOSUL e da ALCA. *Contexto Internacional*, 25(1), 103–138. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-85292003000100004>
- Onuki, J., Feliú, P., & Oliveira, A. (2009). Political parties, foreign policy and ideology: Argentina and Chile in comparative perspective. *Brazilian Political Science Review*, 4.
- Palau, M., & Ortega, G. (2008). *Paraguay: El nuevo escenario de disputa de los intereses populares*. CLACSO.
- Payne, M., Zovatto, D., Florez, C., & Zavala, A. (2003). *La política importa. Democracia y desarrollo en América Latina*. BID.
- Pérez-Liñán, A. (2018). Impeachment or Backsliding? Threats to democracy in the twenty-first century. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, 33(98), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1590/339801/2018>
- Pérez-Liñán, A., & Polga-Hecimovich, J. (2012, July). *Political elites, democratic breakdown, and presidential instability in Latin America*. Paper presented at the International Political Science Association (IPSA) Conference, Madrid.
- Prins, B., & Marshall, B. (2001). Congressional support of the president: A comparison of foreign, defense, and domestic policy decision making during and after the Cold War. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 31(4), 660–678. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0000-0000.2001.00192.x>
- Raile, E., Pereira, C., & Power, T. (2011). The executive toolbox: Building legislative support in a multiparty presidential regime. *Political Research Quarterly*, 64(2), 323–334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912909355711>
- Ripley, R., & Lindsay, J. (1993). *Congress resurgent: Foreign and defense policy on Capitol Hill*. University of Michigan Press.
- Rose, G. (1998). Review: Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy. *World Politics*, 51(1), 144–172. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100007814>
- Rudalevige, A. (2002). *Managing the president's program: Presidential leadership and legislative policy formulation*. Princeton University Press.
- Samuels, D., & Matthew, S. (2003). Presidentialism, elections and representation. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 15(1), 33–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0951692803151002>
- Sanchez, L. (2014). Éxito y participación legislativa en materia de política exterior. El Congreso de la Nación Argentina, un estudio de caso. *Revista Mexicana de Análisis Político y Administración Pública*, 3(2), 71–92.
- Santos, M., Perez-linan, A., & Garcia Montero, M. (2014). El control presidencial de la agenda legislativa en América Latina. *Revista de Ciencia Política (Santiago)*, 34(3), 511–536. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2014000300001>
- Senado. (2011, June 9). Diario de Sesiones. [Written report of proceedings in the Senate floor]. Sistema de Informaciones Legislativas. Retrieved from: <http://silpy.congreso.gov.py/sesion/1518>
- Shugart, M. (2008). Comparative executive-legislative relations. In S. Binder, R. Rhodes, & B. Rockman (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political institutions* (pp. 344–365). Oxford University Press.
- Shugart, M., & Carey, M. (1992). *Presidents and assemblies: Constitutional design and electoral dynamics*. Cambridge University Press.

- Shugart, M., & Haggard, S. (2001). Institutions and public policy in presidential systems. In S. Haggard & M. McCubbins (Eds.), *Presidents, parliaments, and policy* (pp. 64–102). Cambridge University Press.
- Sinclair, B. (1993). Congressional party leaders in the foreign and defense policy Arena. In R. Ripley & J. Lindsay (Eds.), *Congress resurgent: Foreign and defense policy on Capitol Hill* (pp. 207–234). University of Michigan Press.
- Stuhldreher, A. (2003). Régimen Político y Política Exterior en Argentina: El caso del primer gobierno de Carlos Menem (1989-1995). *Perfiles Latinoamericanos*, 22, 79–101.
- Tayfur, M. (1994). Main approaches to the study of foreign policy: A review. *METU Studies in Development*, 21(1), 113–141.
- Wildavsky, A. (1966). The two presidencies. *Trans-Action*, 4, 7–14.
- Yates, J., & Whitford, A. (1998). Presidential power and the United States Supreme Court. *Political Research Quarterly*, 51(2), 539–550. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591299805100212>