



**DYNAMICS OF PARTY COMPETITION IN FOREIGN POLICY DECISION-  
MAKING PROCESS OF BRAZIL AND CHILE<sup>1</sup>**

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**DINÁMICA DE LAS DISPUTAS DE PARTIDOS POLÍTICOS EN EL PROCESO DE  
TOMA DE DECISIONES EN LA POLÍTICA EXTERIOR DE BRASIL Y CHILE**

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**ABSTRACT:** The study analyzes the decision-making process in foreign policy, examining the governments of the Workers Party in Brazil and the Socialist Party in Chile, investigating how international acts may be the object of legislative and partisan action and, most important, that is subjected to conflict/consensus between government and opposition. Considering the foreign policy as a public policy, the methodological assumption of this study assumed that political parties are important actors in the decision-making process, acting as veto players and influencing international acts from ideological variables and composition of coalitions.

**Keywords:** Coalitions; Decision-making process; Foreign Policy; Political Parties

**RESUMO:** O estudo analisa o processo de tomada de decisão em política externa, examinando os governos do Partido dos Trabalhadores no Brasil e do Partido Socialista no Chile, investigando como os atos internacionais podem ser objeto de ação legislativa e partidária e, mais importante, que está sujeita a conflito/consenso entre governo e oposição. Considerando a política externa como política pública, o pressuposto metodológico deste estudo assumiu que os partidos políticos são atores importantes no processo decisório, atuando como vetores e influenciando atos internacionais a partir de variáveis ideológicas e composição de coalizões.

**Palavras-chave:** Coligações; Processo de tomada de decisão; Política externa; Partidos políticos.

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**RESUMEN:** El estudio analiza el proceso de toma de decisiones en política exterior, examinando los gobiernos del Partido de los Trabajadores de Brasil y del Partido Socialista de Chile, investigando cómo los actos internacionales pueden ser objeto de acción legislativa y partidista y, lo más importante, que son objeto de conflicto/consenso entre gobierno y oposición. Considerando la política exterior como una política pública, el supuesto metodológico de este estudio asumió que los partidos políticos son actores importantes en el proceso de toma de decisiones, actuando como actores de veto e influyendo en los actos internacionales a partir de las variables ideológicas y la composición de las coaliciones.

**Palabras clave:** Coaliciones; Proceso de toma de decisiones; Política exterior; Partidos políticos.

## 1 Introduction

The Latin-American literature, generally speaking, tends to conclude that the Parliament's participation in international matters is precarious, due to the high concentration of power in the Presidency and Foreign Affairs Ministry, the low electoral callback and the lack of expertise instruments, that the parliamentarians do not possess. Therefore, "parliamentarians have traditionally had low participation in formulating national foreign policy. Under the pretext that foreign policy is a matter for princes, not the people, along their history parliamentarians have been kept out of the theme" (ALCÂNTARA, 2001, p.13). And, with both Brazilian and Chilean hiper-presidentialism, the Legislative branch would have no means of participating in international acts, conforming itself in its apathy and abdicating in favor of the Executive in the decision-making process of foreign policy, accepting the policies negotiated in the foreign arena due to the high cost of rejection. (LIMA; SANTOS, 2001).

However, many recent studies have shown the relevance of Latin-American legislatives and political parties in foreign policy – especially in Brazil and Chile – including domestic agents in its formulation *ex ante* and *ex post*. In this sense, even with few cases of rejection of international acts (DINIZ, 2009), the political parties have been institutionalizing their participation in the decision-making process, increasing their power when there is a conflict of interest even facing a predominant Executive branch (RIBEIRO; ONUKI, 2009).

Considering that the preponderance of the Executive over the Legislative branch it is not a privilege on decision-making involving the foreign policy, but in the decision-making processes in public policy in general, legislative and partisan participation in foreign policy occurs, always considering their interests and preferences as well as the institutional characteristics of the partisan system, observing the formation of the coalitions as key in presidentialist systems. Thus, when there are different interests between the Executive and political parties (and even those that are part of the governmental coalition), there is an increase in parliamentary participation, especially through procedure mechanisms and through and increase on the processing of proposals. And, as a characteristic of the coalition, the divergence is more likely to happen.

Based on these assumptions, the main goal of this study is to analyze the legislative and partisan participation in Foreign Relations Committee on the High and Low Chambers in center-left governments in Brazil (2003-2010) and Chile (2000-2009), verifying, qualitatively, the influence of political parties and the Legislative Branch in all international acts negotiated by the Executive in the foreign arena and that were sent to Congress during this period<sup>2</sup>, examining the dynamic government *versus* opposition. Starting from the hypothesis that there is legislative action in international acts in both countries and that, more importantly, such participation happens on the same framework as ordinary public policy, with conflicting interests between the branches and the government and opposition parties, according to existing political institutions. For that, two key aspects will be examined: first, the control and voting mechanisms that parliamentarians possess for *ex post* action in foreign policy; and, second, the time variable in processing time in projects at the Legislative Houses. In both cases, it will be highlighted that, beyond the institutional participation through procedural mechanisms and processing speed of presidential messages, a more or less intense dispute between government and opposition on the decision-making arena of foreign policy based on the configuration of political-partisan government coalitions.

As a general rule, there are no amendments presented that impact on an international act being processed in both Chilean and Brazilian Congresses, only substitutions or interpretation clauses. However, analyzing the decision-making process as a whole, it can be verified that the implementation phases of an international act influence both the duration of the steps under the Executive's responsibility and the time to process the countersigning of the international act by the National Congress. Therefore, another way to demonstrate the legislative and partisan participation on the committees, in what concerns the disputes between government and opposition, happens on the delay to conclude the legislative process to countersign the international act. That is, a subtle manner of expressing parliamentarian and preference differences is the duration of the interval between the presentation and approval of presidential messages in international acts (SOUZA, 2013, p.93). Given that, the increase in processing time is a way of the National Congress manifesting in regards to the international act.

Considering the Brazilian and Chilean presidentialism as stable multi-partisan system, where the formation of majority coalitions is a variable that guarantees governability and the maintenance of democracy, the study considers the processing time from the coalition-forming dynamic and their preferences regarding the Executive Branch in foreign policy. With that, and

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<sup>2</sup> Were classified as international acts negotiated by the executive presidential messages that referred to international treaties and agreements with foreign countries and international organizations on issues related to trade policy, direct actions in international affairs, measures relating to the functioning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the *Cancilleria*, as well as issues related to national defense. Finally, the presidential messages that refer to the presidential absence were mapped, it is the responsibility of the Congress to authorize the President and the Vice-President to be absent from the country.

according to the previous assumptions, it is sought to verify two central hypotheses. On one hand, first, when broad heterogeneous coalitions are formed, the processing and legislative silence time is longer, provoking more conflict between parties and, consequently, between parties and the Executive branch, causing more intense participation on international acts. Such hypothesis is verified in the Brazilian case, where PT, during the Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva administrations (2003-2010), considered different parties with different preferences to compose its base. On the other hand, secondly, when the Executive branch forms coalitions with a smaller number of more homogeneous parties, the time for processing and legislative silence is shorter, with a consensus and preference moderation between parties and, as a consequence, between parties and the presidency, resulting in a less intense participation in projects concerning international matters. This hypothesis could be verified on the Chilean case, in which the PS, during Ricardo Lagos' (2000-2006) and Michelle Bachelet's (2006-2009) administrations, composed its coalitions with parties that had similar preferences.

## 2 Partisan programs, ideology and formation of coalitions: Brazilian and Chilean political parties' positions in foreign policy

The ideological preferences of political parties in foreign policy are important to estimate the ideal points of legislators and, in consequence, classify the coalitions by their composition and homogeneity/heterogeneity. Considering this, the study contemplated the analysis of government programs, statutes and principles of Brazilian and Chilean parties belonging to the government base, which allows, based on preexisting classifications, to add the criterion of international policy as key variable to understanding preferences and partisan ideology (OLIVEIRA; ONUKI, 2010, p.162; OLIVEIRA, 2011).

According to table 1, the ideological preferences of the main political parties with congress representation in foreign policy may be structures on the one-dimensional continuum that goes from left to right.

**Table 1** – Ideological position of Brazilian and Chilean political parties in foreign policy

Parties	Left	Center-Left	Center	Center-Right	Right
<b>Brazil</b>	PC do B PSOL	PT PSB PDT	PP PPS (opposition) PMDB	PTB PR PSDB (opposition) DEM (opposition)	
<b>Chile</b>			PS PRSD PPD	PDC	RN (opposition) UDI (opposition)

Source: Data elaborated by the author based on party programs.

The study, thus, agrees with the thesis that political parties in Brazil and Chile have

preferences in the decision-making process in foreign policy, according to their coalitions that, according to Oliveira and Onuki (2010, p. 145), “alters the course of the country’s behavior at the foreign arena”. In this sense, the broader and more ideologically heterogeneous the coalition, there are more points of participation and conflict between the parties, whether they belong to the coalition or the opposition.

It can be highlighted that, during the period analyzed, the Lula da Silva administration sought to make broad and heterogeneous coalitions since the beginning of his first term, involving many parties with preferences spread along the ideological spectrum from left and right, which may have resulted, as it can be seen ahead, in more divergence in the decision-making process in foreign policy. On the other hand, the smaller and more homogeneous the coalition, taking for instance the example of the Chilean case, the consensus between the branches and the parties can be observed, making so that the action is delegated to the Executive. According to the data analyzed, it can be verified that both Lagos and Bachelet formed smaller and more homogeneous coalitions, considering only parties in the center-left and center of the ideological spectrum.

That way, on the following section, the presidential messages that were processed by the Foreign Relations Committees of the Upper and Lower Houses in Brazil and Chile from 2000 to 2010, aiming to verify the main hypothesis of this paper, which is that the size and heterogeneity of the government coalition may cause more points of conflict or consensus and the increase/decrease of the time spent to process matters related to international acts, which, at its turn, influences the formulation of foreign policy by the Executive and its international negotiation.

### **3 Processing speed and party coalition in foreign policy**

The study has, as a temporal scope, the analysis of two legislatures and two presidential terms from the Lula da Silva administration (2003 to 2010), in Brazil, and three legislatures and two presidential terms on the Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006) and Michele Bachelet (2006-2010) administrations in Chile. Regarding Brazil, 446 presidential messages were analyzed, that were processed simultaneously by the Foreign Relations and National Defense Committee (CREDN) of the Lower House of Congress, and by the Foreign Relations Committee (CRE) of the Senate. In Chile, on its turn, the study examined 286 presidential messages that were countersigned by the *Comisión de Relaciones Exteriores, Asuntos Interparlamentarios e Integración Latinoamericana* of the Lower House of Congress, and by the *Comisión de Relaciones Exteriores* of the Senate.

Based on that, the study analyzes the processing time of international acts as a key variable to explain the legislative actions in foreign policy and the partisan dispute between government and opposition, highlighting cases where there was a long legislative silence that contributes to increase the conflict between parties and the government.

The debate on the consequences of the decision-making process speed suggests the legislative time is a key variable to understand the government's performance and the accountability in democracies (CHAISTY, 2014, p.589). On one hand, it is expected that the delay in processing projects may increase the governability risks, reducing the time and resources destined to other important decisions (WOON; ANDERSON, 2012, p.410). On the other hand, the increase in processing time may also be positive, assuring opportunities to build consensus and conflict as means to strengthen democracies (BORGHETTO; GIULIANI, 2012). In stable presidentialist systems, with multiple and disciplined parties organized in coalitions, such as Brazil and Chile, at least during the period analyzed, an extremely long decision-making process may signal increase in deliberation and even partisan conflict with a positive bias, key factors to the consolidation of a democracy with an effective system of checks and balances<sup>3</sup>. This hypothesis is verified in the Brazilian case, where there was more heterogeneity in coalitions and, therefore, longer processing time of international acts, evidencing the increasing conflict between parties. On the other hand, the speedy pace in decision-making is considered to be a result of a construction of coalitions in a more effective manner in the legislature (and not due to a lack of involvement of the Legislative Branch in the decision-making process), evidencing the homogeneity of preferences within the parties as a key hypothesis for the Chilean case, with shorter time to process foreign policy proposals.

That way, although both Brazilian and Chilean forms of presidentialism may result in minority governments, the *modus operandi* is stable and based on majority coalitions, with bargaining and power exchange between the Executive and the government parties (CHAISTY, 2014, p.591). As a consequence, the negotiations with the legislative base results in governability, but the processing time of some projects depends on the presidents' effectiveness in dealing with coalitions, according to their homogeneity or heterogeneity. That is, it is expected, in the Brazilian case, that with the increase in government coalitions and due to their preference heterogeneity, the decision-making process will be slower and more conflicted. When the government aims are not compatible and the internal demands remain in conflict, the processing time tends to increase. On the Chilean case, the less broad and more homogenous coalitions make the processing times shorter, based on moderation and consensus. When the government aims are compatible and there is domestic consensus, the processing time tends to be shorter.

In order to evaluate the use of processing time an instrument of partisan manifestation and conflict between government and opposition, will be considered (SOUZA, 2013):

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<sup>3</sup> With this, the Linz (1994) thesis, according to which the increase in time causes harmful conflict to consolidating democracies. And in multiparty systems, the lack of incentives to form disciplined majorities, the processing of delayed projects would be extremely negative, is refuted.

- a. the processing time from its international promulgation, by the Executive branch, until its entry on the Foreign Affairs Committee (TTE)<sup>4</sup>;
- b. the time taken to issue the report by the Foreign Affairs Committees of the Lower Houses of Congress, considered the initiator House (TTC1);
- c. the time taken to send it to Senate and its Foreign Relation Committees, characterizing the processing time of the Lower Houses of Congress (TTCD);
- d. the time taken to issue the report by the Foreign Affairs Committees of the Senate, considered the revision House (TTC2);
- e. the Senate's processing time, until its publication or rejection (TTSF);
- f. the full processing time of the international act from its entry in the legislative process in Brazil and Chile (TTT);

According to table 2, below, the hypothesis that the ideological amplitude and increase in the number of parties inside the coalition, evidenced during the PT government, slows down the legislative processing of international acts in the committees can be confirmed, whereas the formation of more homogenous, stable coalitions not as broad, as seen in the *Concertación*, speeds up the decision making process in foreign policy.

**Table 2** – Processing time of presidential messages, in average days (2000-2010)

	<b>Brazil</b>	<b>Chile</b>
<b>TTE</b>	708	1244
<b>TTC1 – CREDN AND CREAI</b>	209	82
<b>TTCD</b>	625	146
<b>TTC2 – CRE AND CRE</b>	121	116
<b>TTSF</b>	165	451
<b>TTT</b>	790	597

**Source:** Data elaborated by the author based on Chile's and Brazil's National Congresses Websites.

The first aspect, the executive processing time (TTE) considers the international promulgation of the act, until it is sent to the International Relations Committees of the Lower House of the Congress. In Brazil, during the analyzed period, it took around 708 days, whilst Chilean presidents took almost twice that time, around 1244 days. In Chile, free trade treaties were the ones that took the least amount of time to be processed by the CREAI – in average, 241 days. Whereas in Brazil, projects involving BRICS and IVAS countries, one of the center points in Lula da Silva's diplomacy, were the most expedited, taking around 347 days to start being processed by the CREDN.

So on one hand the study assumes that the slower pace to send the acts may cause for a better preparation of the parliamentarians and political parties to process the matter, building

<sup>4</sup> It will not be considered the analysis of the internal processing time in the Executive branch, but it is worth highlighting its extreme importance for decision-making. This is because the Executive can, after signing the international act and before sending it to the National Congress, file it or determine further studies on the subject within their agencies, so that the delay in sending the international act for referendum signals the existence of differences between the agencies themselves, or the negative effects of the act on the internal level, considering the legislative preferences (SOUZA, 2013, p.104).

consensus around the project and, as a consequence, its timely processing; on the other hand, the Executive's rush in expediting the international act results in a poorer preparation of the legislators on the theme, diminishing consensus and thus increasing the time it takes to be approved both within the Committees and the Legislative Houses.

Considering the heterogeneity of the Brazilian coalitions and the more homogenous and stable Chilean coalitions to ratify the hypothesis of the present analysis, the second aspect analyzes the speed of reports in the Foreign Relations Committees in the Lower House of Congress – the initiator House (TTC1). According to the data collected, the CREDN took, in average, 209 days to have their reports approved, whereas the Chilean CREAMI took an average of 82 days. However, if we consider the objectives of each country, the dynamic becomes even more different. The PT, in its two Lula da Silva administrations, centered its objectives in strengthening Mercosur and Unasur, apart from seeking a more incisive international insertion and increase in soft power via cooperation accords with the BRICS and IBAS countries and Africa, evidencing, therefore, the privilege to South-South cooperation. However, that didn't mean acceptance on part of opposition parties and the opposition, who sought to delay the processing time reported by the CREDN. The projects regarding Mercosur and Unasur, for instance, took around 331 days to have their reports approved; and, if we contemplate only the reports made by parliamentarians from the opposition, the average time drops to 318 days, which demonstrate that reports made by parliamentarians from the governments base took longer in the CREDN. Similarly, when they involved BRICS and IBAS countries, the processing time was also above average – around 212 days. Such as it happened in matters regarding Mercosur and Unasur, the ones made by the opposition (48% of total) took less time (194 days), which points, again, to a conflict between the government and its own base. Considering the main objectives of the Chilean foreign policy as a whole, the commercial deals were processed quickly by the CREAMI – around 69 days; if we consider matters reported by the opposition (18% of the cases), the average time increases to 78 days. For the free trade agreements, the dynamic was even faster: in average, every free trade agreement took 41 days to have its report approved. In 56% of the projects of free trade agreement, oppositionists made the reports; in these cases, the average processing time was 42 days. Thus, the consensual component can be observed around the goals of Chilean foreign policy given the processing speed of commercial and free trade agreements<sup>5</sup>.

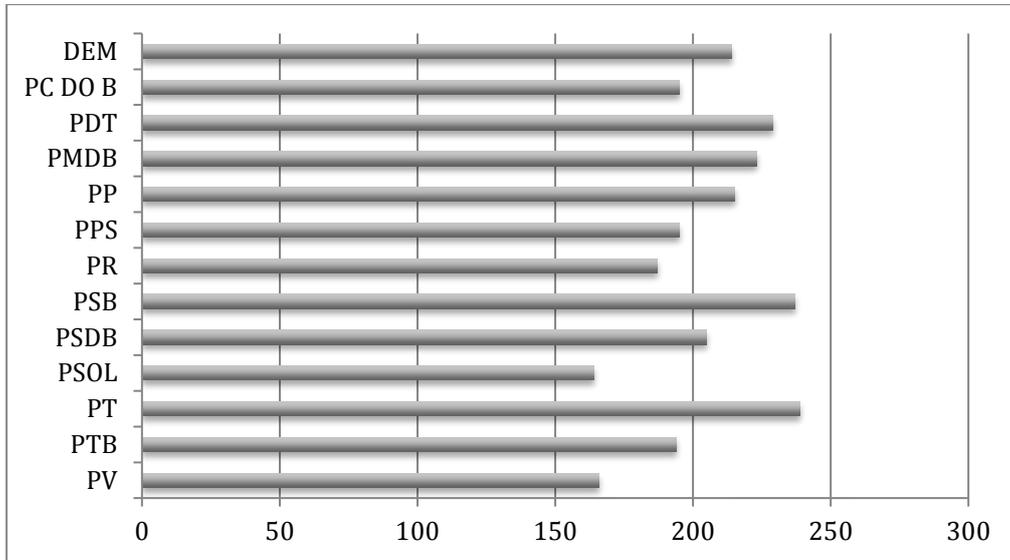
In Brazil, according to graph 1, as observed in the previous section (that showed most of the reports were voted against by the government's own base), the government's coalition parties were the ones that took longer to be approved by the CREDN. The reports made by the PT were the ones that took longer to be processed (239 days), followed by PDT (229 days) and PMDB (223); whereas the main opposition parties, DEM and PSDB, took, in average, 214 and 205 days

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<sup>5</sup> For comparison, matters of human rights in foreign policy took around 117 days to have their reports approved.

to present their reports. That means, the longer standard time in the Brazilian case results, among other factors, from the divergences between in the government's base, that have a report approval dynamic considered more dilated.

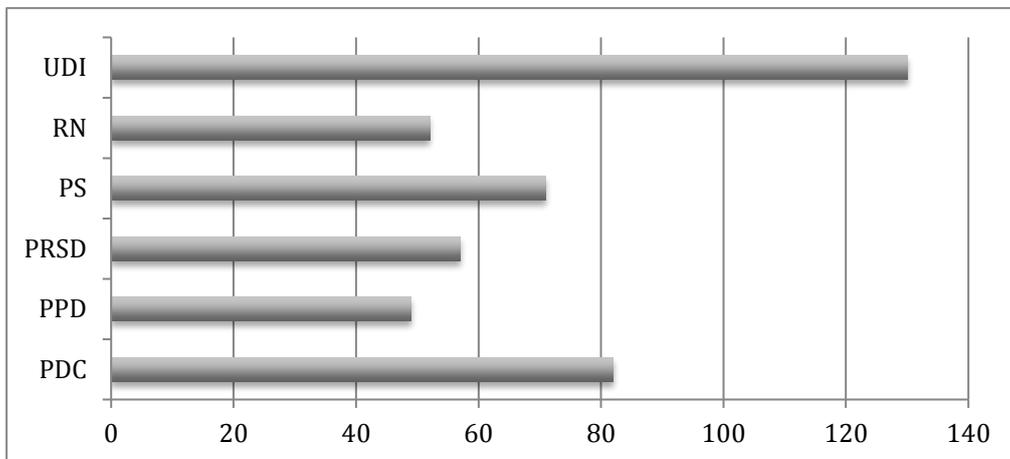
**Graph 1** – TTC1 of presidential messages by party, in average days, in Brazil



**Source:** Data elaborated by the author from the Brazilian National Congress website.

In graph 2, regarding the Chilean CREAMI, shows that the UDI was the party that prolonged the most the processing time of the Committees reports, with a 130-day average. As for the other parties, the reports were made faster, which shows more consensus between the *Concertación* coalition and even an opposition party, the RN.

**Graph 2** – TTC1 for presidential messages by party, in average days, in Chile



**Source:** Data elaborates by the author from the Chilean National Congress website.

It is worth mentioning that, in spite of the fact that the CREAMI's TTC1 is practically half the TTC1 of the CREDN in Brazil, there were discrepancies. The MSC 23-342/2001, that concern the border movements adopted by the Basel Convention, even having simple urgency processing,

took eight years (or 3061 days) to have the report, made by Congresswoman Isabel Allende Bussi (PS), approved in the Committee. The same way as the MSC 1540348/2002, that submitted the scientific agreement between Chile and the Dominican Republic to congressional referendum, had the report made by Congressman Gonzalo Arenas (UDI) approved in nine years, or 3892 days<sup>6</sup>. In Brazil, the reports that took longer to be processed were: the MSC 504-2003, that forwarded a message regarding the text with an amendment to the WTO Constitution, and the report made by Congressman Paulo Delgado (PT), was returned without response and approved in 1084 days; and the MSC 56-2006, regarding the maritime transport agreement between Brazil and the United States, reported by Congressman Marcondes Gadelha (PSB) and approved after many others had been rejected.

But the biggest example of congressional participation in foreign policy matters is related to the deployment of Chilean troops to Haiti and the bill of the peace operations. In 2004, President Ricardo Lagos decided to take part in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which generated severe criticism by the congressman. This was due to the fact that the Executive branch did not consult with the Federal Senate, that was supposed authorize the deployment of foreign troops from the territory, as foreseen in law 19.067. In this context, the senators approved the troop deployment, but there was serious questioning regarding the procedure and the convenience of the decision, provoking debates on the complexity of the mission and its duration, as well as its costs. When the prorogation of the request, the Senate continues to debate the participation of Chilean troops every six months, so much so that the formation of a Special Committee, composed by members of the government's base and the opposition in equal number, was requested, with the purpose of evaluating the situation of Haiti as a framework regulating the deployment of troops to future peace missions. That way, in 2007, the Senate followed the Special Committee's recommendation and approved the proposal of a new national policy regarding the participation in peace operations, sending, to the Foreign Relations and Defense Committee, a bill modifying law 19.067 and establishing norms for such participation. In 2008 the bill was approved and later sent to the Lower House of Congress, which approved the bill after indications proposed by internal committees and a few amendments to the text. After passing through the Senate it was sent to President Michelle Bachelet, being promulgated in 2008, as law 2.297, that "modifies law n. 19.067 and establishes norms to the participation of Chilean troops in peace operations".

As for the third aspect, it regards the processing time in the Lower House of Congress further forwarding to the CREs (TTCD). In this regard, matters that entered the Brazilian Lower House took, in average, four times longer than the ones due to be ratified among Chilean

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<sup>6</sup> As the two main TTC1 in general, the CREAI was also responsible for the approval of reports the same day they arrived, as can be observed on the presidential messages 81-351/2004, 384-356/2008 and 1608-357/2009.

congressmen. While the time to forward to the Brazilian Senate took 652 days, the Chilean case was faster, with a 146-day average, evidencing the consensual characteristic of the international acts being processed there. The free trade agreements, main goal of the Chilean foreign policy, took around 105 to be approved by Lower House and sent to the Federal Senate. If we consider only commercial agreements, the average is even lower: 138 days. In Brazil, the agreements regarding Mercosur/Unasur and the BRICS/IBAS group were above the Lower House average: 635 and 720 days, respectively.

For its turn, the fourth aspect considers the reporting speed by the revision House, that is, the Foreign Relations Committees in the cases analyzed (TTC2). In this case, the standards changed substantially. This is because there was practically the same average processing time in the cases analyzed: 121 days for reports from Brazilian senators and 116 days for the ones from the Chilean in the CRE. As the reports in the Chilean CRE were made by all the members together, there is no way to measure the decision-making process according to the parties. Again, in the Chilean case, commercial and free trade agreements were processed faster. While the first ones took about 66 days to be approved, the second ones had an even smaller time gap, of 56 days (that is, half the normal processing time). In Brazil, on the other hand, the processing dynamic was characterized by being faster in cases regarding the Lula administration's main goals. Agreements related to Mercosur/Unasur took around 120, while matters on international acts related to BRICS and IBAS were even more expedited, with a 78-day average. It can be evidenced that the main point of friction happened in the Lower House in Brazil; as for the Senate, it was more closely linked to the key guidelines of the Lula administration's diplomacy, so much so that both government and opposition senators did not conflict, whether in modification points or influencing the processing time. However, again, the parties that were responsible for increasing the time to process the reports of matters in the CRE were the ones from the government's base – PP (164 days), PSB (163 days) and PT (147 days) – while the opposition parties maintained average levels (DEM, with reports approved in 133 days, and PSDB, in 97 days). Chile had the presidential message that took the longest to have its report approved: the MSC 68-353/2005, that provides for the extradition agreement between Chile and member countries of Mercosur, that was on the country's CRE for 2191 days.

The fifth aspect, regarding the processing time in the Federal Senate (TTSF), had a completely different dynamic. In Brazil's Upper House, the average to be sent to the Executive branch was 165 days; in Chile it took dramatically longer, around 451 days. The causes for a more expedited cycle in Brazil can be given by the importance by the Leadership Collegiate to the decision-making process in the country's presidentialism – was evidenced in the agreements regarding Mercosur/Unasur (138 days) and the matters regarding international acts in BRICS and IBAS (111 days). It is important to realize that the constant dynamic in commercial and free trade agreements negotiated by Chile and that were approved in the Federal Senate: in average, the

ordinary commercial acts took 398 days, while the ones regarding free trade took 259 days.

Finally, to conclude this section, the sixth aspect, regarding the full processing time from the moment in enters the Legislative branch (TTT), the data gathered and analyzed confirm the main hypothesis of this study. Firstly, the Lula administration sought to build coalitions that were broad and heterogeneous, which increased the distances between the preferences of the parties and the government's base, in a manner that there was more disagreement regarding the public policy examined – foreign policy. With that, apart from the more intense partisan conflict inside the coalition to formulate the reports in the Lower House and the Senate, the presidential messages took, in average, 790 days to go through the Legislative Houses, and the parties from the base contributed to slowing down the process. Secondly, the Lagos and Bachelet administrations formed more stable and homogenous coalitions, narrowing the distances between the parties and the presidential party, which increased the consensus in formulating foreign policy along the years. As a consequence, apart from the larger consensus inside the coalition and even among opposition parties and the government, the matters related to international acts were more expedited, taking, in average, 597 days in the decision-making process by the Chilean National Congress.

Considering the primordial aspect of this study's discussion, that is, the importance of parties in promoting interests based on their programmatic and ideological preferences and their influence in formulating the main goals of the countries in foreign policy, in worth highlighting that, in Chile, political parties and legislators acted in the promotion of the guidelines of the PS's diplomacy as well as the country's: the faster processing of commercial and free trade agreements. The commercial agreements, for instance, took an average 521 days to be fully processed. However, if we consider the free trade agreements, the dynamic was even faster, so much so that from the time they entered the CREATI, the acts were approved in less than a year, or 363 days.

As for in Brazil, legislators and political parties (especially the ones in the government base) did not show support to the main guidelines and objectives of the Lula da Silva administration, which resulted in slowing down matters seen as essential to the development of the PT's foreign policy. Agreements regarding Mercosur/Unasur, for instance, took a little over the average time, around 796 days. Matters negotiated with BRICS and IBAS were prolonged for 831 days, signaling the conflict component of this typo of foreign policy. It is important to highlight, also, that the Lula administration sought international agreements with ideologies similar to the PT's, such as Venezuela, Bolivia and Cuba, or countries that had practices condemned by opposition parties, such as Libya and Syria. In these cases there was an even longer delay in the total processing time that lasted, in average, 888 days, that means, almost 100 days longer than the normal processing time.

#### 4 Conclusion

The study analyzed the key aspects to the decision-making process in foreign policy in Brazil and Chile based on the analysis of its Foreign Relations Committees in the National Congress. Firstly, despite the predominance and primary of the Executive branch in international matters, the Legislative Branch takes part in the process of formulating foreign policy, whether it is *ex ante*, influencing and pressuring the position of the Executive in international negotiations, or *ex post*, through institutional and procedural mechanisms contained in the decision-making process.

Secondly, and more important, the legislative and partisan participation in foreign policy happens along the lines of the breach government *versus* opposition, whether it is in larger degree, as is the Brazilian case, or in a smaller degree, evidencing the consensus of the *Concertación* coalition in Chile. This is because the less cohesive and homogeneous the coalition, the greater the obstruction and the bargaining in the legislative process in foreign policy, causing greater delays in the decision-making.

In the Brazilian case, both the opposition parties, but mostly the government's allied base, sought to increase the processing time of agreements that were characterized by the Brazilian diplomacy's central guidelines during the Lula administration – that is, the political-institutional strengthening of Mercosur and Unasur, and the cooperation with countries from the global South, especially those from the BRICS and IBAS. This is because their ideological preferences were more extreme and dispersed, apart from heterogeneous, causing more points of friction between the government and the political parties.

On the other hand, the more cohesive and homogeneous the coalition, the greater the consensus in the legislative process in matter of international acts, resulting in more expedited and effective decision-making. And, during the Lagos and Bachelet administrations, the commercial and free trade agreements continued to set the tone, as it happened in previous years. And, as the Chilean political parties have more center and moderate positions in foreign policy, there was a cooling off of the partisan conflicts and greater consensus between the proposals that were processed, so that few modifications were offered, apart from the increase on the celerity in international acts involving commercial and free trade matters – both characterized by the main guidelines of all parties in foreign policy in Chile.

Therefore, the ideological factor present in the coalitions is a variable that affects the decision-making process in foreign policy. The greater the ideological heterogeneity and the size of the coalition, the greater the partisan conflict in foreign policy. On the other hand, the greater the ideological homogeneity and the smaller the size of the coalition, the smaller the partisan conflict in international acts. It was assumed that there was legislative action and that it is guided, most of all, by the partisan disputes inside the coalitions, and between government and opposition.

To summarize, in democratic contexts, the degree in which foreign policy is formulated varies according to the international context but, above all, the correlation of preferences of the political-partisan and power configuration existing in each country's political system. Thus, due to the relevance of the domestic component in international agreements, the conclusions of this study are important to articulate an explanation on the reasons that lead countries run by center-left political parties to act in a different/similar manner in foreign policy, considering previous administrations and even the same countries in similar periods, for there were important differences between two government styles, considering the general and partisan guidelines of each country's foreign policy, as well as the composition and ideological preference of the government coalitions. Based on these final considerations, the study aims to contribute minimally to the understanding of the decision-making process of foreign policy in Brazil and Chile through the domestic variables, such as political parties and institutional mechanisms, bringing elements to formulate more questions on the theme.

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