

# Political Convergence in South America

A Case Study of Synchronous Political Phases in  
Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay

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# Abstract

This case study considers what appears to be a political convergence in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. Four political transitions that have occurred in all three countries are studied: the military coups of 1964, 1973 and 1976, the transitions back to democracy, the implementations of liberal economic reforms, and the recent turns leftwards.

Three different types of explanations are presented, each representing a different view on the question of structure versus agency. These explanations build on theories of diffusion, theories of political cycles and the impact of external factors. Each type of explanation is then analysed separately, resulting in three different analyses.

I argue that diffusion seems to have the best explanatory potential, although political cycles also deliver reasonable explanations, whereas the external factors studied – the US and the IMF – fail to give a satisfactory explanation on either transition.

In parity with the conclusions of Graham Allison's *Essence of Decision*, the most important insight of this thesis is, however, the importance of the perspective for how we understand the problem.

*Key words:* political convergence, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, diffusion, political cycles, external factors, synchronous political phases, Allison  
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# 1 Introduction

In 1964, Brazilian elected leftist president João Goulart was overthrown by the military, and the civilian government was replaced by a military one. In 1973, Juan María Bordaberry, who had won the general elections in Uruguay two years earlier, dissolved the parliament. Supported by the military, he argued that this was necessary to suppress the intensified activities from the socialist urban guerilla. In 1976, similar tensions between armed groups from the Left and the Right in Argentina led the military to overthrow the democratic government under Isabel Perón and launch a "guerra sucia" – dirty war – against dissidents.

In 1983, 1985 and 1989, democratic elections were held in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil, respectively, and during the 90s, all three countries wielded liberal economic reforms. Then, in 2002, leftist presidential candidate Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva won the Brazilian presidential elections, the year after followed by the victory of Néstor Kirchner in Argentina, who's focus were social reforms, and in 2004 Tabaré Vázquez became the first leftist president in Uruguay.

## 1.1 Problem and Purpose

In general, the political development of each sovereign country differs from all others. This makes perfect sense, since most countries vary in some of the factors one can believe have an important impact on the politics, such as institutions, culture and history. In some cases, however, protruding similarities across the borders can be observed. One recent example is the wave of democratization that swept through several Central European countries after the fall of the Soviet Union. Such cases are interesting, since they make it probable that a common factor can explain the political turn. Once one has identified a factor that both makes sense explaining the shift and is shared between the countries in mind, one can make it probable that this factor indeed has an important role shaping the political process.

The purpose of this study is to find such factors that have an important influence on the forming of a country's politics, as well as political institutions, by studying the similar political developments in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. Finding factors that can explain the political process, not only in one country but

three, will help to more accurately explain the politics of any country. Thus, the research question of this study is

*How can the similar political developments in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay be explained?*

## 1.2 Theory

There are at least three different kinds of conceivable explanations to transnational political convergence, assuming that the similarities are not entirely random. They all relate to, and take different stance on, the question of structure versus agency, by some prominent social scientists called the most important theoretical issue of human science (McAnulla, 2002: 271).

The first possible explanation is that the politics in one country are a consequence of the politics in a neighbouring country. It could be because political movements get inspired by their counterparts across the border. It could also be that the benefits of certain politics depend on, and is altered by, the politics of the neighbouring countries. Yet another mechanism for this kind of explanation is that the reason for adopting the politics of the neighbours is that the benefits and costs of that politics now are known, and the risks associated with changing the politics in that direction are therefore lowered.

As its focus lies on "the intentions and actions of individuals" (McAnulla, 2002: 276) – primarily political leaders, but also the electorate – this type of explanation is closest to the intentionalist (i.e. actor-based) view. There is a rich tradition of theories of diffusion<sup>1</sup>, out of which I will base the analysis on the study on economic policy diffusion by Simmons and Elkins (2004).

Another type of explanation looks at inherent factors within the political system. According to this perspective, the fact that the studied countries have undergone similar political developments is because one kind of politics is, as

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Walker (1969) on policy diffusion between states in the US, Starr (1991) on democratic diffusion, Strang (1991) on institutional diffusion

such, the causation of a political counter-reaction. Such an argument could be found in Hirschman's theory of political cycles (1982). This argument does not, however, explain why the shifts have occurred simultaneously. Instead, it assumes that the political developments in all three countries were once synchronized and have then simply stayed in phase.

This type of explanation is structuralist, since no autonomous power is left to individual actors who "only have a role in as far as they are the 'bearers' of structures" (McAnulla, 2002: 275). In this part of the analysis, I will apply the theory of political cycles, as first described by Hirschman and later elaborated by Bresser Pereira (1993).

A third type of explanation looks at external factors. The argument here is that the reason why the politics are similar in several countries at once is that they all depend on the same external factors, which have equivalent impact on them all. In this case, it could be, for example, the world economic conjuncture, which roughly affects all in the same manner, or the U.S. strategy to combat communism in Latin America, which led to support of military dictatorship in all three countries.

This perspective is neither entirely structuralist, nor intentionalist, but rather a combination of both. This middle-way stance on the question of structure versus agency is usually referred to as dialectic, and it declares that individual actors are important, but external factors still have an impact, as they "constrain what individuals can do" (McAnulla, 2002: 279). In this part of the analysis, I will, instead of applying a general theory, look for possible external factors, such as the above-mentioned US anti-communist policy, and analyse how important an impact such factors were.

So, the explanation could either be found within each country, outside the countries, or in the relationship between them. Of course, one could argue that the answer to the question lies in all of these kinds of explanations combined. Naturally, when dealing with human societies, it would be preposterous to single out one explanatory factor as the sole causation, since the mechanisms are way too complex for such claims. Nor is that, by any means, the aim of this study. To some extent it is possible, however, to differentiate between the explanatory factors, and approximate their relative weight. That is what this study intends to do.

### 1.3 Method

The method of this study will be to apply operationalized theories, representing each of the aforementioned explanations, on the political development in the studied countries. Through the operationalization of the theories, I will identify

indicators that can then be observed in the empirics. Since all three countries will be regarded as one single case of political convergence, with the intent to use different theories to explain the outcome, it is to be regarded as a case study.

Esaiasson *et al.* differentiate between theory-consuming methods, theory-testing methods and theory-developing methods (2007: 42f). According to this division, one could argue that the method used here is theory-consuming, since the study primarily aims to explain the case in question. However, weighing the applied theories against each other makes it more of a theory-testing method, where the study aims on strengthening or weakening the used theories, depending on their explanatory strength in this precise case. There is no clear-cut division between those two methods, and – as Esaiasson declares – ”the difference between theory-testing and theory-consuming studies is a question of degree”<sup>2</sup> (2007: 43).

## 1.4 Scope and Delimitations

In this study, two different delimitations have to be made. The first one is geographical. Why Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay? There are other countries in the region that also share similarities in their political development, such as Chile and Paraguay. Chile is maybe the most famous example of both military dictatorship – under Augusto Pinochet – and liberal economic policy – under the influence of Milton Friedman. Paraguay has also gone through military dictatorship, liberal economic reforms and has a leftist government as of today. Although it would indeed be possible to include these two countries, given their similar political development, the scope of this study does not allow all five to be included.

The choice on Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay is motivated by the goal to include countries that are as different as possible in both size and culture, but still manifest apparent conformance in their political development. Uruguay is by far

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<sup>2</sup> My translation from Swedish

the smallest country in the region, while Brazil is one of the largest in the world. As for Argentina, also being quite large, the main distinction relative to Brazil lies in the culture, emanating from different languages and different colonial history.

Even though this is not a comparative study that applies the most-different-system design, the argument of generalizability of the theories explaining the case is strengthened by the fact that the countries with similar political development differ considerably in other aspects.

A delimitation in time is also needed. One possible temporal delimitation could be the independence of the respective countries, stretching between 1816 for Argentina and 1828 for Uruguay. Such a delimitation would, however, be far too ample, only excluding the politics during the colonial era. Another possible delimitation could be the turn of the century in 1900, marking a starting point for the modern history of these countries. From this year, many political trends are shared across the studied nations, but it is still too ample for this analysis.

As a more feasible delimitation, the scope of this study will be the latest four major political transitions – regarding both polity and policy – that have taken place in all three countries, stretching roughly 50 years back in time: the coup d'état leading to military dictatorship, the transition back to democracy, the adoption of liberal economic reforms, and lastly, the recent political turn to the left.

## 1.5 Material

Mainly two types of material will be used in this study. Primarily, I will use respected secondary literature for facts from the political history in the study countries, with the eleven-volume standard work *The Cambridge History of Latin America* as base. This will be supplemented by two more books on the subject: *Historia de la Argentina Contemporánea* (2006) – authored by the director of the Programme of Political History at University of Buenos Aires –, and *Breve Historia Contemporánea del Uruguay* (2006) – by a Ph.D. in American History at University of Madrid.

Secondly, I will use firsthand data primarily from the (recently made free of charge) World Bank Databank, the Direction of Trade Statistics handled by IMF, and the World Trade Organization Statistics Database – all of which are accessible through their respective webpages.

## 1.6 Disposition

Subsequently, three different sections will follow. Each regards one theory or type of explanation, which is presented, operationalized and then used for an analysis. The first section, regarding processes of diffusion, will be the most extensive, since it is based on the largest amount of data. Thereafter follows a section dealing with political cycles, and the last of these sections bring forth possible explanations in external factors.

The three different sections could be seen as three separate studies, albeit as such they are short. To put together my findings, this study will be completed with a section where I conclude and discuss the three different analyses, and suggest an answer to my research question.

## 2 Politics Diffuse

In this section, I start by defining some terms and specify a basic assumption for the analysis. Then, I present a theory of diffusion, based on a study on economic policy diffusion by Simmons and Elkins (2004). Whereas their theory regards economic policy, the same mechanisms will be used in this study to analyse the diffusion of all kinds of political ideas, regarding policy as well as polity. The theory is then operationalized to enable the analysis that will follow. This analysis is parted in accordance with the different transitions that are analysed.

### 2.1 Definitions and Assumptions

The first question one has to ask is what does diffusion mean? According to Strang, the term diffusion refers to "any process where prior adoption of a trait or practice in a population alters the probability of adoption for remaining non-adopters" (1991: 325). Another definition is given by Welsh: "Diffusion refers to the process by which institutions, practices, behaviors, or norms are transmitted between individuals and/or between social systems" (1984: 3). I build upon the latter for my definition of diffusion in this study: a process where the implementation of political ideas has a positive impact on the implementation of similar ideas elsewhere.

For easier reference to the diffusion relations, I will hereafter use the terms *innovator* and *followers*. Innovator is the first of the three studied countries to implement a new political practice or ideology, whereas followers refers to those that then implement resembling politics.

What about diffusion from outside the studied countries? Would it not be possible that ideas diffuse to all three countries from an outside source? Of course there is no reason why the studied politics would have first originated in any of the three countries I choose to study here. My basic assumption here is that once one of the three countries adopted new politics, any diffusion process to the remain two countries will at least partly stem from this "innovator", and the mechanism of diffusion will thus be apparent regardless of where it was innovated originally.

## 2.2 A Theory of Diffusion

In their article "The Globalization of Liberalization" (2004), Simmons and Elkins theorize two broad classes of mechanisms for how one country's politics may influence the politics of other countries. It could either be that the politics in one country *alters the benefits* of certain politics in neighbouring countries, or it could be that each country *provides information* on the benefits of the politics it has implemented. The first class assumes that the implementation of certain politics in one country – in an evermore interdependent world – creates economic externalities on other countries, while the latter deals with the inspiration political leaders or electorates get from their colleges across the border.

The alteration of benefits could take two different shapes. They could be material, in the sense that adopting the neighbour's politics leaves the country better off economically. For example, if two countries compete in the same global markets, and one of them implements a radical trade liberalization, which could worsen the competitiveness of the other country, which then may feel compelled to respond by adopting similar reforms.

But the alteration of benefits could also be reputational. The argument for this is that whenever there is a

theoretical consensus on an appropriate politics [this] raises the intangible costs of nonconformity. Perceived policy failures associated with "heterodoxy" will suffer greater public condemnation than similar failures of conforming policy. Governments that resist ideational trends face reputational consequences that cast doubt on their approach and potentially the legitimacy of their governance (Simmons & Elkins, 2004: 173).

The other class of diffusion mechanisms regards the information that is provided through the example of the innovating country. The most obvious mechanism here is *learning from success* (Simmons & Elkins, 2004: 175). If certain politics in one country seem to work out well, then it is not very farfetched for political actors in neighbouring countries to implement similar politics.

Simmons and Elkins also bring forward possible diffusion mechanisms through communication and cultural reference. The theory for the former mechanism is that ideas may spread easier if government representatives from the innovator and the follower have frequent talks. The argument for the latter is that it is easier to relate to – and therefore get inspired by – countries with similar culture.

## 2.3 Operationalizations

The next object will be to identify feasible indicators of these mechanisms. I will operationalize mechanism by mechanism, specifying both general indicators, and such that are specific for a certain transition. Indirect effects of the innovator as a path-opener (e.g. by terminating factors upholding the *ancien regime*) will be disregarded, since they can not explain why the followers converged with the innovator, only that they were enabled to do so. To facilitate the reading, indicators will be written in italic.

### 2.3.1 Altered material benefits

Starting with the mechanism of altered material benefits, a possible indicator for all four transitions could be how *the amount of trade* between the innovating country and the non-adopter changes when the latter follows in the former's trail. If it is essentially higher when the type of regime is similar then when it differs, one can expect that there might have been an economic incentive for changing regime.

### 2.3.2 Altered reputational benefits

The argument of altered reputational benefits does not make any sense in regarding the military coups. It is not probable that the coups were staged based on a fear of declining support for the civil regimes that were then replaced by violent means. Neither does it make sense in the transition to leftist governments, as that transition was not decided by the leader, but the people. I assume that the electorate do not vote based on concern for the common reputation.

However, for the transition to democracy, this argument could indeed be valid. It is possible that if a notion of the importance of democracy became consensual in the region, a fear of losing more than only the political power if the politics would fail, may have triggered military dictators to voluntarily initiate and fulfil a transitional process, where they could at least secure some rights for themselves. An indicator for this mechanism could be to compare how *the democratic mean* of all South American nations changed when the innovator ushered the democratic transition. If this event led democracy to become the regional norm, this would favour the diffusion by alteration of reputational benefits theory. As a measure of democracy, I will here use Freedom House's data

of the freedom in the world<sup>3</sup> – grouping each country into either free, partly free or not free.

Likewise, if a notion of the necessity of liberal economic reforms spread, it may have been risky for a political leader to stick to other policies, as that may then be pinned down as the reason for a possible policy failure.

### 2.3.3 Learning by success

For this mechanism of diffusion, the indicators depend on what the political actors regard as success. One universal indicator of success for a political leader is *economic wellbeing*, here somewhat crudely operationalized as growth rate in GDP per capita. This indicator will be used for all four transitions.

It would, however, be naïve to credit this measure as the sole indicator of "success". For the military coup makers, for example, the success in consolidating the power and combating resistants might have been equally important (if not more). Thus, apart from the growth rate variable, I will also define "success" for the coup makers as *internal stability* – operationalized as lack of violent intrastate conflict.

For military dictators opening up for democratic reforms, success would probably be defined in terms of *ability to avoid societal retaliation*. For this transition, the approval of a law of impunity for former dictators will be used as operational definition of success.

When it comes to democracies, the most important form of success is *popular support in elections*, which will consequently be used as indicator of success for both market-oriented and social reforms. Further, success for liberal economic reforms will be operationalized as *financial stability*, measured in inflation rates and international debt as percentage of Gross National Income, and

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<sup>3</sup> I am aware that this variable as a measure of democracy does have problems with validity, since "freedom" is not equal to "democracy". Yet, it is my belief that – in absence of a measure more generally agreed upon – this problem is to some extent compensated by the frequent use of this data in measuring "democracy" in similar studies, as this facilitates comparison.

success for social reforms will be defined as *decreasing inequalities*, measured in the GINI-coefficient.

### 2.3.4 Communication and Culture

The other two mechanisms of diffusion by providing information are not as relevant in this study as for a study on a global scale. Since all three countries here are neighbours, it is hard to see any restrictions on the abilities for interstate communication. The main barrier being linguistic differences following the cultural distinctions, I will merge these two mechanisms and use a dummy variable for both ability to communicate and cultural reference. The distinction will be between Brazil, on the one hand, and Argentina and Uruguay on the other. The theory of diffusion through communication and cultural reference will be strengthened if there is a correlation between political convergence and this cultural/linguistic distinction. This will be done lastly in this section.

## 2.4 Analysis

Below follows a section containing five subsections. First, the four transitions will be analysed in one section each, presented in chronological order. In the fifth section, I will analyse the impact of the abovementioned culture-linguistic division.

### 2.4.1 Transition to military rule

The first transition, from democracy to military dictatorship, first took place in Brazil in 1964. This is almost a decade before the same thing would happen in Uruguay, which makes it the slowest diffusion process of those studied here. The concept of having the military intervene in politics was by no means newfound at that time. In Argentina, the military had already seized power thrice since 1930, and it would do so again in 1966. As there have been several military coups in Argentina, in this study I chose to look at the coup of 1976, being the longest lasting, the most brutal and the most recent.

For analytical purpose assuming that Brazil is the "innovator" in this case, we now turn to analyse how its type of government could have diffused to its southern neighbours. Could it be the case, that the democratic government in Uruguay would profit from joining the giant economy to its north as a military

regime? Looking at the amount of trade between the two countries shows 19 percent increase in the year of the Uruguayan coup 1973 (the parliament was dissolved in June), which is in line with the general trend in the preceding years. In the year that followed, however, the value of trade increased by 187 percent, while the Uruguayan economy only grew a little less than 3 percent, thus possibly indicating an altered material benefit for Uruguay. Also as share of the total Brazilian foreign trade, Uruguay almost doubled in 1974. This could suggest an increased interest from the Brazilian government to trade with the like-minded military in Uruguay (Ministério do Desenvolvimento, Indústria e Comércio Exterior, 2010; World Bank, 2010).

For Argentina, however, no clear-cut material benefit is possible to deduce. Comparing the trade in the year of the coup – 1976 – to 1978 (data is missing for 1977) shows for certain an increase in nominal value, but the share of Brazil's total trade is the same: approximately 3 percent.

Another possible diffusion mechanism is learning by success. Operationalized as growth, the Brazilian military regime was indeed a success. From the coup in 1964, annual growth never fell below 3 percent, with an average growth the five years preceding the coup in Uruguay of more than 10 percent. The corresponding average in Uruguay was less than 2 percent, with negative growth in 1971 and 1972. Following the coup in 1973, growth rates increased, reaching 6 percent in 1975 – while at the same time growth was negative in Argentina (World Bank, 2010). Therefore, it would not seem unthinkable that military intervention was seen as a good formula for a better economy, suggesting diffusion through learning by success.

Also in terms of internal stability, the military regimes seemed to know how to handle insurgents. When discontent with the military rule became more openly expressed in Brazil by the end of the 60s, the regime responded with tougher measures, which in turn led leftist dissidents to an even more firmly committed revolutionary struggle. After a well noticed kidnapping of the US ambassador by the urban guerilla in 1969, the regime launched a brutal *guerra suja* – dirty war – and by the end of 1971, all urban guerillas were destroyed. Focus then turned to the rural guerillas, which were defeated by 1975 (Bethell – Castro, 2008: 177-194).

Similarly in Uruguay, the urban guerilla – *los Tupamaros* – had intensified their struggle by turning to more violent means by the end of the 60s. In 1971 and 1972, some of the most spectacular attacks were blowing up the Golf Club, assassinating the security chief of a prison, and trying to take over a police station in Montevideo. When two policemen were killed the same day in different places of Montevideo, the military decided to take action and declared a state of emergency, referring to an emerging civil war. As the military widened its acting space by suspending civil rights, it did not take more than a couple of months until the Tupamaros were vanquished (Arteaga, 2008: 263ff).

Showing itself successful to restore the order and combatting subversion, the military in Brazil and Uruguay could indeed have been an inspiration in

Argentina, where the violence was much worse. Inspired or not, within one year from the Argentine coup in 1976, the "dirty war" that was launched by the new regime had successfully quelled the armed opposition and order was restored (Novaro, 2006: 48-72).

## 2.4.2 Transition to democracy

In the transition from dictatorship to democracy, Argentina was first out, starting the new year in 1984 with a democratic constitution after the military regime resigned in december 1983. However, transitions to democracy had already begun – although slowly – in Brazil in the middle of the 70s, and in 1981 in Uruguay, with the reinvolvement of political parties in a dialogue with the military regime (Bethell – Castro, 2008: 202; Arteaga, 2008: 284). What we will see is therefore how two military regimes, already engaged in a transition to democracy, reacted on the quite sudden and much faster transition in Argentina.

Neither for Uruguay nor Brazil, following Argentina in turning to democracy shows any significant increase in trade (IMF, 2010). When democracy returned to Argentina, its relative trade with the dictatorships of Brazil and Uruguay was somewhat decreased, suggesting unwillingness in the Argentinian democracy to trade with its neighbouring dictators. When Brazil returned to civil rule – although not yet a democratically elected – the year after, the Brazilian share of Argentina's total foreign trade almost doubled – from 7 to 13 percent –, but, since a similar increase occurred with the still undemocratic Uruguay, no inference could be drawn. From 1990 – the year when Brazil's democratically elected president was inaugurated, the Brazilian share of Argentina's trade increased continuously for six years in a row, reflecting the desire among the restored democracies for more regional trade, which were later institutionalize in the Mercosur cooperation (IMF, 2010; WTO, 2010).

Looking instead at how the reputational benefits altered, and the effects of the Argentine transition on the regional norm. The percentage countries by Freedom House (2010) classified as free, increased from 33 percent in 1980, to 50 percent in 1984, as Argentina joined the other 5 of South America's 12 countries. When Brazil also followed, turning to a civil rule in 1985, a majority of all South American states became classed as free: 8 of 12. Although there were some backlashes in the transitional process in Uruguay (Arteaga, 2006: 289), it would not take more than months to follow Brazil as elections were held in November 1984 and the president-elect Sanguinetti inaugurated in March 1985. It is hard to say how big impact altered reputational benefits might have had, but at least for Uruguay, the discontinued military regimes of its two neighbours could surely have made it even harder for the military to hold on to power, fearing to fuel any lusts of vengeance amongst the people. Also for the Brazilian military, the democratizations of Argentina and Uruguay may have influenced their abstention

when power was transferred from their appointed candidate to an elected president in 1990.

It could also be motivated to look back at the initiations of the democratic transitions. These show that the first decisions to move towards democracy in both Brazil and Uruguay, in 1974 and 1981 respectively, were made at a time when the majority of the South American countries were not classed as "free", and after Uruguay fulfilled the transition, no new countries would be classed "free" until Surinam in 1988.

In terms of growth, all three countries show a move from negative growth the year before democracy returns, to positive growth in the year of the elections. Even though the time between the different transitions was too short to enable a longterm evaluation of the impact of democracy, the examples of first Argentina and then Uruguay proved that democracy could give a positive push on the economy.

Looking at how the military regimes succeeded in avoiding retaliation, one can see that the innovator failed to secure immunity. Unhindered by any law or agreement, the first step for newly elected president Alfonsín was to order the arrest of the former military regime (Torre – De Riz, 1991: 174). Therefore, the diffusion mechanism in this case would rather be "learning from others misdoing", then from success.

In Uruguay, the military reached what they understood was an implicit agreement with the political parties to not persecute abuses during the dictatorship if democracy was restored (Arteaga, 2008: 300). For the law to be ratified, it had, however, to pass through a plebiscite, which it did in 1986. In Brazil, similarly, the military – before handing over the power – reached an agreement that no revanchism would be conducted (Bethell – Castro, 2008: 226). It is not at all improbable that, seeing that a military regime could very well fall apart with harsh consequences for its representatives, the military regimes in Brazil and Uruguay were motivated to fulfil the democratization process in return for an assurance of not being charged.

### 2.4.3 Transition to economic liberal reforms

In all three countries, the transition to a period of liberalized trade, privatizations and deregulatory reforms emerged in an economy in crisis. In all three countries, the president initiating this process was elected in 1989. As Alfonsín resigned prematurely, Argentina became the first one out, when, in July 1989, the power was assumed by Carlos Menem, who did not wait to enter a direction of reforming the market (Novaro, 2006: 219). Both Brazil and Uruguay followed in March 1990, when the power was transferred to Collor de Mello and Lacalle, respectively.

Looking for a benefit in trade for converging politically, the years 1990–1994 show a significant increase in trade between Uruguay and Argentina, where the trade tripled in nominal value and doubled in share of Uruguay’s total trade. The trade between Argentina and Brazil shows a similar pattern, where the nominal value almost quadrupled and the share of Argentina’s total trade doubled (IMF, 2010; WTO, 2010). This clearly suggests an altered material benefit in converging – a convergence that became most profoundly manifested in the organ for the establishment of a common market: Mercosur.

What about reputational benefits for adopting liberal economic policies? At the time of the elections in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay 1989, 4 out of 9 of the other South American states did already apply liberal economic policies. In 1991, an agenda of economic liberalization was on the table in 8 of the 12 countries (IADB, 1996). It is not hard to see that it was a trend of the time, and it is not impossible that this could have pushed voters to join the bandwagon, and fuelled leaders to push through the many times unpopular reforms.

Were the reforms successful, giving reason to learn from them? In the period 1990–1999, Argentina managed to lower the inflation rate from 2000 percent to a 1 percent deflation, while having an average annual growth on 4.5 percent, that could be compared to the average 4 percent negative growth during the three years preceding. During the same period, foreign debt decreased from 46 percent of GNI to 27 percent in 1993, but then increased to more than 50 percent in 1999, reflecting a culminating economic crisis in the highly indebted Argentina, as the Russian debt crisis of 1998 spread (World Bank, 2010).

In Brazil, the inflation rate was decreased from almost 3000 percent in 1990 to less than 5 percent in 1999, and the average annual growth of 1.7 percent was at least positive, compared to the negative 4.5 percent growth in 1989. In Uruguay, similarly, the inflation went from more than 100 percent to less than 6 percent, while a positive annual growth was maintained. The external debts remained approximately the same level in Brazil, and was somewhat decreased in Uruguay, until it augmented in both countries in 1999 (World Bank, 2010).

As a weapon against high inflation rates, it would be hard to deny that the liberal economic reforms were successful. But were they equally successful in terms of popular support? In Argentina, Menem became the longest sitting president ever, being reelected in 1994 for another 5 year term. In Brazil, the to-become-president Lula da Silva was defeated in three elections in a row, in 1989, 1994 and 1998, the two latter against the former minister of finance who was famous for having introduced an economic plan to fight inflation, involving privatizations and a more open market. In Uruguay, the elections in 1994 resulted in a new coalition cabinet with slightly more focus on social issues, although largely sticking to the same economic policy, and in 1999, outspoken neoliberal Batlle was elected.

Even though the diffusion of liberal economic reforms may not have been through learning from each others success – as it took place almost simultaneously –, the continued neoliberal politics during the decade could surely

have been influenced by the neighbours' successful economic policies, that retained popular support.

#### 2.4.4 Transition to left-wing governments

On January 1 in 2003, leftist president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva assumed the presidency in Brazil, which makes Brazil innovator in this diffusion process. Looking for altered material benefits, the bilateral trade tells us that neither Argentina, nor Uruguay, does show any significant increase in trade with Brazil – or each other –, as they also changed to leftist governments (IMF, 2010).

Instead looking for indicators of diffusion through learning by success, we see that, when Néstor Kirchner was elected president in April 2003, the Brazilian economy had not changed much. The short timespan is of course an important reason, but also, Lula da Silva tended to stick to the economic policies of the former government (De Paiva Abreu – Werneck, 2008: 452) – the stable annual growth of a few percents continued, and he also managed an annual decrease of one of the highest GINI-coefficients in the world (World Bank, 2010).

In Argentina, the economy had just stabilized when Kirchner was elected, going from a negative growth of more than 10 percent in 2002 to a positive growth of almost 9 percent in 2003. As Kirchner managed to reach even higher growth the year after, as well as decrease the GINI-coefficient, Uruguay, facing a similar situation with a recently stabilized economy and upcoming elections, could surely have learnt from a successful neighbor (World Bank, 2010).

Measuring success as popular support shows that both Lula da Silva and Kirchner were successful leaders. In the parliamentary elections in 2005, Kirchner's leadership was consolidated, as his candidates got around 40 percent of all votes (Novaro, 2006: 206) and in Brazil, Lula was reelected in 2006 with more than 60 percent of the valid votes (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2010). The popular support in the neighbouring countries could be a reason for why the leftist government in Uruguay would become what political scientist Walker argues is of the same type as the leftist governments in Argentina and Brazil, in contrast to e.g. those in Venezuela and Bolivia (2008: 11f).

#### 2.4.5 Diffusion Through Communication and Culture

As we now have analyzed all four transitions, we could see if the dummy variable, dividing Uruguay and Argentina on the one hand, and Brazil on the other, show any correlation with the direction of the diffusion processes.

The transition to military rule was innovated in Brazil in 1964, and then followed by Uruguay in 1973 and Argentina in 1976. Democracy diffused from

Argentina in 1983 to Uruguay in 1985 and then Brazil in 1989. However, as the transition towards democracy in Brazil was initiated already in 1974, one could argue that, even though there is diffusion, it is slower from Brazil to Argentina and Uruguay than it is between the two former Spanish colonies.

This lag does not correspond, however, to the transitions to liberal economic reforms and, later on, left-wing governments. After Menem started his market-oriented reforms in 1989, both Uruguay and Brazil followed already the year after. Likewise, the turn to the left, emanating in Brazil in 2002, were immediately followed in both Argentina and Uruguay in the next elections.

## 3 Politics are Cyclical

In this section of the study, I analyse the political development using theories that claim politics are cyclical. First, I present the theoretical framework, based on Hirschman's ideas that were later elaborated by Bresser Pereira. Then, in search for feasible indicators, I operationalize the theory, whereupon the analysis will begin.

### 3.1 Theoretical Framework

In his book *Shifting Involvements* (1982) Hirschman outlines a theory on how societies oscillate “between periods of intense preoccupation with public issues and of almost total concentration on individual improvement and private welfare goals” (1982: 3). According to this theory, it is pointless to argue for a static optimum of state involvement in the economy, since humans “think they want one thing, and then, upon getting it, find out to their dismay that they don't want it nearly as much as they thought” (1982: 21).

After a period focusing on regulation and public investments in the economy, people get disappointed and frustrated and demand deregulations and privatizations. And then, after a period of such market-oriented reforms, people's frustration now turn to demanding more regulations and public investments. Hirschman stresses that even though the cycles follow a similar pattern, each new wave of market-oriented or state-oriented reforms is unique in its character and purpose. Each cycle of expansion and contraction of the state is a response to new problems, as the problems from the last cycle should now have been solved. Thus, state involvements take on new modes for each new expanding phase. The underlining mechanism is, however, according to Hirschman, the same: public frustration and disappointment (Hirschman, 1982: 11).

The Brazilian political scientist and economist Bresser Pereira elaborated Hirschman's theory in his paper “Economic Reforms and Cycles of State Intervention” (1993). In the middle of a phase of state contraction, he went in polemic with neoliberals who argued that a minimal state is the optimum and who, at the time, were seeing “the end of history” approaching (cf. Fukuyama, 1989). Bresser Pereira instead argues that there is an inherent lag in the state's ability to adapt to new circumstances and challenges. While in the expanding phase of the cycle, the state tends to expand too much; initially seeking to correct

market failures, the state itself will, after some time of more and more involvements, create distortions that, in the long run, will weaken the state. Thus, Bresser Pereira argues, for the state to reshape and remain the strong actor that also the market needs it to be to function, deregulations, privatizations and market-oriented reforms is both necessary and logical. Just as necessary and logical as new state investments in the public welfare are, after a period of deregulations and privatizations.

The theories of political cycles do not explain a political convergence. Since the politics, according to these theories, are determined by structural factors – through public frustration in response to cyclical phases of excessive state expansion and contraction – the reason for Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay to follow similar political phases would be that they once got synchronized. After that point, they have independently followed their own political cycles, and remained in phase.

## 3.2 Operationalizations

The main object in this analysis will be to look for indicators of shifting concerns for public issues and private welfare, through the endogenous mechanism of public frustration. As the theory originally were set up to explain economic policies, what is to be regarded as public issues and private welfare is widened to include the transitions in polity as well. Preoccupation for public issues could certainly be a demand for public welfare, publicly financed investments and regulations of the market, but also public order. Similarly, private welfare is not only in terms of liberal economic reforms, but could also be manifest in a demand for political liberties.

One possible indicator of the mechanism that predicates Hirschman's theory – public frustration – could be the amount of large oppositional demonstrations. Somewhat problematic, this assumes that public frustration is manifested in the form of demonstrations, although one can expect that, during military dictatorship, fear of repression could surly be restraining on people's will to express their discontent in public. It also suffers a reliability issue, as reported estimations of the magnitude of expressions of will might be biased in accordance with the estimator's political view. Yet, any estimation can, put into context, give a hint of the extent of public frustration.

Demonstrations are here defined as any organized public expression of will, be it so walking on the streets with a placard, or conducting a strike for political matters. Only larger demonstrations are interesting in this study, as it is not to measure the presence of *any* opposition, but the public frustration in general.

### 3.3 Analysis

To verify the theory proposed by Hirschman and Bresser Persira, we first turn to the situation when the military overthrew the government. According to the theory, we could anticipate what Hirschman would describe as a preoccupation for public issues.

In Brazil, the official reason for the military to intervene was that the left-wing government in place would lead to "chaos, corruption and communism" (Bethell – Castro, 2008: 165), and in both Argentina and Uruguay, the military stepped in to crush intensified violence from leftist militants. Violence was not the only manifest of discontent from the Uruguayan and Argentine Left: just before the coup, the trade unions in Argentina "began to paralyse the principal centres in heated protest" through a wave of strikes (Torre – De Riz, 1991: 157), and in Uruguay, on the temporary suspension of civil liberties in 1972, "strikes succeeded each other in all spheres of the productive process, the central administration and the service sector"<sup>4</sup> (Arteaga, 2006: 268).

In addition to the preoccupation for public order, a possible interpretation from the perspective of political cycles could be that it was a growing frustration from the Left that made the military fear their potential takeover and, therefore, felt it necessary to react. Silva argues similarly that one factor for why Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay succumbed to military dictatorship was "the specifics of class conflict and its politics [that] made it difficult for the state to fulfill its primary functions" (Silva, 1999: 37).

During the era of military dictatorship, adversaries of such frustrations were harassed, if not killed. In Argentina, the regime declared that "[a] terrorist is not only one who carries a bomb or a pistol, but also one who spreads ideas contrary to Western Christian civilization" (Torre – De Riz, 1991: 158). But when the general disappointment with the military regimes in Brazil and Uruguay became apparent, as they – despite censorship – were turned down in popular votes, they had to retire, albeit not immediately.

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<sup>4</sup> My translation from Spanish

In both Brazil and Uruguay, after a transition to democracy was initiated, impatience over the slow return of civil liberties fuelled frustrations. In Brazil, 3 million workers went on strike for restored union rights in 1979, and before the transition to civil rule in 1984, a massive demonstration with more than 800 000 participants (according to the organizers) advocated an immediate return of direct presidential elections (Bethell – Castro, 2008: 214–222). In Uruguay, as political rights were still not restored by the autumn of 1983, all political forces realized a massive manifestation "for democracy", followed by a large strike on the anniversary of the coup in 1984 (Arteaga, 2006: 288ff).

This suggests that, what might at first have been a passive acceptance of the military rule amongst the general public, a fatigue now gradually spread. Applying the theory of political cycles, this frustration over a military rule that had bypassed its legitimacy could probably explain the transition to democracy.

In Argentina, the regime's dirty war involved many unofficial disappearances, and many innocent were killed (Torre – De Riz, 1991: 159). More important than a growing frustration over institutionalized violence seem, however, the defeat to Great Britain over the Falkland Islands, suddenly making election inevitable; the military could no longer hold together, as it had now not only "led the country to its first military defeat in history, but also done it alienating from the international community and in the context of an unparalleled economic crisis" (Novaro, 2006: 135).

With the return of democracy to Argentina came high hopes, but also big frustrations (Novaro, 2006: 175). The inflation was the highest in the world, and when a plan was launched to curb the inflation, the trade unions repeatedly declared general strike. Also, the proposition in 1986 to privatize many publicly owned companies had to be withdrawn after massive protests. Still, the general public trusted in the plan (Torre – De Riz, 1991: 177ff; Novaro, 2006: 170). When the plan failed, paradoxically, the support for even more drastic privatizations grew (Novaro, 2006: 213). In 1989, Alfonsín lost the elections, and food protests and growing social unrest had him resign prematurely. His successor Menem swiftly gave full support to fiscal austerity, privatizations and economic liberalization (Torre – De Riz, 1991: 192).

The frustration was not equally apparent in Uruguay, nor was the turn as drastic. The former president Sanguinetti had tried to liberalize trade, but was hindered by resistance in the parliament to go through with many of his proposals. After the elections in 1989, Lacalle, got a parliamentary majority behind him, enabling him to fulfil the structural reforms he thought imperative. During the electoral campaign he had criticized Sanguinetti for "administering the crisis", while Lacalle promised more profound changes.

In Brazil, the first elected president since the coup had only a rudimentary economic programme, based on anti-corruption. Ironically, he had to resign after only two years, threatened by impeachment for corruption. Both of his programmes to fight inflation had failed, but the minister of finance of his successor, Cardoso, was more successful with the *Plano Real*. As architect behind

this successful plan, he got broad support in the elections in both 1994 and 1998. Even though many of the reforms were criticized by the Left for increasing social injustices, Cardoso's inflation-restraining measures made him popular amongst even the poorest (Bethell – Nicolau, 2008: 249–263).

In terms of political cycles, one reasonable interpretation is that was the public frustration over the inflation and its consequences on the economy that led to a demand for a thorough restructuring. As liberal reforms seemed to work, they were awarded with popular support.

At the same time, in all three countries, the liberal economic reforms were accompanied by a steady increase of the support of the Left. Still, a broader public frustration over the effects of the economic policy would wait until the next financial crisis. This began in Russia and Southeast Asia in the middle of 1998, and demolished the confidence in all emerging economies, especially those highly indebted (Novaro, 2006: 277). In 1999, the external debt stock in Argentina amounted to over 50 percent of GNI, and although the rates were lower in Brazil and Uruguay – slightly more than 40 percent and 30 percent respectively (World Bank) –, this would cause a period of extreme financial instability in all three countries.

In Brazil, Lula da Silva promised not to switch to a revolutionary economy if he would be elected in 2002. Remembering that the Left had been an important reason for the military to intervene in politics in many countries in South America, there was a widespread suspicion towards what injury the Left could cause. Neither did Lula da Silva fit into the image of a statesman, being a metallurgy worker. Yet, social issues were largely overlooked, and economic inequalities were enormous. For the upcoming elections in 2002, Lula da Silva made clear invitations to the Centre, and his victory could probably be explained, in addition to the frustrations over social issues, by less fear that he would opt for revolutionary extravaganzas.

Similarly, in Argentina and Uruguay, the frustrations over disregarded social reforms alone would not have given the Left the needed support. Kichner in Argentina did a reassembling move as Lula da Silva had done in Brazil, but instead of turning from the Left to the Centre, as a member of the Peronist *Partido Justicialista*, he went to the Left for support. In Uruguay, the *Frente Amplio* that

had had its main base of support in urban Montevideo now managed to address also the rural dwellers. Also in Uruguay, it was important to prove economic responsibility, as Arteaga has it

Paradigmatic in this turn was the announcement by candidate Vásquez about who would be his minister of finance, the leader of Asamblea Uruguay<sup>5</sup>, senator, professor and ex dean of the Faculty of Economic Science at the University of the Republic<sup>6</sup> (2006: 339).

Still, maybe the most important factor for the victories of the Left in all three countries was the financial crisis that, although the leaders claimed it came from outside, made the people punish the sitting parties (Novaro, 2006: 301f; Arteaga, 2006: 339). It is not a very controversial claim, even though the relation is not mechanical, that a severe crisis makes people more prone to change. What happened was probably what Bresser Pereira saw as the political cycle adjusting to the dynamics of the economic cycle: "[i]f the economic downturn is tied to failures of the market, a progressive political phase may prevail" (1993: 1344).

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<sup>5</sup> A social–democratic political party, and a part of the Frente Amplio (ie. the Broad Front)

<sup>6</sup> My translation from Spanish

## 4 Politics Depend on External Factors

Apart from theories of diffusion and political cycles, a possible explanation for the similar political phases in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay lies in the impact of external factors. The argument is that the political transitions in all three countries were consequences of external factors that triggered them all to react similarly. In this section, I will present two separate explanations for how external factors may have affected the political development. These explanations will then, just as in the two previous sections, be operationalized to enable an analysis.

### 4.1 Explanations

For the institutional transitions in Latin America, from democracy to military dictatorship back to democracy, Diamond *et al.* stress the importance of the US foreign doctrine of the time (1990: 32). During the Cold War, US foreign policy was sharply marked by anti-communism. A fear of a domino effect – once one country had turned communist, others would follow – helped leading the US to support authoritarian regimes, which could repress the communist movements. As the tensions of the Cold War were loosening up, the US foreign doctrine turned, giving more importance to democracy.

One possible explanation for how these institutional transitions have come to occur simultaneously could therefore be that the US's support, first for authoritarian anti-communism, and then democracy, has been an important determinant for all three countries.

Also regarding the transition to left-wing governments later on, some scholars credit the US for having played a role. Mexican political scientist Arditi claims that "the vacuum created by the aloofness of the United States in the region [after 9/11, created] a setting conducive for the resurgence of the Left", as US interest in Latin America all the sudden "virtually disappeared" (2008: 66f).

Therefore, as a first external factor, it seems motivated to examine what impact the attitude of the US administration has had on the political development.

Proposing an explanation for why liberal economic policies became the dominant paradigm during the 90s, Gwynne and Kay point out that "the package of economic reforms [was] strongly supported by international institutions such as the World Bank and IMF" (1999: 15). The Washington Consensus was really a

consensus in an important centre of power, affecting everyone within its sphere of influence. Thus, a possible explanation for the simultaneous adoptions of market-oriented reforms could lie in pressure from these powerful financial institutions to do so – for example in terms of conditioned grants and loans.

## 4.2 Operationalizations

According to the possible explanation outlined above, it could have been US discontent about the situation precluding the military coup, and its subsequent support for the coup, that actually made it happen. To what extent did the US give support to the coup-makers? Support can take on many different shapes, and to really pin down the extent of the eventual support, I will in this part of the analysis draw on secondary literature. Also when it comes to the stated disinterest of Latin America, and its possible impact on the political turn to the left, I will rely on existing studies.

The forthcoming explanation awards a lot of power to the financial institutions of the World Bank and the IMF, which, with consensus on economic policy behind them, could push all three countries to implement the reforms they suggested. One could here look at how the dependence on IMF credits changed over time: if it was the economic power of these institutions that had the governments implement their recommendations, one could anticipate that the amount of used IMF credits would be augmenting prior to changed policies. It is also reasonable to study the relations between the governments and the IMF and World Bank, as this could give a hint of whether these were benign or not.

## 4.3 Analysis

Regarding the military coup in Brazil in 1964, there is little doubt that the US gave it moral, economic and material support in the form of weapons, as well as – through its organ for covert operations, the CIA – promised logistic aid would the coup-makers meet resistance. (Bethell – Castro, 2008: 173; Forsythe, 1992: 385, 389). Cuba had already gone from being an old ally to a fierce antagonist, and the US administration clearly feared a domino effect. But was the US support necessary for the military to go ahead with its plans?

The assurance of support in case of resistance surely must have given the military command a coveted security that they would succeed, but as the coup met little opposition – a call for a general strike on the occasion of the coup was

largely ignored (Bethell – Castro, 2008: 168) – it seems improbable that the military would have hesitated out of fear of a popular revolt. More important than the support from the US was probably the direct or indirect work of “the business community, landowners, catholic church, press and urban middle class” to stimulate the coup (Bethell – Castro, 2008: 168f). The role of the US was undoubtedly more important in the coups in Guatemala 1954 and in Chile 1973, and even though the US maybe speeded up the military intervention in Brazil, it would probably have happened anyway.

Soon after the coup in Uruguay 1973, the US president at the time, Gerald Ford, would announce his approval of illegal interventions in the internal affairs of Latin American countries (Lernoux, 1980: 496). No doubt, the US had supported the coup. However, contrary to in Chile (CIA, 2000), no direct involvement was really needed, as the civil rights were gradually surceased without running into cumbersome opposition (even though there were large manifestations against the dictatorship) (Arteaga, 2006: 274). One could argue that the passive support of the US was enough – and necessary – to induce the coup, and it seems as a fair claim to say that the general attitude of the superpower, and its active support for coups elsewhere in the region, was important for the trend of anti-communist military takeovers that marked Latin America during the Cold War, but in the particular case of Uruguay, the US does not seem to have played a critical role.

Neither was there any need for US involvement when the Perón government was overthrown in Argentina 1976. The Argentine military had already a custom of butting in to national politics, and at the time, the US had started to look over its support for dictators. Soon after the Argentine coup, Ford was replaced in the White House by Jimmy Carter, who had far more concerned for democracy and human rights than both his predecessor and successor. US relations with the South American dictatorships soon harshly deteriorated (Torre – De Riz, 1991: 163; Finch, 1991: 279; Bethell – Castro, 2008: 208f).

The impact this had on the transitions to democracy should, however, not be exaggerated. For the case of Brazil, US ambassador at the time has clearly stated that “[t]he US played a no role in the abertura” (Bethell – Castro, 2008: 221), and when the process towards democracy began in Argentina and Uruguay, Carter was out and Ronald Reagan in. In contrast to Carter, Reagan had no qualms dealing with brutal dictators, and he saw to that the isolation of Argentina ceased, whereupon he started to use Argentine soldiers for US purposes in other countries (Torre – De Riz, 1991: 167f). Even though some argue that the shifted attitude of the US was important (Silva, 1999: 44), it is hard to see that it was really a determining factor.

When it comes to liberal economic reforms, the fact that the World Bank and the IMF strongly supported such innovations is undisputed. However, they had insisted on such reforms for decades, being largely ignored (Gwynne – Kay, 1999: 15). What made these recommendations break through at this point? The fact that these policies were adopted under democratically elected governments

justly makes Gwynne and Kay wonder “how the economic model can be orchestrated within democracies in which large numbers of the electorate are not enjoying the benefits of economic growth?” (1999: 25).

From 1988 to 1998 all three countries had a steady annual decrease in the amount of IMF credits used (World Bank, 2010). Argentina stopped paying interest after a failed negotiation with the IMF in 1988 (Torre – De Riz, 1991: 204), and the relation between Brazil and the IMF was traditionally difficult. Actually, Cardoso, who would privatize and liberalize the Brazilian economy, did not get the blessing of the IMF for his *Plano Real*, since they did not believe it would work (De Paiva Abreu, 2008: 400, 426; De Paiva Abreu – Werneck, 2008: 448).

With such strained relations, the economic support from both the World Bank and the IMF, even though it was important as the main source of new funds (Gwynne, 1999: 78), does not seem to explain why these reforms were adopted at this time. Instead, Gwynne and Kay suggest an alternative explanation: after the fall of the Soviet Union, there was simply no alternative to liberal economic policy. Neoliberalism never had broad support in Latin America, but now, liberal economic reforms were framed as the “modern” policy, while it was, according to the ministers of finance, paramount to “modernize” the Latin American economic policies (1999: 26).

Lastly, we turn to the role of the US in the transitions to left-wing governments. A proposal is that the sudden lack of interest from the US in the aftermath of 9/11 2001 created a vacuum of political initiatives, that, in turn, paved the way for the Left. This, however, suggests that US was traditionally actively engaged in Latin American politics, which is not entirely true. In 1999, Peter Hakim, president of the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, stated that “US policy today is running on empty” and that any favourable circumstances in the relations between the US and Latin America were “sustained mostly by inertia”. It would be hard not to agree, when he argues that the lack of US ambassadors in both Argentina and Brazil (posts that had been vacant for three respective one year), together accounting for almost half of Latin America’s economy, signified a declined US interest in the region. Still, this did not bring forth left-wing governments, and the impact of lacking US interest therefore seems weak.

## 5 Conclusions

What we have seen in this study are three different types of possible explanations applied on our case: the appeared political convergence in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. The intent was to approximate their relative strength, and thus reach a better understanding of which factors that are important shaping the political development in any country.

Neither of the explanations could be singled out as outstanding in its potential to explain all four transitions, although external factors stick out for having failed on all. What does this say about the “dialectic” middle-way stance on the question of structure versus agency? Probably not very much. We only looked at two external factors – the role of the US and the influence of the IMF and the World Bank – without a doubt there are numerous other possible external factors to study. Further, what we saw was not that these factors lacked importance, only that they could probably not alone explain the different transitions. This does not falsify, however, the statement that these factors “*constrain* what individuals can do”, to quote my earlier quote.

To fulfil the intent of the study and approximate the relative weight of the proposed explanations, I would argue that the theory of diffusion delivers a fair explanation to all four transitions, through at least some of the mechanisms. In the transition to military dictatorship, learning from successful neighbours in combating leftist insurgents seem both intuitive and have empirical support, as far as this study goes. The same applies to altered reputational benefits for the transition to democracy, altered material benefits for the implementation of liberal economic reforms, and, again, learning from success when electing leftist leaders (this time, the electorate learned that a left-wing regime did not mean catastrophe, as many had feared).

Although the theory of political cycles also could give reasonable explanations to all four transitions, its mechanism of public frustration and disappointment is harder to grasp. Does it mean that whenever a large enough majority of the public is sufficiently disappointed with the current politics, these will eventually change? If so, this could hardly be argued with, but it would not tell us why people gets frustrated in the first place. The statement that a human always seek what she does not have is intuitively true, but as it does not predict our future grievances more than in relative terms (i.e. after right-wing politics comes left-wing politics, just like the sun always eventually succeeds the rain), it seems more of a philosophical discussion (which is not unimportant) than a useful theory for explaining political turns.

Still, I would argue that it does give us a more thorough understanding. When the general public starts to manifest their discontent, the regime is doomed. It also clearly shows that there is no static optimum for politics, and that a mere fatigueness of current politics could induce change.

Altogether, this brings us to the probably most general insight this study has come up with, namely that different perspectives on one same case can bring different understandings of it, all of which could, furthermore, be true. So the “real” picture would probably be seen only when all glasses are on, at the same time, while looking with only one pair of lenses will only put the foci on one point at a time.

The parallel to Allison’s groundbreaking study of the Cuban missile crisis from 1979 is obvious, and a quote from his conclusions on how we need to understand complex political happenings will do well as a closure of this multiperspective thesis: “[One model] alone will not do. Multiple, overlapping, competing conceptual models are the best that current understanding [provides]” (Allison – Zelikow, 1999: 401).

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