

# END OF THE PROGRESSIVE CYCLE, RESURGENCE OF THE "NEW RIGHT" AND FOREIGN POLICY ACTION FOR REGIONALISM IN THE CURRENT GOVERNMENTS OF BRAZIL, ARGENTINA AND CHILE <sup>1</sup>

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Eje temático: Regionalismos y Análisis de Política Exterior

**Abstract:** After the cycle of redemocratization that took place in the 1980s, most South American countries alternated between neoliberal periods and the strengthening of the so-called "progressive governments", where the main political parties of the region's left and center-left were elected as alternatives to the neoliberal cycle, promoting public policies aimed at regional integration, multilateral instances and the diversification of commercial and political partners. In recent years, however, several crises have made it possible for centre-right and right-wing parties to be elected. In Brazil, Argentina and Chile, the resurgence of the "new right" took place, in the first place, with a discourse based on distrust of the parties and of politics itself. Secondly, with the emphasis on the need for less state action and the privilege of market mechanisms. Finally, thirdly, these governments were elected on the basis of a deep social division. Based on these considerations, the study examines whether the new right has had new directions in foreign policy aimed at regional integration in South America, highlighting what have been the positions of these new governments. To achieve these objectives, the causes of the emergence of the new right will be investigated in each of the contexts, highlighting the political system, societal and economic aspects. An analysis will then be made of the main guidelines for the election of the new right in terms of foreign policy, verifying the existence of regional integration policies in government programs. Finally, the study considers the position taken by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the President of each country, analyzing official documents and speeches on social networks.

**Keywords:** Regional Integration; New Right; Pink Wave; Foreign Policy.

## Introduction

The history of South America has observed the frequent occurrence of political events in series in a relatively short space of time, which indicates the importance of endogenous causes, specific to each country, but also contextual factors, linked to the external plan. In the 1960s and 1970s, countries such as

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<sup>1</sup> Work prepared for presentation at the 10th Latin American Congress of Political Science, of the Latin American Association of Political Science (ALACIP), in coordination with the Mexican Association of Political Science (AMECIP), organized in collaboration with the Technological Institute of Higher Studies of Monterrey (ITESM), on July 31, 1, 2 and 3, August 2019.

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Brazil, Argentina and Chile were affected by coups d'état and ruptures of constitutional orders, most of which lasted until the mid-1980s.

With the end of the Cold War, in the last thirty years, South America went through intense political, economic and social transformations. At the political level, there was the disintegration of the authoritarian regime and the implementation of a new democratic order. Economically, under the impact of the external debt, inflation and the lack of control of public finances prevailed. Finally, at the social level, there was a worsening of social inequality and concentration of income.

In this context, with the end of authoritarian regimes and the crisis of the state, the processes of democratization, economic liberalization and the rise of neoliberalism began, which lasted until the mid-1990s. The reform agenda was essentially neoliberal, with a reduction in the role of the state in the economy. Privatizations, trade liberalization, deregulation and adjustments took place, forcing most countries to move in the same direction: that of free market democracies open to trade and investment flows. The reforms, implemented in the vast majority of Latin American countries<sup>3</sup>, were directed to the neoliberal market.

The initial success was due to the restoration of the economic order of countries suffering from high rates of inflation and a high percentage of the population living below the poverty line. This was possible mainly due to the favorable international context, resulting in reforms that would eventually attract foreign investment, which contributed to economic growth.

However, despite the initial success, the reforms did not assure Latin American countries the development necessary to compete in the markets of industrialized countries and emerging economies in Asia, nor did they create enough jobs for those who suffered from the diminished role of the state. The state continued to face fiscal problems, economic growth remained low, unemployment and social inequality increased, and institutional crises became quite recurrent. Over time, many South American countries faced crises, and

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<sup>3</sup> Major neoliberal rulers: Carlos Menem, in Argentina (1990-2000); Gonzalo Sanches de Lozada (MRN, 1993-1997 and 2002-2003) and Hugo Banzer Soarez (ADN, 1997-2001), in Bolivia; Fernando Collor and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, in Brazil; Carlos Andrés Pérez (AD, 1988-1993) and Rafael Caldera (CN, 1993-1998), in Venezuela; Eduardo Frei (PDC, 1993-1999), in Chile; and Julio María Sanguinetti (PC, 1994-1998), in Uruguay.

initial optimism about the neoliberal model suffered a reality shock, transforming the political climate of the countries and causing the social-institutional deficit of democracy and market reforms.

With the processes of democratization and neoliberal reforms failing to fulfill their main promises and social expectations to the populations, a new political-economic cycle took place in South America with the inauguration of progressive, socialist, center-left and social-democratic governments, whose alternative programs to the current economic and social order attracted the adherence of a large part of society dissatisfied with the unfolding initiatives of the neoliberal governments of the period.

In this context, marked, on the one hand, by the crisis of left-wing paradigms at the international level, whose apex was the disarticulation of state socialism, and, on the other hand, by neoliberal hegemony, the election of Hugo Chávez to the presidency of Venezuela was the first moment of the cycle called "Onda Rosa", which was reinforced by the election, in 2000, of Ricardo Lagos, of the Socialist Party (PS) of Chile, in addition to the coming to power of the Workers' Party (PT) of Lula da Silva in Brazil, of the Justicialist Party (PJ) of Néstor Kirchner in Argentina<sup>4</sup>. In spite of their differences and internal specificities, there was convergence around proposals aimed at greater social inclusion<sup>5</sup>, the implementation of neo-developmental models and the construction of a framework of regional institutions focused on political consultation, security and defence cooperation, as well as infrastructure and energy initiatives.

In recent years, however, we have witnessed a new and important change in the South American political landscape. If the first decade of the 21st century was diagnosed by the emergence and strengthening of the "Onda Rosa", with the rise of left-wing and progressive governments on the continent, recent years have shown a new dynamic, namely the return of more conservative and

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<sup>4</sup> Also elected were: Tabaré Vázquez (2005), in Uruguay; Evo Morales (2006), in Bolivia; Rafael Correa (2007), in Ecuador; Fernando Lugo (2008), in Paraguay.

<sup>5</sup> Political parties such as the PT in Brazil, the PS in Chile, and the PJ in Argentina have assumed the political and economic rules of liberal democracy and the market economy, promoting redistributive social policies. Although they were notably leftist parties, they discarded the revolutionary paths and accepted the restrictions imposed by the current political and economic system, such as electoral competition as the exclusive way to achieve power, the normativity of representative democracy (recognizing political and social plurality) and the need to establish broad alliances to govern. In addition to respecting the modus operandi of liberal democracy, they have adopted a moderate program of economic reforms.

right-wing governments in the main countries of the region, what has been called the "Blue Tide". In this conservative return, the general context includes the end of the commodity boom, the worsening of the economic situation, the wear and tear of left-wing governments, the general disenchantment of society with politics, and extreme polarization.

One of the first to be elected in this new conservative wave was Mauricio Macri, in 2015, in Argentina. Already in 2017, Sebastian Piñera was elected for a second term as President of Chile (after having held the post from 2010 to 2014). Also in 2017, Ivan Duque was elected president by the Centro Democrático de Colombia, in opposition to former president Juan Manuel Santos and the peace agreement with the FARC. Finally, in 2018, Jair Bolsonaro was elected to the presidency of Brazil with an anti-system platform, in favor of fighting corruption and anti-Party Workers' platform. However, it is not a unified political-ideological bloc of individuals and right-wing parties coming to power. Far from being homogenous, these governments reflect several local contextual variables<sup>6</sup>; all, however, combine adherence to the neoliberal model, mistrust of traditional politics and political parties (as well as of institutions in general, such as Congress), a conservative customs agenda, non-inclusiveness agendas on social issues, the militarization of public security, automatic alignment with the United States and, lastly and most importantly for the present analysis, a change in perspective on the regional integration institutions created during the progressive cycle (Pinheiro and Lima, 2019, p. 5).

Based on these initial considerations, the central objective of this article is to examine the general characteristics of the new governments in foreign policy for regional integration, highlighting what initiatives have been implemented by these governments and whether there is a change in relation to the actions of previous administrations. To this end, first of all, the study will present a conceptual debate on the classification "right" and "left". Secondly, the contexts of strengthening the new right in Brazil, Chile and Argentina will be examined, highlighting the main strategies for action of the "new right". Third, the central

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<sup>6</sup> For Zucatto (2019), we can identify more moderate positions, as in Argentina de Macri. On the other hand, a more radical and markedly conservative group has been gaining ground, such as Piñera (in his current term of office) and Bolsonaro, who marked the moment when the radical right came to the presidency of the country.

characteristics of the strategies of the new conservative governments for integration will be examined from primary and secondary sources, observing if there is a decrease or increase in the importance of the integration processes, and if there is a convergence of action, aiming at a conservative integrationist project in politics and a liberalizing one in the economy. Finally, the conclusions will be drawn.

## **1. The conceptualization of the "right" and the "left"**

The terms "right" and "left", according to Bobbio (2012, p.49), are used to contrast ideologies and movements related to both thought and political actions, and can be classified as ambiguous and of opposite meanings, mutually excluding, because there is no movement that can be classified simultaneously as right or left, and jointly exhaustive, admitting the hypothesis that a given doctrine is only or right or left. They are, therefore, antithetical terms, and the idea of divergent conceptions, opposing each other, prevails. The main reason why the dyad remains is that there is a left insofar as there is a right, and there is a right while there is a left. That is, one depends on the other for its existence - even if the two terms do not always have identical force. For Bobbio (2012, p.62), the predominance, whether of the left or the right, does not make the other part disappear; on the contrary, the two parts continue to exist simultaneously, so that each is the very *raison d'être* of the existence of the other. They are therefore interdependent, where one part exists if the other also exists.

Although the dyad is then challenged, the terms "right" and "left" are continuously used in political language. What, then, would be the criterion for distinguishing the terms? Admitting the spatial character of the concepts, without specific, determined and constant content over time, Bobbio stresses that the criterion of "equality and inequality" should differentiate the terms, considering between whom there is equality, in relation to which and on the basis of which criteria (Bobbio, 2012, p.113).

That is, the division between Right and Left expresses a difference in attitude towards equality. In this way, the left is given the greatest presumption for reducing inequalities, which would be social and eliminable; while the right is

more prone to unequal measures, since most inequalities would be natural and ineliminable. In other words, while the left understands that inequalities are artificial, socially constructed and possible to be reversed through an active role of the State, the right seizes inequalities as natural, being hardly eradicated, without the need for State intervention over them.

It should be noted, however, that the way in which the views of "right" and "left" are translated into political action is not unconditional, but needs to be understood within each context, that is, each time and space. They are not terms that designate fixed content, but diverse, according to time and situations (Bobbio, 2012, p. 107).

## **2. The contexts of the rights in South America: strengthening and strategies for action**

There are two crucial moments in understanding the rise of the new right wing and conservatism. At first, as already highlighted, the 1980s saw processes of democratization, where elites and parties linked to the right sought to free themselves from previous authoritarian regimes, making an instrumental use of democracy (Giordano, 2014). And, in a second moment, from the emergence of a wave of South American left, with subsequent crisis of the model and rise of the "new direct".

With the objective of establishing a minimum state in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, most South American countries (including Brazil, Chile and Argentina) moved towards a model of trade opening to the market and liberalizing reforms, replacing the model of state interventionism called "Substituição de Importações"<sup>7</sup>. The Crisis of the Developmental State, then, began with the economic liberalization of the military government of Augusto Pinochet - which influenced the adoption by other Latin American countries of a set of market-oriented policy measures, reducing the role of the State in the economy. In this

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<sup>7</sup> Such a model, which consisted of government primacy to direct industrialization policies based on the exchange of imports with domestic production of goods, in addition to the protection of basic industries through subsidies and trade barriers in the form of tariffs (Hirschman, 1968), predominated among Latin American countries until the mid-1980s, with the proliferation of state-owned enterprises and development banks.

way, the establishment of the “Washington Consensus” was allowed, which aimed at monetary stabilization and the re-establishment of market laws, together with fiscal discipline and changes in priorities in public spending, always in accordance with market laws and with the elimination or reduction of trade barriers.

In the 1990s, during the governments of Fernando Collor de Melo and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, in Brazil, Carlos Menem, in Argentina, and Patricio Aylwin and Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, in Chile, the reform agenda was essentially neoliberal, with a reduction in the role of the state in the economy, stabilizing economies and controlling inflation. Privatizations, trade liberalization, deregulation and adjustments took place, forcing countries to move in the same direction: that of free market democracies open to trade and investment flows. And, in a favorable international context, the reforms attracted foreign investment, which contributed to economic growth. (Panizza, 2006; Flores-Macías, 2012)<sup>8</sup>.

However, despite initial success, liberalizing reforms have failed to deliver on their promises to increase the prosperity of the population, and have exacerbated other problems, such as unemployment and social inequalities (Weyland, 2010, p.2). The state continued to face fiscal problems, economic growth remained low, and unemployment, informality and social inequality increased. And from 1998 onwards, South America began to feel more intensely the social effects of neoliberalism, in addition to the strong financial crisis and fiscal adjustment policies that have permeated the region.

Consequently, at the turn of the century, a wave of victories by the Latin American left ended the hegemony of the neoliberal model, defending changes in the state's development model. Thus, with the crisis of the neoliberal model, new political leaderships and the strengthening of left and centre-left parties emerged - in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Latin America as a whole. (Panizza, 2006; Lanzaro, 2009)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Specifically in the case of Brazil, Cardoso's administration promoted monetary stability, reducing inflation rates and allowing for the reduction of poverty, and the increase in consumption and international investment (Kingstone and Ponce, 2010, p.103). To maintain low inflation rates, Cardoso took measures to attract and maintain the flow of capital, raising interest rates. As a result, Cardoso abstained from structural reforms related to taxes and the pension system, in addition to increasing public sector debts. In addition, world economic crises also contributed to the deterioration of Cardoso's monetary orthodoxy.

<sup>9</sup> The common point is that, in Brazil as well as in Chile and Argentina, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva's PT, Ricardo Lagos' and Michelle Bachelet's PS and Néstor Kirchner's PJ were classified as

Even though it was a period in which left-wing and centre-left governments prevailed, the right wing remained active in the opposition, with considerable capacity to intervene in the political scenario by financing campaigns and lobbying political actors (preventing or postponing the approval of government projects), the dissemination of their ideals in the media, support for technocrats, the promotion of collective actors who organize the public space and influence the process of preference formation, the discourse of emphasis on fighting corruption, the strengthening of public security, the management of the public machine, and support for the overthrow of progressive governments<sup>10</sup> (Giordano, 2014; Kaltwasser, 2014, p. 35).

Based on these strategies, and in contexts of political, social and economic crises, Argentina, Chile and Brazil elected representatives of the right and centre-right to their respective presidencies<sup>11</sup>. In Argentina, Mauricio Macri founded the Commitment for Change Party, a center-right association, in 2002. He later joined the non-Peronist coalition named “Cambiamos”, winning the elections in December 2015 after twelve years of the center-left governments of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Kirchner (2007-2015). In Chile, Sebastian Piñera of the Chile “Vamos” right-wing coalition replaced Michelle Bachelet of the Socialist Party after being re-elected president in December 2017 with 54% of the vote. In Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro was elected by the Liberal Social Party (PSL) in 2018 with 55 percent of the vote, beating PT candidate Fernando Haddad.

Despite the backdrop of right-wing political positions, there are many differences between elected governments. In the social sphere, Bolsonaro

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center-left parties from the prism of social democracy (or moderation), adopting policies aligned with the social-democratic program on the social-economic axis as an alternative to neoliberalism, preserving the market as the center of the development model and trying to correct some of its shortcomings by increasing government intervention in the economy, with priority given to reducing unemployment, income redistribution policies to combat poverty, and investment in infrastructure (Lanzaro, 2009; Weyland, 2010; Flores-Macías, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> As happened in Paraguay in 2012, with the dismissal of Fernando Lugo, and in Brazil, in 2016, with the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff.

<sup>11</sup> The election of the right wing in Colombia and Peru should also be highlighted. In Colombia, Iván Duque of the Central Democratic Party succeeded Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018), who was elected in defense of the peace process with the FARC. In the elections, Duque was elected with 53.8% of the votes. In Peru, current President Martín Vizcarra took office in March 2018 shortly after Congress accepted the resignation of Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, who remained in office for only twenty months.



defends conservatism in customs, responding to the base of the evangelical electorate that elected him. Macri and Piñera, on the other hand, are seen as more liberal on social issues - Macri, for example, proposed a debate for abortion liberalization, while Piñera enacted a gender identity law. In the political arena, the presidents of Argentina and Chile make use of democratic rules, seeking consensus with the opposition to regiment congressional majorities. Bolsonaro, on the other hand, does not have an allied base so far and has tried to use pressure from his followers on social networks to get politicians to support his projects. Even in the economic field, while Macri and Piñera have clearer and more liberalizing platforms, Bolsonaro has not yet made it clear what his directions are, since the actions of various ministries have been guided by the confrontation between neoliberal logics against statistants.

As similarities, we can see the return of the United States as the main economic partner - more ideological, in the case of Bolsonaro, and more pragmatic, in relation to Macri and Piñera. We can also find in both the defense of the issue of security; however, while the presidents of Chile and Argentina have been carrying out measures to militarize internal security, the Brazilian president has sought to insert bills to liberalize the carrying of weapons in the country as a measure to reduce violence. In the economic field, the three leaders have been defending a neoliberal model that seeks to reduce the role of the state in the economy, balancing the accounts and lowering public spending to promote exports, in addition to boosting job creation in conjunction with the private sector. However, historically, the Chilean model favors the reduction of the role of the State in the economy, while Brazil and Argentina have societies more dependent on the State, with more entrenched public pension systems - which has hindered Macri's governability and may compromise the performance of Bolsonaro, who does not have a majority in the House of Representatives and the Federal Senate.

### **3. Foreign policy action for the regional integration of right-wing governments in South America**

The disintegration of the international order of the Cold War provoked immediate consequences for the South American environment, increasing the

pressure to shape regional institutions appropriate to the prescription of the Washington Consensus. In the meantime, in 1991, Mercosur (Mercado Comum do Sul) was created as a result of the Asunción Treaty signed by Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. Initially, Mercosur aimed at trade, customs tariffs and market access; but, between the lines, it aimed at obtaining preferential access to the Brazilian market, in exchange for Argentine support for Brazil's international trade strategies (Bouzas et al, 2002, p. 145)<sup>12</sup>.

However, with the Real crisis in Brazil and the recession in Argentina, integration weakened and cooperation was reduced. With the launch of IIRSA (Integration of South American Regional Infrastructure) in 2000, there was concern about the resumption of the economic development cycle to overcome the crisis of the neoliberal model. To this end, the infrastructure sector was prioritized to leverage growth through financed projects, and represented the beginning of a process of breaking with the profile of seeking unrestricted alignment with the Washington Consensus.

With the advent of the so-called "Onda Rosa", the programmatic convergence of the governments of Brazil, Chile and Argentina (in addition to Uruguay and also Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Venezuela) opened space for a cooperation agenda focused not only on trade issues. Thus, in 2007, UNASUR was created, with the establishment of a South American Defense Council (CDS) in order to represent the consolidation of new joint efforts for the defense and security of the continent, solidifying the region as a zone of peace through the resolution of conflicts. In 2010, the South American Infrastructure and Planning Council (COSIPLAN) was created, which absorbed IIRSA and gave a new focus to regional integration, with greater government participation and a systemic vision of the process (Jaeger, 2019, p. 8).

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<sup>12</sup> Mercosur is considered as an instrument for better insertion of Brazil in the world economy, aiming at international credibility and autonomy. Thus, since its inception, it has opted for low institutionalization and the intergovernmental process, without the need for a heavy bureaucracy, aiming at a more independent action and strengthening the leadership of the country. The intergovernmental logic, based on the actions of governments and presidents, enabled the balance of the treaty, but with low intensity and minimal bureaucratization, prioritizing the non-institutionalization and weakness of regional mechanisms, in addition to the attempt to mitigate pressures from elites or interest groups (Vigevani et al, 2008, p. 6-12). The degree of institutionalization, then, is kept purposefully low, ensuring the regional leadership of the country as an instrument for freedom of action in the international system.

However, as of 2011, the economic crisis hits emerging countries from the slowdown of the Chinese economy and from troubled internal contexts. At the same time, the processes of regional integration have not developed supranational institutions and have not achieved a strong social support. In addition, with the economic crisis, it has become increasingly difficult to pay for regional cooperation courses - especially for the region's largest suppliers of goods, namely Brazil and Argentina.

With the end of the progressive cycle in Brazil, Chile and Argentina, the new governments began to bet mainly on the approximation with the central powers - such as the United States and the European Union - that is, aligned with neoliberalism and with the preferences of the economically stronger countries, being based on the promotion of the private sector and of foreign direct investment, in addition to aligning with the security agenda of the United States for the region<sup>13</sup> (Sanahuja and Comini, 2018).

However, with the central powers assuming protectionist positions, Macri became more reticent in his association with the center and has been seeking to strengthen relations with Asia, in addition to establishing a diplomatic balance scheme with China and Russia, establishing projects in the areas of nuclear energy, oil, infrastructure and trade. On the other hand, Chile continues to have its external action guided by bilateralism, whose center-left or center-right governments seek to implement a pragmatic approach in foreign policy, through its economization and acceptance of globalization and the dynamism of its borders, seeking an ideological orientation together with the United States and other industrialized economies, in addition to seeking free trade agreements and participation in international treaties. On the other hand, in the first six months of the government, Jair Bolsonaro has been aligning himself unconditionally with American positions, which has caused some unpredictability in the country's relations with the traditional partnerships with China and Russia.

In this new scenario of the rise of a new cycle, the emergence of several governments to the right of the political spectrum in South America has generated several consequences for regional integration processes. In the first place, the

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<sup>13</sup> Colombia has a special role to play in this context following the rise of Ivan Duque in 2018 and the victory of the "no" vote in the plebiscite on negotiations with the FARC. In addition, the country joined NATO as an external partner and became a member of the OECD.

Unasur crisis became latent as of January 2017, when then Secretary General Ernesto Samper left office in protest at the impeachment of the President of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff. In April 2018, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru suspended their participation in the organization<sup>14</sup>. Second, with the escalation of the Venezuelan crisis, the main governments of the region began to meet in the Lima Group - formed in 2017 by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Paraguay with a view to a peaceful solution to the crisis, being the main axis of international opposition to Nicolás Maduro<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, the opposition to Nicolás Maduro in the Lima Group, together with an option for open regionalism and the realignment with the global center, meant the strengthening of an idea of pragmatic regional integration, advancing with the disarticulation of Unasur, as well as the establishment of channels of dialogue so that Mercosur may have a policy of coordination with the Pacific Alliance, whose members are Chile, Mexico, Colombia and Peru<sup>16</sup>.

Recently, in March 2019, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guyana, Paraguay and Peru<sup>17</sup> created PROSUL (Forum for the Progress of South America), whose founding treaty establishes the body as a regional space for coordination and cooperation to advance toward more effective integration in infrastructure, energy, health, defense and security issues. There is, however, no provision for institutional strengthening, privileging a flexible structure. Therefore, unlike Unasur, which emerged at a time when countries had predominantly leftist leaders, Prosul emerges at a time of rising right on the continent. Moreover, while Unasur had a better consolidated structure, with a headquarters in Ecuador,

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<sup>14</sup> In April 2019, the governments of Macri and Bolsonaro denounced the Unasur Constitutional Treaty, formalizing their withdrawal from the organization (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2019; Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> In relation to the Venezuelan crisis, the governments of Macri, Bolsonaro and Piñera insist on an immediate withdrawal from the regime of Nicolás Maduro and support the interim government of Juan Guaidó in international forums.

<sup>16</sup> The agreement between Mercosur and the European Union should be highlighted. However, the bases of the agreement have not yet been disclosed until July 1, 2019, and there is still a need for internal ratification by the member states.

<sup>17</sup> With the exclusion of Nicolás Maduro's Venezuela, meeting the country's objectives of isolation and rapprochement with the United States. Furthermore, it should be noted that the initiative for the creation of PROSUL was Colombia's in partnership with Chile, and Brazil and Argentina were in second place in the new arrangement. This indicates, according to Jaeger (2019, p. 10), a new configuration in regional relations unprecedented in recent history, marked by integration in the Brazil-Argentina axis and the possibility of Brazilian leadership.

Prosul functions as a forum for flexible dialogue, organized according to the will of the participants.

### 3.1. Foreign policy, regionalism and positions of the governments of Bolsonaro, Macri and Piñera

In order to check how the position on general foreign policy and regionalism has been positioned in the governments of Bolsonaro, Macri and Piñera, the article analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively the official documents contained on the websites of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of both countries, and examined the official publications made by the respective Ministries and Presidents on social networks<sup>18</sup>.

First, a quantitative analysis was made of the official accounts of the Presidents of the Republic of both countries, in addition to the publications of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in 2019<sup>19</sup>, verifying the percentage of publications related to regional integration and also to the main crisis in the region, that of Venezuela.

In a second moment, the study used the discourse analysis methodology to understand the interests that the actors defend and the implications of political discourse marked by specific constructions and subjectivities, which allows to see narrowness and singularities and the conceptions of power that are inherent to the discursive practices through which the agents are constructed (Doty, 1993; Hansen, 2006). Through the discourse analysis of a specific social network, namely Twitter<sup>20</sup>, We can understand how Brazil, Chile and Argentina have

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<sup>18</sup> More specifically, on Twitter, which has shown how digital diplomacy has become increasingly important in an interconnected world and with a growing number of international actors. The creation and development of the Internet has brought significant impacts to everyday foreign policy activity, broadening its concept (Aprigio, 2010) and bringing the importance of public diplomacy, where state and non-state actors use the media and other communication channels to influence public opinion in foreign countries (Gilboa, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> In both cases, the article examined all publications of the respective official accounts from January 1 to July 1, 2019. The use of this time period is justified because it is only during these six months that we can observe the three presidents (Bolsonaro, Macri and Piñera) acting simultaneously in their terms of office.

<sup>20</sup> The choice of Twitter is justified in view of the fact that the social network has become one of the main social media channels used by political leaders, containing official positions and speeches that are essential for understanding the way foreign policy is made.

responded to the question of regional integration and regional crises, as well as understand what the main focuses of each country's foreign policy are.

The Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in its official account @ItamaratyGovBr, has produced 502 publications. Of these, 28 (5.5%) related to Regional Integration, while 50 (10%) referred to Brazil's main partner, the United States. In addition, 29 (5.7%) highlighted the crisis in Venezuela. It should also be noted that most of the publications emphasized Brazil's presidential meetings with the United States, Israel, Paraguay, Argentina, Chile and Juan Guaidó, recognized by the country as the President of Venezuela. Regarding the Venezuelan crisis, the agency's main publications highlighted the importance of recognizing Guaidó, as can be seen below:

"Brazil calls on the international community, especially those countries that have not yet recognized the PR in charge of Guaidó, to join Venezuela's liberation effort, recognizing the legitimate Guaidó government and demanding that the regime's violence against its own population cease." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)<sup>21</sup>.

During the period under review, only one post made implicit reference to the importance of regional integration. On June 28th, the organ stressed that "Mercosur and the European Union concluded today, in Brussels, after 20 years, the free trade agreement between the two blocs. Itamaraty coordinated the negotiation effort of the Brazilian government" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)<sup>22</sup>.

On the other hand, President Jair Bolsonaro (@jairbolsonaro) made 938 posts in the period, 133 (14.1%) referring to the performance in foreign policy. Of these, only 14 (10%) referred to Regional Integration, as a focus on the exit of Unasur, Prosul and Mercosul, as evidenced by the publications below:

"Yesterday in Santiago we laid the foundations for a new space for dialogue and integration in South America: PROSUL. The main pillars will be democracy, prosperity and respect for sovereignty, opposed to the totalitarian advance observed in the continent in recent years with UNASUR" (Bolsonaro, Jair)<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Available at <https://twitter.com/ItamaratyGovBr/status/1099519992268288001> . Accessed July 3, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Available at <https://twitter.com/ItamaratyGovBr/status/1144663870721708041> . Accessed July 3, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/jairbolsonaro/status/1109408486578941952> . Accessed on 3 July 2019.

“Foreign Minister @ernestofaraujo formalized the withdrawal of the Union of South American Nations (Unasur) and constituted the Forum for the Progress of South America (PROSUL). It is part of the new bloc Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay and Peru. The only active members are Uruguay, Guyana, Bolivia, Suriname and Venezuela. Unasur was born in 2008 as a project of the then Venezuelan President, Hugo Chávez, and was supported by Lula.” (Bolsonaro, Jair)<sup>24</sup>.

“Historical! Our team, led by Ambassador Ernesto Araújo, has just closed the Mercosur-EU Agreement, which had been unsuccessfully negotiated since 1999. This will be one of the most important trade agreements of all time and will bring enormous benefits to our economy.” (Bolsonaro, Jair)<sup>25</sup>.

There is no reference to a supposed Brazilian leadership in the integration process. Furthermore, most of the Brazilian president's publications refer to a process of de-ideologizing the country's foreign policy, which can also be seen in the messages of support for the United States-Brazil relationship and the recognition of Juan Guaidó as president of Venezuela, as we see below:

“For the first time in a long time, a Brazilian President who is not anti-American arrives in Washington. It's the beginning of a partnership for freedom and prosperity, as Brazilians have always wanted.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)<sup>26</sup>

“Brazil is in solidarity with the suffering Venezuelan people enslaved by a dictator supported by the PT, PSOL and ideologically aligned. We support the freedom of this sister nation to finally live a true democracy. Brazil is following the situation in Venezuela very closely and reaffirms its support for the democratic transition taking place in the neighbouring country. Brazil is on the side of the people of Venezuela of President Juan Guaidó and the freedom of Venezuelans. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/jairbolsonaro/status/1118101835057963008> . Accessed July 3, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/jairbolsonaro/status/1144656459969572864> . Accessed July 3, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/jairbolsonaro/status/1107375044320210944> . Accessed July 3, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/jairbolsonaro/status/1123241659658059777> . Accessed July 3, 2019.

In Argentina, the *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto* (@CancilleriaARG) published 370 messages, of which 31 (8.3%) referred to regional integration - the same number as publications on the Venezuelan crisis. Most of the publications provided outstanding relevance for the country's international insertion through trade agreements with Chile, the European Union, South Korea and Singapore, through bilateral visits to India, Vietnam and Brazil, and through the emphasis on South-South cooperation as a strategy (a fact that was not mentioned in any publication by Brazilian foreign policy actors).

It should be noted that the body referred to the importance of regional integration, specifically of Mercosur, in the following tweets:

“Meeting of Mercosur national coordinators at the Palacio San Martín: Mercosur is our main platform for international insertion, but we aim to turn it into a more modern and efficient tool. With our partners from Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay we agree on the need to promote reforms with an effective impact on the structure and dynamics of Mercosur. During the Argentine Presidency of the bloc, we will work on its modernization, integration into the world and simplification of processes. The institutional reform of Mercosur is essential”. (*Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto*)<sup>28</sup>

“We signed the Mercosur-EU agreement, which represents a strategic advance in Argentina's positioning on the international scene. This reinforces the commercial agenda of our country and our bloc”. (*Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto*)<sup>29</sup>

With this, it is clear the importance that Argentina, through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has given to the process of regional integration in Mercosur, aiming to strengthen the bloc in order to improve the strategic positioning of the country in the international arena.

President Mauricio Macri (@mauriciomacri) made 378 posts, of which 88 (23%) were related to the country's foreign policy. Of these, 20 publications (22%) mentioned the crisis in Venezuela. On January 23, Macri declared his support for Guaidó, acknowledging it:

“as President in Charge of that country. Like the other countries of the Lima Group, we are confident

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<sup>28</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/CancilleriaARG/status/1095763456693882881> . Accessed July 4, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/JorgeFaurie/status/1144664380828725249> . Accessed July 4, 2019.



that the decision of the Assembly and its President will lead to the restoration of democracy through free and transparent elections, with the full force of the Constitution and the participation of opposition leaders." (Macri, Mauricio)<sup>30</sup>.

However, unlike Bolsonaro, Macri has not used the discourse of ideology as the main component of his foreign policy, highlighting the importance of meetings and dialogues with leaders from the center-left field, such as President Tabaré Vázquez<sup>31</sup>. Another fact is that there is the defense of the international insertion of the country with several partners, such as India and the emphasis in the II UN Conference for South-South Cooperation. Moreover, Macri made little reference to regional integration in his speeches (six in all), which seems to diagnose greater independence from presidential diplomacy - since Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has given much emphasis to the importance of regional integration for the country's competitive insertion in the world.

In Chile, the *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores* (@MinRel\_Chile) made 591 posts, 60 (10.1%) of which related to regional integration, with emphasis on Prosul. In a publication published by Minister Roberto Ampuero and reposted by the agency, it was noted that "due to the failure of what was Unasur, it took us three years without being able to operate, without the integration of South America working. It is completely paralyzed" (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores)<sup>32</sup>. Ainda a respeito da Unasul, according to Ampuero, "did not have the conditions to allow the integration of South America. The space that does have a clear agenda and active participation is Prosur" (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores)<sup>33</sup> which, in the words of the Minister,

"it is a source of pride that we have been able to face, resolve, organize and attend so well to the representatives of 11 countries [...] with what Chile's leadership has been achieved very clearly, it has become very clear that Chile has broken with 5

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<sup>30</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/mauriciomacri/status/1088165355640500227> . Accessed July 4, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> "Today I met with the president of Uruguay, Tabaré Vázquez, to analyze the situation in Venezuela and we agree on the importance of energizing Mercosur to promote more opportunities and trade agreements". Available at: <https://twitter.com/mauriciomacri/status/1095778896065323016> . Access on July 4, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Available at: [https://twitter.com/Minrel\\_Chile/status/1109042499367174144\\_Chile/status/1109042499367174144](https://twitter.com/Minrel_Chile/status/1109042499367174144_Chile/status/1109042499367174144) . Accessed July 5, 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Available at: [https://twitter.com/Minrel\\_Chile/status/1120389599610712065](https://twitter.com/Minrel_Chile/status/1120389599610712065) . Accessed July 4, 2019.

years of paralysis of dialogue and integration in South America". (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores)<sup>34</sup>.

However, 99 (16.7 percent) of the agency's publications highlighted the crisis in Venezuela, emphasizing that Chile "has strengthened its leadership in the defence of democracy, freedom and respect for human rights, through concerted action with other governments" (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores)<sup>35</sup>. Again, the agency refers to the country's leadership role - a term that was not used in any way by the ministries of Brazil and Argentina. And, like the Argentine agency, the Chilean Ministry emphasized the need for the country's participation in several bilateral and multilateral agreements, with a focus on APEC, the Pacific Alliance and the TPP11.

Sebastian Piñera (@sebastianpinera), the current president of Chile, is the least active president on social networks, with 242 publications in the analyzed period. However, 56 of them were related to Chilean foreign policy (23%), 20 to Venezuela and 10 to regional integration. With regard to Venezuela, Piñera said,

"one of the noblest and most beautiful principles of Chile's Foreign Policy is its firm commitment and defense of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. These principles must always be defended and they do not recognize borders. That's why I'm going to Cúcuta, to defend freedom in Venezuela". (Piñera, Sebastian)<sup>36</sup>.

In regional integration, the focus was again on Prosul, with criticism of Unasur and emphasis on the leadership process in Chile. According to Piñera, the

"Unasur has been paralyzed for 3 years and failed because of excessive ideology. Our proposal is to create a new referent in South America (PROSUR) for better coordination, cooperation and regional integration, free of ideologies, open to all and 100% committed to democracy and human rights." (Piñera, Sebastian)<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Available at: <https://minrel.gob.cl/con-lo-que-se-ha-logrado-ha-quedado-muy-claro-el-liderazgo-de-chile/minrel/2019-03-25/135004.html> . Accessed July 5, 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Available at: [https://twitter.com/Minrel\\_Chile/status/1126125253447618560\\_Chile/status/1126125253447618560](https://twitter.com/Minrel_Chile/status/1126125253447618560_Chile/status/1126125253447618560) . Accessed July 5, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/sebastianpinera/status/1098207918850301952> . Accessed July 5, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/sebastianpinera/status/1097508516569509888> . Accessed July 5, 2019.

Still, in the words of the Chilean president,

“It's been more than five years since the Presidents of South America met. Unasur failed because of excessive ideology and bureaucracy. Prosur is a forum, without ideology or bureaucracy, so that all the democratic countries of South America can dialogue, coordinate, collaborate and make our voice heard”. (Piñera, Sebastian)<sup>38</sup>.

Piñera was also emphatic in defending Mercosur, without making reference to the Brazilian performance, highlighting only the negotiations carried out by Argentina. He congratulated Argentina and President Mauricio Macri “after 20 years of negotiations, to have successfully concluded an agreement between Mercosur and the European Union. Without a doubt this agreement opens a world of growth and development opportunities for Argentina and Mercosur”. (Piñera, Sebastian)<sup>39</sup>.

From the data, we can see some trends. In common, the three countries have worked together with the Lima Group to solve the crisis in Venezuela, openly defending Juan Guaidó as the recognized president. There is also a defense of regional integration, with greater intensity in Brazil and with greater intensity in Chile, through Prosul and criticism of Unasur. There does not seem to be a convergence of the three countries in a joint defense of integration, since there are different interests and different positions - especially Brazil's in relation to both.

Brazil has paid much attention to the United States in its foreign policy, taking a more secondary position in regional integration, without making any mention of the country's leadership in such a process. The country, in the figure of President Jair Bolsonaro, has highlighted an ideological position in the discourse, away from any position linked to the left and with privilege of relationships with political actors of right-wing ideology. In turn, Argentina's foreign policy has acted more pragmatically, clearly seeking to defend regional integration and bilateral and multilateral agreements with a view to the country's international insertion. Macri did not adhere to Bolsonaro's anti-left discourse,

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<sup>38</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/sebastianpinera/status/1106898588376793089> . Accessed July 5, 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/sebastianpinera/status/1145336651171975168> . Accessed July 5, 2019.

making several alliances with South-South Cooperation countries, and emphasizing the importance of Mercosur for the country. Finally, Chile has defended two central aspects of its foreign policy: a leadership position in the solution of the Venezuelan conflict; and regional integration through Prosul, also praising the Chilean leadership in a process with low institutionalization and still incipient.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Progressive left or center-left governments dominated South American politics during the first decade of the 20th century. Despite many advances in diverse social areas and with an emphasis on advocating for South American integration, they left power amid various corruption scandals, increasing insecurity, and falling economic growth.

After the first decade of the 21st century, several right-wing governments emerged on the South American scene. Macri, in 2015 in Argentina, Piñera, in 2017 in Chile, and Bolsonaro, in 2018 in Brazil, were elected with various criticisms of previous progressive administrations, emphasizing political change, the fight against corruption, the strengthening of internal security and the defense of non-ideological action in foreign policy.

In 2019 - a period in which we can visualize the performance of the three leaders together in office - we have observed two general trends: first, the fierce opposition to President Nicolás Maduro, and the defense of Juan Guaidó as effective president, with the participation in international forums aimed at a solution without Mature; second, the withdrawal of the integrationist processes considered as ideological, such as Unasur, and the emergence of Prosul, with a tendency to homogenize the right in its agenda for the integration of South America.

However, there are differences between the rights that have come to power, and the very consolidation and continuity of a right-wing cycle is still open. While Bolsonaro has given much more attention to an ideological discourse in favor of relations with the main Western powers (more specifically, the United States), Piñera and Macri, on the other hand, have acted with more emphasis on integration in order to improve their international insertion. Argentina has opted

to diversify its partners and defend Mercosur, as it needs regional integration to strengthen its negotiating position at the international level. Chile, on the other hand, seems to take advantage of the "power vacuum" in the region, in which no country assumes a leadership position, and has tried to highlight, through speeches, its intervention in favor of the solution of the Venezuelan conflict and to ensure the strengthening of regional integration through Prosul.

There is, however, no clear convergence of all right-wing governments, with all acting with clear and edifying proposals. Despite South America's regional integration being established as a strategic element, we can see that Brazil has not seen regionalism as central to its foreign policy, while Chile and Argentina seem to pay more attention to the process, with a focus on Prosul and Mercosur, respectively.

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