



RESEARCH ARTICLE/ÉTUDE ORIGINALE

Soft Balancing, Binding or Bandwagoning? Understanding Institutional Responses to Power Disparities in the Americas

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Abstract

What strategies will states pursue in managing their relations with more powerful neighbours? International Relations scholarship identifies a wide range of policy options open to “secondary states,” including soft balancing, bandwagoning and institutional binding. We provide a conceptual framework to distinguish between these similar and often conflated institutional strategies on the basis of two dimensions: threat perception and inclusiveness. We then apply this framework to the inter-American system. Analyzing original data on treaty action between 1946 and 2015, we find that secondary states’ adherence to multilateral agreements increases when the United States participates and when states do not perceive the hegemon to be a threat. These findings suggest that institutional binding captures the dynamics of inter-American cooperation more adequately than either soft balancing or bandwagoning: states balance against perceived threats but bind their friends.

Résumé

Quelles stratégies les États poursuivront-ils dans la gestion de leurs relations avec des voisins plus puissants? Les études savantes en relations internationales identifient un large éventail d’options politiques ouvertes aux « États secondaires », y compris l’équilibre souple, le rapprochement (bandwagoning) et les arrangements obligatoires. Nous fournissons un cadre conceptuel permettant de distinguer ces stratégies institutionnelles similaires et souvent confondues sur la base de deux dimensions : la perception de la menace et l’inclusion. Nous appliquons ensuite ce cadre au système interaméricain. En analysant les données originales sur les formalités conventionnelles entre 1946 et 2015, nous constatons que l’adhésion des États secondaires aux accords multilatéraux augmente lorsque les États-Unis y participent et lorsque les États ne perçoivent pas l’hégémonie comme une menace. Ces résultats suggèrent que les obligations institutionnelles reflètent mieux la dynamique de la coopération interaméricaine que les équilibres souples ou les tendances à l’élargissement : les États s’équilibrent en fonction des menaces perçues, mais lient leurs amis.

The authors are listed alphabetically and contributed equally to this study.

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Introduction

International Relations (IR) scholarship has conventionally focussed on the strategies of powerful states such as great powers and hegemons. However, most states in the international system are not great powers, nor do they have the capacity or intention to become hegemons. For these “secondary states,” managing relations with the hegemon is a central concern. On a spectrum between confrontation and accommodation, Jesse et al. (2012: 14) identify a range of strategies open to secondary states: hard balancing, soft balancing, balking, blackmailing, leash slipping, remaining neutral, binding, bonding and bandwagoning. Others have added hedging (Koga, 2018) and enmeshment (Goh, 2013) to this already long—and by no means exhaustive—list. Still others have stretched and blended these concepts to create hybrid categories such as “soft bandwagoning” (Grigorescu, 2008) or “institutional balancing” (He, 2008). Yet the conceptual boundaries that distinguish these strategies are often blurred. The tendency in the literature appears to favour the creation of new concepts rather than the clarification of existing ones.

In what follows, we develop a framework that distinguishes between three similar and often-conflated institutional strategies of managing power disparities: soft balancing, bandwagoning and institutional binding.¹ By *institutional strategies*, we mean policies by which smaller states engage with the more powerful through the creation and maintenance of international institutions, understood as “explicit arrangements, negotiated among international actors, that prescribe, proscribe, and/or authorize behavior” (Koremenos et al., 2001: 762). We contend that such clarification is needed because these concepts derive from competing theoretical traditions and are frequently hypothesized as rival outcomes, yet in practice they tend to be conflated, which limits their analytical utility.

We introduce two dimensions to differentiate between these strategies: *threat perception* and *inclusiveness*. Bandwagoning should occur when secondary states partner with the hegemon in response to a perceived threat (Walt, 1987). As such, bandwagoning is inherently inclusive. By contrast, when states cooperate with the hegemon not because they feel threatened but to achieve mutual gains, we describe this as institutional binding (see Ikenberry, 2001). While bandwagoning and institutional binding are both inclusive strategies, soft balancing is not. Despite attempts to stretch the concept to incorporate inclusive strategies such as “institutional balancing,” we maintain that soft balancing is only analytically meaningful as an exclusive strategy—that is, when secondary states cooperate in ways that exclude the hegemon (see Brooks and Wohlforth, 2005).

We apply this distinction to the case of the inter-American system. This regional cooperation scheme dates back to the late nineteenth century, when it became institutionalized under the leadership of the United States (see Atkins, 1997; Petersen and Schulz, 2018). Since then, and especially during the Cold War, the

inter-American system, with the Organization of American States (OAS) at its core, has been described as an instrument of the United States to consolidate its power over the Western Hemisphere (see Herz, 2011). We argue that a conceptual framework that distinguishes between threat and inclusiveness clarifies the institutional responses of states in the region. As such, we do not attempt to explain the full set of strategies that states in the Americas have used in their dealings with the United States; rather, we are interested in identifying the primary power management strategy that has underpinned engagement through the inter-American system.

As a regional arrangement, the inter-American system is primarily based on a set of multilateral agreements. Analyzing states' commitment to these treaties allows us to identify the drivers of institutional engagement in the region. For this purpose, we analyze the full set of inter-American treaties adopted between 1946 and 2015. We then contrast adherence to inter-American treaties with other, global agreements using supplementary data from the United Nations Treaty Series (UNTS) (n.d.).

We find evidence that institutional binding, rather than bandwagoning or soft balancing, best describes the strategies of secondary states in the inter-American system. In this context, states' adherence increases when the United States participates and when it is perceived as less threatening. By contrast, the participation of the secondary states of the Americas does not appear to be conditioned by these concerns at the global level.

The remainder proceeds as follows. In the next section, we develop the conceptual distinction between bandwagoning, soft balancing and institutional binding. The subsequent section discusses the research design, data and operationalization of the variables. We then employ event history analysis to contrast the drivers of inter-American cooperation with treaty participation at the global level. The conclusion considers the broader implications and limitations of this study.

Binding, Balancing and Bandwagoning: What Is the Difference?

Conventionally, IR theories have adopted the perspective of the powerful, especially focussing on great power politics as a potential source of conflict. However, scholars have long called for closer attention to the policy choices of secondary states (Cooper et al., 1991; Keohane, 1969; Williams et al., 2012). New concepts have proliferated to fill this gap. We argue that what is needed now is a framework to conceptually disentangle overlapping and often ambiguous terms.

In terms of power management, balance-of-power theory argues that states will take measures to avoid concentrations of power that might jeopardize their security (see Parent and Rosato, 2015). However, this often leads to contradictory theoretical expectations. According to the (defensive) neorealist strand of the literature, states should balance either internally, through the creation of capabilities, or externally, by forming countervailing alliances. "Secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side; for it is the stronger side that threatens them" (Waltz, 1979: 127). Extending this argument, Walt (1987) posits that states balance not only against material capabilities but against threats. The level of threat that one state poses to another depends on the states' material capabilities and geographic

proximity and on a state's perceptions of an adversary's "aggressive intentions" (24–27). Importantly, Walt explicitly links ideological alignment to threat perception, noting that ideologically similar states tend to fear each other less (40).²

Conventional balance-of-power theory anticipated that states would band together against the United States in the aftermath of the Cold War (Mearsheimer, 1990). The absence of clear counterbalancing in this period has refocused the debate around two competing theoretical explanations: bandwagoning and soft balancing.

Although Waltz (1979: 126) argues that weaker states should only side with the stronger in exceptional cases, proponents of bandwagoning posit that the overwhelming power of the United States has made balancing unfeasible (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008). In this view, engagement with the hegemon, including participation in institutions it has created, represents the only way forward for secondary states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thus, Schweller (1994) argues that bandwagoning is not synonymous with capitulation but refers to a more cooperative relationship that can be profitable to secondary partners.

Whereas bandwagoning implies the absence of balancing, an alternative account suggests that secondary states have "soft balanced" against the hegemon. In this view, "hard balancing," which occurs through the creation of material capabilities and countervailing military alliances, has been absent because states facing overwhelming US preponderance have opted for more tacit means, including "international institutions, economic statecraft, and ad hoc diplomatic arrangements" (Pape, 2005: 44; see also Paul, 2004: 16).

Soft balancing has emerged as one of the most popular concepts to describe institutional responses to power disparities. However, among other aspects, critics object to its unwieldy breadth and general vagueness, which make it too ambiguous for rigorous empirical testing and indistinguishable from ordinary "diplomatic friction" (Lieber and Alexander, 2005: 109). Others add that soft balancing only makes sense if it is logically connected to balance-of-power theory; otherwise, almost any policy choice could be described as soft balancing, robbing the concept of all analytical value and rendering it unfalsifiable (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2005: 104).

Responding to these criticisms, Paul proposes a redefined conception, according to which soft balancing refers only to the following: "restraining the power or aggressive policies of a state through international institutions, concerted diplomacy via limited, informal ententes, and economic sanctions in order to make its aggressive actions less legitimate in the eyes of the world and hence its strategic goals more difficult to obtain" (Paul, 2018: 20; see also Paul, 2004: 3). In this sense, soft balancing could take many forms and may resemble institutional binding, among other strategies. However, we argue that the key difference between soft balancing and institutional binding is that "soft-balancing mechanisms are used against a threatening state," while institutional-binding mechanisms are not (Paul, 2018: 38).

Despite this clarification, ambiguities remain (see Feng and He, 2017). While Paul (2018) asserts that soft balancing only occurs in response to a perceived threat, the vast majority of the literature has not made this connection sufficiently clear. Oswald (2006), for instance, even suggests that soft balancing occurs among "friends," which clearly falls outside the scope of the original concept. Similarly

confusing is the assertion that NATO is an example of soft balancing, which (wrongly, we argue) implies that soft balancing can be inclusive (see also Paul, 2018). Furthering this confusion, He (2008: 493) argues that “institutional balancing,” a term he uses as synonymous with soft balancing, can be “exclusive” or “inclusive” depending on the power disparities between states. Contrary to this position, we maintain that, strictly speaking, soft balancing should only occur (a) in response to a perceived threat and (b) in an exclusive context—that is, where the threatening power is not part of the resulting arrangement.

Thus, our conception of soft balancing differs from Friedman and Long (2015), who argue that inter-American cooperation in the early twentieth century attempted to limit the ability of the United States to unilaterally deploy force in the region (see also Scarfi, 2016). While these authors see soft balancing as an inclusive strategy in response to a perceived threat, we argue that this conflates soft balancing with institutional binding.

As these examples illustrate, at present, the literature suffers from considerable conceptual slippage. For example, institutional binding is often treated as a subtype of soft balancing (Flemes and Wehner, 2015: 164; Saltzman, 2012: 134–35; He and Feng, 2008: 393). However, this treatment ignores the fact that institutional binding is not a form of balance-of-power politics. Instead, the notion is commonly associated with Ikenberry’s theory of strategic restraint and liberal institutional theories more generally, although not exclusively (Ikenberry, 2001: 40–42; 2011: 183–84; see also Goh, 2013; Hurrell, 2006: 10–12). Ikenberry argues that the United States fostered a rule-based international order after the Second World War in which the hegemon accepted institutional constraints upon the exercise of its power in exchange for the acquiescence of secondary states. Although Ikenberry develops his argument from the perspective of the hegemon, the underlying logic is a mutually beneficial bargain: for the United States, this bargain legitimized its leadership and entrenched its power; for its Western allies, it provided a safeguard against abuses of power and an opportunity to shape the agenda (Ikenberry, 2001: 41). Ikenberry sees institutional binding as consensual and cooperative and, therefore, clearly distinct from balance-of-power politics (see Ikenberry, 2011: 183; 2018: 7). This is not to suggest that hegemons and secondary states are always equal partners; nor does it mean that security concerns are irrelevant. However, to the extent that institutional binding responds to threat perceptions, it aims at preventing current partners from turning against the hegemon in the future. English School and constructivist variants of institutional binding consequently stress legitimacy concerns and the normative consensus that underpins binding strategies.

It is noteworthy that when applying this concept to US–Latin American relations, Ikenberry discards strategic restraint, as he views relations in the region as “crudely imperial” (Ikenberry, 2011: 27; see also Long, 2018: 1376). Similarly, Mares (1997: 197) sees the Americas and their respective “subsystems” as dominated by balance-of-power concerns. In contrast, others have shown that institutional binding has a long history in the Americas, as Latin American states have utilized international law and regional institutions to manage power asymmetries (Butt, 2013; Hurrell, 1996: 164; Kacowicz, 2005; Merke, 2015).

We argue that these three concepts can be distinguished on the basis of two dimensions: inclusiveness and threat perception (see Table 1). Inclusiveness refers

Table 1 Conceptual Differences among Soft balancing, Bandwagoning and Institutional Binding

| | | Inclusiveness (<i>vis-à-vis</i> the hegemon) | |
|--|---------------------------|---|---|
| | | <i>Exclusive</i> | <i>Inclusive</i> |
| Perceived threat (posed by the hegemon) | <i>High</i> <i>Low</i> | Soft balancing Disengagement | Bandwagoning Institutional binding |

to the participation of the hegemon in the resulting arrangement. Because it aims to frustrate the hegemon, soft balancing is an exclusive strategy. This is in keeping with the logic of balance-of-power theory, which suggests that since soft balancing is a form of balancing, states can only “soft balance” against, rather than with, the hegemon. The dimension of inclusiveness distinguishes soft balancing from bandwagoning, which occurs when secondary states ally themselves to the most threatening power (Walt, 2005: 183).

Both soft balancing and bandwagoning occur in response to a perceived threat. We follow Walt’s (1987) argument that material capabilities alone do not determine the magnitude of a threat posed by a state. In this view, it is misleading to argue that cooperation with the United States, as the preponderant power, always amounts to bandwagoning. Whether or not this is the case depends on whether the secondary state does so in response to a perceived threat posed by the hegemon.³

Bandwagoning is thus distinct from institutional binding. In both cases, secondary states expect to benefit from cooperation with the hegemon; therefore, both strategies are cooperative forms of managing power differentials. However, whereas bandwagoning occurs in response to a threat posed by the hegemon, institutional binding is motivated by mutual gains.

Finally, the resulting 2 × 2 table (Table 1) includes a fourth category that we term *disengagement*.⁴ By definition, disengagement is not an institutional strategy since it involves the deliberate choice not to participate. We expect disengagement to occur when states have no interest in cooperating with the hegemon and do not feel obligated to do so in response to a threat. By default, we assume that states attempt to guard their autonomy—an assumption that is supported by a considerable literature on Latin American international relations (see Tickner, 2003). Thus, we should not expect secondary states to readily cooperate without good reason, especially when this cooperation includes the hegemon.

In sum, we propose a framework to distinguish three common but often conflated institutional strategies for managing power asymmetries (Figure 1). Not all power management strategies (A) involve institutional cooperation (B), nor is all institutional cooperation motivated by power management concerns. However, there is a subset of both phenomena that involves institutional responses to power disparities. As Figure 1 illustrates, the three primary concepts—bandwagoning (1), institutional binding (2) and soft balancing (3)—deal predominantly (although not exclusively) with both institutions and the management of power differentials. Whereas bandwagoning and soft balancing, as power management strategies, may also occur through institutional or non-institutional means, institutional binding, as an institutional strategy first and foremost, must include some form of institutional cooperation, although this need not always be motivated by power

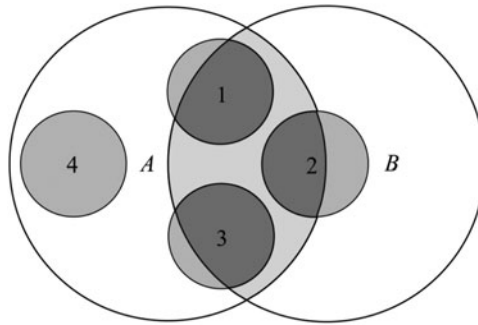


Figure 1 Conceptual Scope.

Note: A = power management strategies; B = institutional cooperation; 1 = bandwagoning; 2 = institutional binding; 3 = soft balancing; 4 = disengagement.

management concerns. By contrast, disengagement (4) is explicitly non-institutional and therefore does not intersect with B.

Research Design

We apply our conceptual framework to empirical analyses using two original datasets on treaty participation. The first contains information on every treaty that was adopted as part of the inter-American system between 1946 and 2015 (74 agreements in total; see online Appendix D).⁵ The second contains a sample of multilateral treaties registered with the United Nations during the same time period (835 agreements).⁶ In both samples, we examine the conditions that lead the secondary states of the Americas to pursue different institutional strategies in their relations with the United States. The data are summarized in online Appendix A.

Within the inter-American system, treaties are generally open to all members (even Cuba, which was suspended from the OAS in 1962, has occasionally bound itself to inter-American agreements). Thus, it is theoretically possible that any independent country of the region can bind itself to any inter-American agreement. We extend this logic to the United Nations Treaty Series (UNTS) sample. Although the full UNTS registry also contains bilateral and closed multilateral agreements, we restrict our focus to open multilateral agreements that include at least three participants (the definition of multilateral), at least two of which are from the Americas.

Our dependent variable is the action of a state taken toward a treaty at a particular time. “Legal binding” is a binary variable with a value of 1 if a state adhered to a particular treaty at that time, and 0 if it did not. “Adherence” usually takes the form of ratification. However, treaty law provides for a number of alternative ways in which states can express their consent to be bound.⁷ We treat all such expressions as functionally equivalent (see von Stein, 2017). Thus, for our purposes, signing is not a prerequisite for adherence.⁸ Importantly, this allows us to examine nonparticipation of states that never signed an agreement in the first place, which is something we are interested in doing here.

The data from both samples have been set for survival analysis in treaty-country-year format. The basic logic of a survival model is to estimate the

probability of an event (in this case, adherence to the treaty in question) at a particular time. The 34 independent countries of the Americas (excluding the United States) become “at risk” of legally binding themselves to an agreement once a treaty is adopted.⁹ Countries enter the sample once they achieve independence. Because there is no time limit to adherence (indeed, many countries ratify agreements decades after they were adopted), countries remain “at risk” until they accept the treaty as legally binding or the observation period ends (December 31, 2015). Hence, for each treaty, adoption occurs at time t_i , regardless of the actual calendar year.

In the inter-American system, the average time from adoption to adherence is 22.6 years (with a median of 22). In the UNTS sample, the average time from adoption to adherence is 29 years (median of 33). In both samples, the earliest observed adherence is at $t = 1$ (the same year the treaty was adopted);¹⁰ the last observation is at $t = 71$ (treaty adopted in 1946, and country not yet legally bound at the end of 2015).

Figure 2 depicts the survivor functions for both samples, providing an overall picture of the rate at which states bind themselves to agreements over time. On average, more than 30 per cent of countries in the samples accept multilateral agreements within the first 20 years after the treaty is adopted, although the survival curve is slightly steeper in the case of the inter-American system. After year 30, it is unlikely that states adhere to an agreement, as the slope of the survival curve becomes practically flat.

We use Cox proportional hazards regression models, with robust standard errors clustered by country to control for intragroup interactions.¹¹ The Cox model is appropriate here because the proportionality assumption is not systematically violated (see online Appendix B). For a discussion of model fit, see online Appendix C.

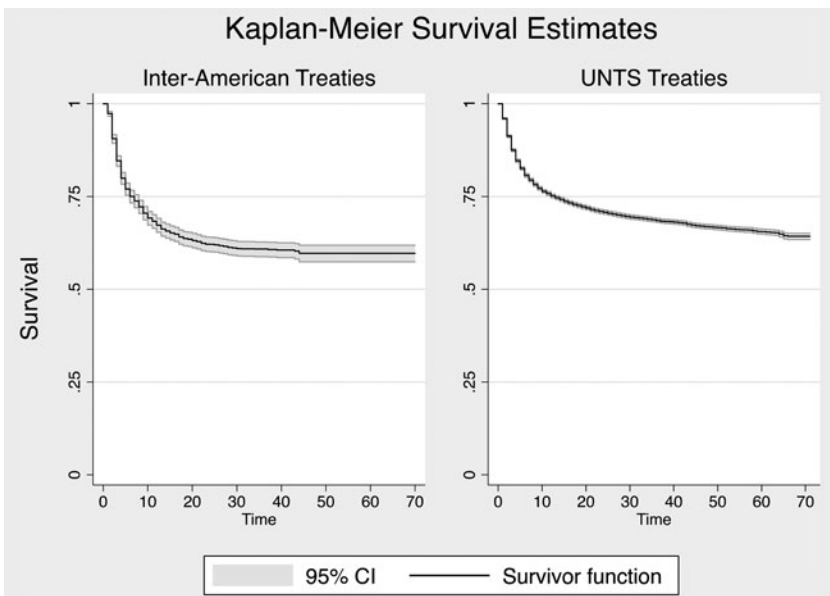


Figure 2 Survival Estimates

Main explanatory variables: Threat perception

The case study literature agrees that power disparities have been the dominant force in inter-American cooperation. We therefore expect the *relative strength of the United States* to be a factor in determining the perceived threat that it poses to the other countries of the region. US power is measured using the Correlates of War Composite Index of National Capability (CINC), which takes into account the population size, energy consumption, military strength and industrial resources of a state at a given time. While sheer material capabilities may represent a potential threat, how states perceive this threat depends on other factors, as elaborated below.

We hypothesize that governments that are ideologically more distant from the United States should feel more threatened by it, whereas those that share a similar worldview should feel less threatened. After all, the United States has a lengthy history of overt and covert interventions in the region, especially in pursuit of its anti-communist agenda during the Cold War. This hypothesis is in line with the existing literature, which suggests that ideological affinity with the United States is one of the most divisive cleavages in Latin American foreign policy (Hey, 1997; Merke and Reynoso, 2016).¹² We therefore measure the degree of ideological alignment between a particular country and the United States at a given time.

Studies frequently recur to voting behaviour in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as a proxy measure of *ideological congruence* (Voeten, 2013). This is an imperfect proxy, but no other measure exists that covers the entire time period and geographic scope of our analysis. Due to these limitations, we supplement our measures of threat perception with a dummy variable that indicates whether or not there was a *US intervention* in the region in the previous three-year period.¹³ Data on US interventions come from the International Crisis Behavior Project (Brecher et al., 2017). This variable is coded as 1 if there was an intervention in the previous three years, and 0 otherwise.

Finally, we control for *geographic proximity* to the United States using Gleditsch and Ward's (2001) measure of the distance between national capitals.

Main explanatory variables: Inclusiveness

We use US participation as a measure of inclusiveness. *US participation* is a binary variable, with a value of 1 if the United States had signed or bound itself to a treaty and 0 otherwise. Following Milewicz and Snidal (2016), we recognize that the United States is exceptional in the sense that its formal commitment is not subject to the same forces as nonhegemonic states. Hence, we use both binding and signing to measure US involvement.

Control variables

We control for several country-specific confounders, including the *relative strength of the state* in question (also using CINC scores) and the square of this value in order to detect a possible nonlinear relationship.

The literature on treaty ratification is clear that we should expect *domestic institutions* to affect a state's ability to commit to an agreement. In general, commitment should become more difficult as the number of veto players in a political system

increases. Following Tsebelis (2002), veto players are individual or collective actors whose agreement is required to change the status quo. We use Henisz's (2002) measure of political constraints, which captures the number of independent veto points in the domestic policy process.¹⁴

Similarly, we consider the length of time that a state has been *independent* as a means of controlling for the fact that many states joined the international system at a later stage.

The signing of a treaty usually does not constitute an expression of consent to be bound in international law. However, the states that sign an agreement tend to be those that also participated in its negotiation (treaties remain open to signatures for only a limited period). It seems reasonable to assume that states that participated in the negotiation also had some interest in the content and, at least to some extent, were able to shape the design of an agreement. We therefore expect *signature* to be a predictor of adhesion.

We also take into account the fact that the behaviour of other states is relevant to the decision to bind one's state to an agreement. Thus, we measure the *number of countries that have already bound themselves* to the treaty in question. For inter-American treaties, we focus on the number of American countries already bound. For the UNTS sample, we count all independent states who are party to the agreement.

Finally, we expect commitment to vary by *treaty subject*. We follow the coding scheme of Petersen and Schulz (2018), which distinguishes between inter-American treaties according to five areas: framework agreements; peace and security; economic development and commerce; legal affairs and human rights; and social, cultural and scientific cooperation. We add the category of "other" to capture UNTS treaties that do not fit into any of these categories.

Empirical Findings

Table 2 reports the results of our analyses in the form of hazard ratios, which reflect the likelihood that a state will bind itself to a treaty at a given time.

In general, the relative material power of the United States has no significant effect on adhesion. However, within the inter-American system, several other indicators measuring the threat posed by the hegemon have significant negative effects. In particular, as ideological distance from the hegemon increases, the probability that a state will bind itself to an agreement decreases. A one-point increase in the UNGA ideal point distance is associated with a 26 per cent decline in the probability of adhesion.¹⁵ Similarly, the recent occurrence of an intervention in the region decreases the probability of adhesion by 24 per cent.

Although geographic distance from the United States does have a significant effect on treaty adhesion in the inter-American system, the positive direction of the effect suggests that it is actually those countries that are furthest from the United States that are most likely to adhere to inter-American agreements.

Turning to inclusiveness, we find that US participation increases the probability of adherence by 28 per cent in the inter-American system.

Looking beyond the inter-American system, our analysis of the UNTS sample reveals that none of the measures of threat perception or inclusiveness have a significant effect on adhesion. Instead, states' own material capabilities—which had no

Table 2 Estimated Hazard Ratios for Cox Proportional Hazards Models

| | Sample 1: the inter-American system | Sample 2: UNTS treaties (all) | Subsample 2A: UNTS treaties, US participation | Subsample 2B: UNTS treaties, no US participation |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| <i>Threat</i> | | | | |
| Absolute ideal point difference | 0.735* | 1.027 | 0.916 | 1.069 |
| Recent US intervention | 0.757* | 1.016 | 1.128 | 0.942 |
| Material capabilities (US) | 0.990 | 1.017 | 1.013 | 1.016 |
| Distance from the US (1,000 km) | 1.073* | 1.025 | 1.007 | 1.036 |
| <i>Inclusivity</i> | | | | |
| US participation | 1.277** | 0.939 | . | . |
| <i>Controls</i> | | | | |
| Material capabilities | 1.070 | 2.837*** | 4.493*** | 1.957*** |
| Material capabilities (squared) | 0.933 | 0.715*** | 0.607*** | 0.814** |
| Domestic political constraints | 0.574 | 0.787 | 0.770 | 0.734 |
| Independent after 1945 | 0.235*** | 0.651** | 0.547*** | 0.742 |
| Signature | 3.276*** | 4.402*** | 3.692*** | 4.923*** |
| Total countries bound | 1.093*** | 1.027*** | 1.028*** | 1.026*** |
| Treaty subject (Reference Category: Security) | | | | |
| Economic | 0.986 | 0.785** | 0.619*** | 0.972 |
| Framework | 1.890*** | 1.071 | 0.623*** | 1.832*** |
| Legal | 2.132*** | 1.195* | 0.911 | 1.636*** |
| Cultural | 1.321* | 1.240* | 0.494*** | 2.029*** |
| Other | . | 0.980 | 0.799** | 1.271** |
| Number of observations | 51,974 | 758,354 | 317,776 | 440,578 |
| Number of subjects | 2,396 | 27,898 | 11,941 | 21,166 |
| Number of failures | 912 | 8,474 | 3,844 | 4,630 |
| Time at risk | 51,974 | 758,354 | 317,776 | 440,578 |
| Pseudo log likelihood | -6199.9218 | -79549.087 | -31534.062 | -41915.394 |
| Wald chi2(15) | 998.73 | 7436.1 | 2547.45 | 5254.72 |
| Prob > chi2 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |

Note: Cox proportional hazards regressions clustered by country; Breslow method for ties; robust standard errors adjusted for 34 clusters. Independent states of the Americas only; US omitted; Inter-American Treaty H-9 omitted. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

effect in the inter-American sample—appear to be strong predictors of adhesion. The positive effect of the raw CINC score suggests that an increase in a country's material capabilities produces a corresponding increase in the probability that it will adhere to a given treaty. However, the significant, negative direction of the squared term indicates that this effect has an inverted U-shape, whereby both smaller and larger powers are less likely to bind themselves, while states in the middle of the power spectrum are more likely to do so. This is consistent with the view that sees “middle powers” as key supporters of multilateral cooperation globally.¹⁶

Several of our controls are also significant. We find that the dummy variable indicating whether or not a state was independent prior to 1945 has a large and significant effect, with newly independent states being much less likely to bind themselves to agreements.

Unsurprisingly, states that have signed a particular treaty are also more likely to adhere to it. Similarly, for each additional country that binds itself to an agreement, the probability of adherence increases by about 3 to 9 per cent.

Turning to the domestic level, we find that the number and alignment of domestic veto players has no significant effect in either sample. In separate models (not reported), we test alternative measures based on regime type and legal tradition, neither of which has a significant effect.

Finally, issue area appears to be relevant, which suggests that adherence varies depending on the subject matter at stake.

Discussion

For much of the twentieth century, the United States has been the undisputed regional hegemon in the Western Hemisphere. But its material preponderance does not imply that secondary states have no room to manoeuvre. Even at the height of the Cold War, these states maintained a considerable degree of agency in their relations with the “colossus of the north.”¹⁷ We are interested in explaining the institutional strategies that secondary states have pursued within the inter-American system. Focusing on treaty adherence, we ask whether states have bandwagoned, soft balanced or attempted to institutionally bind the United States.

We find that secondary states adhere more readily when the United States is also involved and when they do not perceive it to be a threat. Following the conceptual framework above, this supports the view that inter-American cooperation reflects institutional binding rather than soft balancing or bandwagoning.

This is not to suggest that institutional binding is always the primary motive of states within the inter-American system or that soft balancing and bandwagoning may not be observed in other time periods or fora. The creation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) under the leadership of Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez, for example, clearly constitutes an example of “soft balancing,” whereby a group of states that perceived the United States as a threat created an alternative regional arrangement that excluded the hegemon (see Corrales and Romero, 2012). In terms of bilateral relations, bandwagoning is also evident. For example, Argentina’s decision to declare war on the Axis powers in the final months of the Second World War was principally in response to Washington’s pressure, rather than an ideological commitment or response to any real danger posed by Japan or Nazi Germany. However, these examples fall outside the scope of our study, which is restricted to multilateral treaty cooperation after 1945.

Also outside the temporal scope of our analysis is Friedman and Long’s (2015) discussion of inter-American cooperation in the early twentieth century. In their view, Latin American states used international institutions that included the United States to “soft balance” against it in response to the threat posed by US interventions in the region. However, as Petersen and Schulz (2018: 117) explain, inter-American (treaty) cooperation only prospered in the 1930s as a result of the ideological consensus following the New Deal and, importantly, Washington’s acceptance of non-intervention as a hemispheric principle in 1933. This suggests that institutional binding rather than “soft balancing” characterized relations during the period. Our empirical findings do not allow us to arbitrate

between these historiographical accounts. However, our conceptual framework precludes the possibility of “soft balancing” inclusively, leading us to concur with Petersen and Schulz (2018).

Existing studies find that moments of ideological consensus within the hemisphere have coincided with increased inter-American cooperation (Corrales and Feinberg, 1999; Legler, 2014; Petersen and Schulz, 2018). Although it could be argued that this consensus alone is sufficient to explain institutional cooperation as an indicator of preference alignment (rather than threat), we argue that it is insufficient. This is because secondary states guard their autonomy jealously in the Western Hemisphere, as the theoretical category of disengagement implies. Thus, we do not assume that cooperation always follows from agreement. Indeed, the UNTS sample reveals that ideological congruence has no effect on the probability of adhesion outside the inter-American context (Fig. 3); this holds true irrespective of whether the United States participates. It is only within the inter-American system that this seems to matter, suggesting that the meaning of ideological congruence with the hegemon has special significance within the Western Hemisphere. Therefore, we argue that in this context, ideological congruence also reflects to an important degree the extent to which a secondary state feels threatened by the hegemon.

Although institutional binding and, to a lesser extent, bandwagoning are agnostic when it comes to the effects of treaty subject, soft balancing is not. We would expect security treaties to be particularly relevant for the latter. In the inter-American system, we find that security agreements have a lower level of adherence than treaties in other issue areas. This fits with the general finding that institutional binding rather than soft balancing characterizes inter-American relations. Because the inter-American system includes the hegemon by default, we complement the analysis with a sample from the UNTS. This allows us to look for evidence of soft balancing behaviour outside the inter-American system, particularly in the case of global treaties that do not include the United States. As noted, we do not find that threat perception is a significant predictor of adherence in this context. Further, among treaties that include the hegemon, adherence to security treaties increases when the United States participates but decreases when it does not. Thus it appears that the secondary states of the Americas, rather than looking to soft balance against the United States through multilateral security outside the inter-American system, only bind themselves to global security treaties that also involve the hegemon.

Conclusion

IR scholarship remains divided about the strategies that secondary states adopt to manage power disparities. Myriad concepts have been developed to explain institutional responses, including soft balancing, bandwagoning and institutional binding. We propose a two-dimensional framework that distinguishes between them based on threat perception and inclusiveness. We argue that soft balancing and bandwagoning, when logically connected to balance-of-power theory, should occur only in response to a perceived threat. By contrast, binding takes place in less antagonistic circumstances. States balance against perceived threats but bind their allies. At the

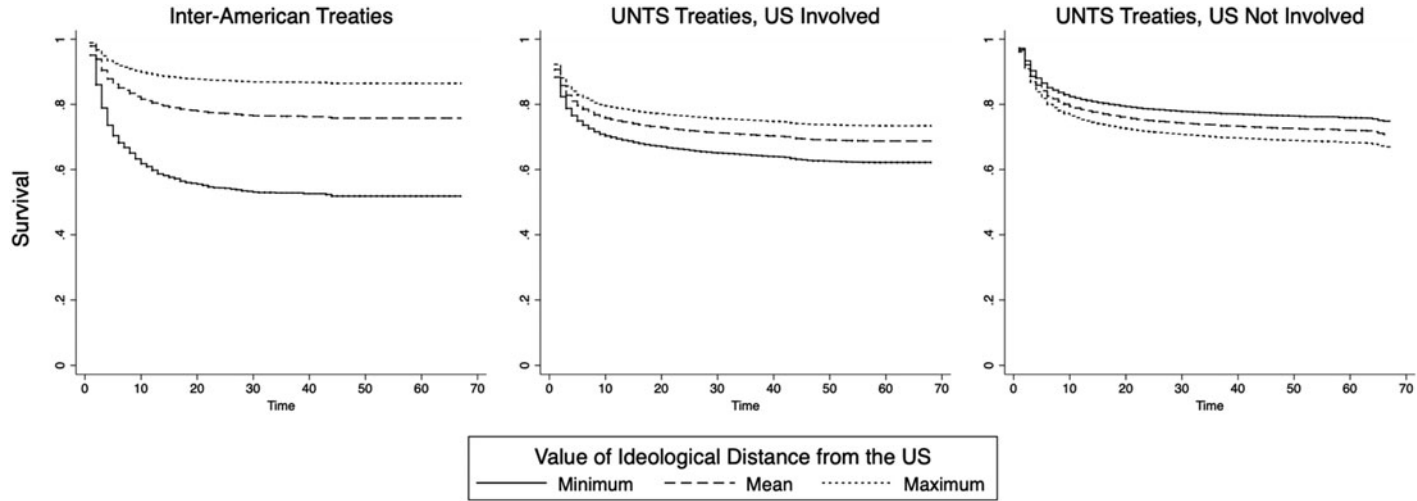


Figure 3 Effect of Ideological Distance from the United States

same time, while soft balancing is an inherently exclusive strategy, both bandwagoning and institutional binding must include the hegemon.

We apply this framework using data on adherence to inter-American treaties adopted after 1945. Even when controlling for potential confounders, the evidence indicates that secondary states commit more readily when they do not perceive the United States to be a threat and when the United States participates in an agreement. We therefore conclude that institutional binding is a better conceptual description of inter-American cooperation than either soft balancing or bandwagoning.

In a simultaneous step, we complement this analysis with data on the adherence of secondary states in the Americas to treaties outside the inter-American system. The results show that neither threat perception nor participation of the hegemon is a significant predictor of adhesion. This leads us to conclude that the dynamics of inter-American cooperation are particular to the region.

These findings may not come as a surprise to observers of inter-American relations. States' participation in the inter-American system has historically waxed and waned. In more recent years, diminished interest among many members contrasts with the hemisphere-wide activism of the 1990s. Rather than casting a radically different light on this history, the purpose of our approach has been to disentangle the different concepts that capture this process.

Our framework does not explain why states turn to multilateral cooperation, as opposed to other means, to manage their relations with the hegemon. Nor do we consider implementation. Some authors have suggested that Latin American states, in particular, often fail to fully implement regional agreements that they have formally accepted (Domínguez, 2007). Examining policy implementation over time and diverse issue areas poses a considerable challenge. Future research should explore ways to consider this aspect.

Our focus here is limited to understanding what motivates institutional cooperation and providing criteria to distinguish between competing concepts. Thus, we do not look at bilateral relations or other forms in which states deal with power asymmetries. It is possible that other kinds of relations are characterized by different concerns. This, however, falls outside the scope of our study. Future research should consider alternative types of strategies, and as these are considered, we anticipate that the framework introduced here will be useful.

By disentangling soft balancing, bandwagoning and institutional binding, we hope to improve the analytical utility of these widely used but routinely conflated concepts. Moreover, we expect the new conceptual category of disengagement introduced here to fill an important theoretical gap in the literature—one that we anticipate will be especially interesting to those studying the current climate of waning interest in inter-American cooperation.

Supplementary material. To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423920000220>.

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Notes

- 1 As elaborated later in the article, the framework also includes disengagement as a fourth, non-institutional category.
- 2 Walt (1987) does not argue that ideologically similar states “flock together” because they are ideologically aligned; rather, ideological alignment leads them to perceive each other as less threatening and therefore more suited to forming an alliance against other, more threatening rivals.
- 3 Schweller’s (1994) “bandwagoning for profit” breaks with balance-of-power theory by arguing that bandwagoning is not the logical opposite of balancing. However, we contend that the central question is not whether states benefit from alignment with a more powerful actor but whether, in doing so, states side with the source of a perceived threat. Contrary to Schweller (1994: 77), we dispute whether “omni-balancing,” whereby states align with powerful external actors against a domestic threat, can accurately be described as bandwagoning. As David (1991) clarifies, states that omni-balance should join forces with external actors because they regard those external forces as less threatening than domestic contenders. Although we do not control for domestic sources of threats, our conceptual point also applies to those cases: states that form external alliances against internal threats are, in fact, balancing; states bandwagon only when they join forces with the source of a threat.
- 4 We thank the anonymous reviewers for this suggestion.
- 5 We use information provided by the OAS’s Secretariat for Legal Affairs (Organization of American States, n.d.). Because the OAS acts as a depository for inter-American treaties, it registers information on all agreements, irrespective of whether or not they entered into force.
- 6 Article 102 of the UN Charter requires member states to register international agreements upon their entry into force. This means that the sample excludes treaties that never entered into force. Despite this limitation, the United Nations Treaty Series (n.d.) remains the most comprehensive database on treaty making available to date (see Koremenos, 2016: 68).
- 7 As per Articles 11 and 12 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969).
- 8 For example, states may join a treaty through accession—a phenomenon that is especially common among newly independent states, such as the Anglo-Caribbean countries.
- 9 Survival analysis was first developed in medical research to examine the occurrence of an event (for example, death). Because of this origin, terms like *risk* and *failure* are commonly used to denote the probability that a subject will experience an event at a particular time.
- 10 Adhesion occurred before independence in only one case (1959, C-15, Trinidad and Tobago), which is omitted. In all other cases, time begins at 1.
- 11 Note that it is not possible to use shared frailty (equivalent to random effects for survival data) in this particular instance since countries typically sign more than one treaty per year, meaning that multiple subjects (signatures) from the same country are at risk of failure (ratification) at the same time.
- 12 Cold War historiography has shown that Latin American governments frequently exaggerated or downplayed their ideological affinity with the United States in order to gain support against domestic contenders (see Friedman, 2003). Although our approach does not capture the complex interplay between domestic and international factors, we expect countries to signal their ideological alignment if they do not perceive the United States as (the principal source of) a threat.
- 13 While the choice of a three-year time frame is somewhat arbitrary, it is worth noting that we also experimented with similar variables indicating a US intervention in the previous one- and two-year periods. The results (not reported) do not make a substantial difference to the models.
- 14 In unreported models, we experimented with alternative measures of domestic constraints, including legal tradition (common vs. civil law) and regime type. Neither alternative makes a substantive difference to the results.
- 15 For reference, the average ideal point difference between the United States and Canada is less than 1, while the average ideal point difference between the United States and post-revolutionary Cuba is over 4.
- 16 Note that the “middle power” category is more complicated than CINC score alone can capture.
- 17 There is not sufficient room to do justice to this literature here. Examples include, but are not limited to, Friedman (2003), Harmer (2011), Darnton (2013), Long (2015), Keller (2015) and Tulchin (2016).

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