

ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE AND POLITICAL COMPLIANCE¹

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Abstract

The article seeks to present the main aspects of the idea that economic dependence can lead to political compliance. It considers the nature of dependence and compliance with regard to dependent foreign policy context. It sketches of some models that describe situations in which economic dependence is related to political compliance. After which, it analyses the scientific characteristics of those models in dependent foreign policy environment. In the short conclusion, it states the importance of the field of study as a science and it suggests an approach to dependent foreign policy through the lens of the theory of science.

Key-words: economic dependence; political compliance; international relations

Resumo

O artigo procura apresentar os aspectos principais da idéia de que dependência econômica pode conduzir à submissão política. Considera-se a natureza da dependência e da submissão no que concerne ao contexto da política externa dependente. Esboçam-se alguns modelos que descrevem situações em que a dependência econômica é relacionada com a submissão política. Depois disso, analisam-se as características científicas desses modelos em um ambiente de política externa dependente. Na breve conclusão, declara-se a importância de se entender o campo de estudo em questão como uma ciência e sugere-se uma abordagem da política externa dependente através das lentes da teoria da ciência.

Palavras-chave: dependência econômica; submissão política; relações internacionais

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I. Introduction

One of the most important issues – if not the most important one – in the studies of dependent foreign policy is to determine whether, and to what extent, dependence influences the foreign policy of a dependent country. In Jeanne A. K. Hey's words, "[t]he essential question posed in dependent foreign policy research is whether economic dependence leads to foreign policy compliance" (Hey, 1995, p. 205). In other words, this issue consists of analysing the grounds on which the foreign policy of a dependent country would comply with the interests of the dominant country. Furthermore, it would be necessary to justify the basis on which dependence² is related to compliance. This justification can be made showing models that link economic dependence to political compliance. There are, as it will be seen, a few important concepts that have to be developed. These are dependence, compliance, and those which appear as consequences of the relations between these two concepts.

This article, thus, falls into two main parts: parts II and III. Part II is concerned with dependence. Part III relates to compliance and to its link with economic dependence. Part II is divided into two sections. Section II.1 is concerned with the types of dependence and with the justification of why economic dependence is the most relevant aspect of dependence in what concerns dependent foreign policy. Section II.2 discusses the conditions for being a dependent country; that is, it is concerned with the conditions for dependence. Part III is divided in two main sections as well. Section III.1 discusses the models, linking economic dependence to political compliance, and is subdivided in two subsections. One describes the characteristics of negative models, the other, the characteristics of positive ones. The latter subsection will present four positive models, based on Adrienne Armstrong's ideas. Section III.2 briefly discusses the difficulties in testing those models.

II. Dependence

² It is important to be aware of the difference between dependence and dependency theory (also called *dependencia* theory). The latter takes into account a larger number of factors, for example, the domestic economic configuration of the dependent country, which the former does not. We shall not consider dependency theory for analysis in this article, but dependence one instead for believing that it is more appropriate for dependent foreign policy context.

For a casual reader, perhaps, dependence seems to be a rather common word. The reason is that most people would agree with sentences in which dependence is superficially used. That is to say, if one expressed that a given country is dependent on some other specific way and more powerful one, it would be regarded as natural and acceptable. Armstrong (Armstrong, 1981, p. 402), for instance, seems to agree with this. The point, nevertheless, is to determine what sort of dependence is considered in statements concerned with dependent foreign policy. As a first approach to this question, it would be important to consider the most important characters of dependence and then to decide which one of those is the most relevant for the dependent foreign policy context.

II.1 Types of Dependence

It seems reasonable to agree with Hey (Hey, 1995, p. 204) when she says that a country can be dependent on another country in three main ways, that is, in a political, economical, and cultural manner. She goes further and considers the economic dependence as the most important one in what concerns dependent foreign policy. This is so because the issue in dependent foreign policy, as it was aforementioned, is to determine to what extent economic dependence influences compliance, which is an aspect of political dependence. Therefore, the point here is to discuss the link that leads economic dependence to political dependence, i.e., compliance. Economic dependence is also very answerable for the changes in cultural dependence³. Considered the other way round, cultural dependence can be strongly

³ Although compliance is in most cases related to economic dependence, it also can be related to cultural dependence, which is not in the scope of the article. Hey (Hey, 1995, p. 210), for instance, without saying that it is motivated by cultural reasons, briefly refers to a situation in which there seems to be cultural dependence. As she says, sometimes a dependent country is governed by an elite that has the same ideas and interests as the elite of the dominant country. Moreover, for these reasons, the elite of the dependent country makes its country take similar positions as the dominant one. Yet even if in this situation the dependent country was prejudiced (which would make clear that there was no actual coincidence of interests between the countries), there was no compliance motivated by economic dependence but by cultural dependence. The main point in defence of its cultural aspect is that in many cases the elite of the dependent country has the same ideas as the elite of the dominant one because they have had the same educational repertoire and background. Moreover, in

linked to economic one. Although it is a very interesting matter for discussion, cultural dependence would be, strictly speaking, a subject for another article. It would be so because cultural dependence is not answerable for an expressive number of cases of political compliance.

Let us now consider some definitions of dependence in order to reinforce its economic aspect in the dependent foreign policy context. According to Dale Johnson's citation of Theotonio dos Santos⁴, "[d]ependence is a situation in which a certain group of countries have their economy conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy, to which the former is subject" (Johnson, 1972, p. 71).

According to dos Santos's ideas and generally speaking, dependence is a relation between two economies, where one belongs to the dominant country and the other, to the dependent one. For Armstrong, for example, it is clear that dependence is related to "economic dependence, or asymmetrical reliance" (Armstrong, 1981, p. 401) in what concerns the dependent foreign policy context.

Furthermore, thanks to Armstrong's last quotation, the concept of dependence gets its asymmetrical character at this point of the article. That is to say, dependence is to be understood as asymmetrical dependence. Dependence that is not asymmetrical does not imply compliance because, in this situation, there would be no dominant country or dependent one in the relation between two economies. In other words, a country as strong (or as weak) as another could have a dependent economic relation that did not configure a relation of political dependence. When one country is as strong (or as weak) as another country, neither has the conditions to exercise pressure on the other. Their relation would be what is called an interdependent relation or symmetrical dependence, which is beyond the scope of this article.

most cases they have had access to similar cultural manifestations and ideologies. It must not be forgotten that in many cases they do not share only ideologies but also economic interests. Cultural dependence is far from playing the same role as economic dependence in the context of dependent foreign policy. That is why in this article we shall privilege the economic aspect instead.

⁴ Santos's article, cited by Johnson (Johnson, 1972, p. 72), is: Theotonio dos Santos, "La Crisis de la Teoría del Desarrollo y las Relaciones de Dependencia en América Latina" *Boletín del Centro de Estudios Socio-Económicos*. Santiago: Universidad de Chile, No. 3, 1968, pp. 26-7.

Summarising what has been said in this subsection, the concept of dependence in the dependent foreign policy context has to be understood as economic dependence. Furthermore, it was argued that it is not sufficient for economic dependence to be related to compliance. It has to be also asymmetrical for the aforementioned reasons. It is, however, important to discuss the conditions a country has to meet in order to be economic dependent. That is discussed in the next subsection.

II.2 Conditions for Dependence

This subsection tries to answer the question of what the necessary conditions for dependence are. In other words, it will discuss what it is for a country to be economically and asymmetrically dependent on another one. These conditions are, as states Armstrong, “the structural characteristics of dependence” (Armstrong, 1981, p. 402). We shall present the most relevant conditions for dependence of two of them and, afterwards, we shall briefly discuss one of those conditions, which seems to appear in Hey’s and Armstrong’s articles.

Let us begin with Hey. She points out three criteria of dependence, which she owes to Richardson. They can be numbered as it follows:

H1) the dependent state’s economic relations with the [dominant state] must be exclusive.

H2) the availability of substitute economic partners must be low, making it difficult for the dependent state to diversify its economic relations or choose new partners.

H3) the relationship must be important to the entire economy of the dependent state. (Hey, 1995, p. 204)

In order to summarise Hey’s three conditions, it could be said that for a country to be dependent, its dependence has to be exclusive. Moreover, the dependent country has to have very few options in substituting its economic partner. Finally, the economic dependence has to be significant for the whole economy of the dependent country.

Hey seems to have based her conditions not only on Richardson's ideas, but also on Armstrong's, as she herself makes clear in a brief note in parentheses referring to Armstrong's work. Based on this, it is worth nothing what Armstrong claims if only because it could shed some light on Hey's aforementioned conditions. Armstrong's three conditions could be numbered as it follows:

A1) a high magnitude of a nation's investment [must be] controlled by another nation.

A2) the inability to find easy substitutes for a commodity or a trading partner [must be the case].

A3) [The dominant country has to be responsible for] intense demand for a commodity. (Armstrong, 1981, p. 402)

It is by no means difficult to notice the similarities between Armstrong's conditions and Hey's⁵. They are related and supplementary.

Hey's (H2) and Armstrong's (A2), for instance, are the same, which is an fact in defence that this condition is a necessary condition for economic dependence. Let us then briefly discuss this condition. It is not difficult for a poor country to engage in a situation in which it will find itself in great difficulty of finding a new trade partner. In most of the cases, it is not viable to switch trading partners. If a dependent country wants to do so, it would face some drastic consequences. One of those – the most important one in the specific case – would be to find alternative sources of economic exchange.

Buying goods would be the easier problem to deal with. It is always easier to buy than to sell. However, stopping to buy goods from the dominant country in order to buy from another would influence its export trade with the former country, which can make this attitude worthless. Furthermore, the dependent country would be

⁵ It must not be forgotten that Johnson (Johnson, 1972, p. 74-5) states much deeper conditions for dependence. These conditions, however, escape from the modest scope of this article and do not seem to make a clear distinction between dependence and dependency theory. For these reasons, we shall not present Johnson's conditions here, but they would be essential for a broader consideration.

only changing the actor in the role of the dominant country while its own role would be the same if not worse, for, as it was said, export trade would be altered. An alternative would be trying to produce at home the goods it has been importing.

Yet, as Armstrong properly notes, home production of the goods is very unlikely to be a substitute for importing them. In her own words, “[T]he purpose of trade is to obtain goods which cannot be produced domestically or which can be produced but at higher cost than elsewhere” (Armstrong, 1981, p. 403). That is to say, if it were worth to produce these goods domestically, the dependent country would never even be importing them in the first place. That is, import trade is a consequence of the inability to produce domestically the goods a country needs.

Therefore, since import trade policy can be seen as a function of export trade policy, it could be said that the issue here seems to be related to the export trade of the dependent country. Moreover, it is at this level that Hey’s (H2) and Armstrong’s (A2) are mostly related. In other words, the export trade of the dependent country is what gives very few options in substituting its economic partner. As it was already suggested, it is by no means easy to find countries to buy the goods that a weak and usually small country can produce. For these reasons, the dependent country has to beg to maintain its export trade with the dominant country, which could easily chose to buy from another.

Similar considerations can be made for the other aforementioned conditions. One way or the other, what is important here is to show the link dependence has to trade⁶ and to other economic factors, what reinforces the economic character of dependence.

III. Compliance

⁶ Although we are going to consider dependence related to trade, Armstrong (Armstrong, 1981, p. 404) reminds us that it can be discussed in terms of foreign aid. As she suggests, aid provokes dependence as far as the dependent country comes to be addicted to continuous aid. It gets to the point at which a country cannot go on with the aid and thus becomes dependent. It must not be forgotten that this aid can be either economic or military (see Armstrong, 1981, p. 404)

Compliance in dependent foreign policy context means the political submission of one nation to another, more powerful one. The importance of compliance here owes itself to the fact that it has been motivated by economic dependence. Furthermore, the issue is to determine in what sense, and to what extent, compliance might be linked to economic dependence. It is important to say that the methodology of approaching these issues is scientific. We shall develop a deeper, but brief, consideration about its scientific character in the conclusion. For now, however, we shall succinctly present some theoretical models that link dependence to compliance. After which, we shall present the difficulties one would have to test these models.

It is important to say that the models can be divided into two basic groups. These are the group of positive models and the group of negative ones. The former concerns the models that show successfully how economic dependence leads to compliance. The latter, on the contrary, is related to those models that show how dependence can lead to the opposite of compliance, that is, to rebellion against the dominant country.

We are aware of the fact that there might be a situation in which there is coincidence of political positions but there is no political compliance. This is possible based on the fact that if a country that is economically dependent on another country takes the same political position of the dominant country, two general reasons could be given for this hypothetical case. It did so motivated by economic pressure from the dominant country or by simple coincidence of interests⁷.

This article shall not treat the case related to coincidence of interests. Therefore, whenever we refer to compliance, we mean that the dependent country took the same position as the dominant country based on reasons of economic

⁷ It is possible there to be a case in which the dependent country takes the same position of the dominant country for both aforementioned reasons. Yet in this case, it seems that economic pressure plays no role for analysis because the dependent country would take the same political position even if there were no economic pressure. In other words, compliance only makes sense when the dependent country finds itself taking a political position that it would not take if there were no economic pressure by the dominant one.

dependence, that is, due to economic pressure. In other words, for compliance we mean the situation in which the dependent country would necessarily not take the political position of the dominant country otherwise, that is, if there were no economic pressure.

III.1 The compliance models

There are many models relating economic dependence to political compliance. We shall focus on some of them. These models treat, as it has been said, two aspects. First, the sense in which economic dependence is linked to political compliance.

Secondly, the extent to which it is so. To ask about the sense in which they are related is to ask whether dependence has positively or negatively motivated compliance. We owe this idea to Hey (Hey, 1995, p. 211). She makes a point considering what she calls “anti-core foreign policies” as a matter of dependence but not economic independent policy. The models that positively link dependence to compliance are far more common. We shall consider the second aspect, i.e., the extent to which economic dependence is linked to political compliance, only concerning positive models. Therefore, this subsection will be split up into two subparts. The first one will concern the negative models. The second will concern the positive ones. We shall borrow Armstrong’s division of positive models and present it in the following subparts.

III.1.1 The negative models

Negative models are those in which dependence provokes the dependent country to take a political position against the dominant country. One could think that it is a matter of political independence. Hey⁸ (Hey, 1995, p. 211-2), nevertheless,

⁸ Relating to what Hey calls anti-core foreign policy in her article (Hey, 1995, p. 211), she refers to another article of hers, which we have not had the opportunity of reading. Yet it seems to be worthwhile to present the reference of this article for further and deeper consideration. The article she refers to is, Jeanne A. K. Hey, “Foreign Policy Options under Dependence: A Theoretical Evaluation with Evidence from Ecuador,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 25:543-74, 1993.

shows that it might not be the case. She presents two ways in which this unexpected attitude of the dependent country towards the dominant one can be explained in terms of economic dependence instead of economic independence.

One of the explanations is based on the idea that the dependent country may have an attempt against its dependence. This attempt could take the form of a political rebellion. This rebellion could take a more rational or emotional form. On one hand, if it is more emotional, it could be described as an act of anger against the economic dependence. That is, in Hey's words, "anti-core behavior [sic] may be a hostile reaction to the state's dependence" (Hey, 1995, p. 211).

On the other hand, if it is more rational, it can be seen as a try of being less dependent. As Hey says, it would be "an attempt to use foreign policy as a means to counteract dependence and to achieve greater independence." As one example of this kind of rebellion, Hey (Hey, 1995, p. 211-2) cites the case of the Latin America Economic Conference, held in Quito in 1984 and promoted by the President of Ecuador, Mr. Osvaldo Hurtado. As she recalls, the President invited all regional leaders for the conference but did not invite any leader from creditor governments. Furthermore, Mr. Hurtado "devoted the meetings to the development of a regional debt strategy that would improve Latin America's negotiation vis-à-vis creditors" (Hey, 1995, p. 211-2). According to her, this simple example can be taken as a "direct manifestation of Hurtado's frustration with Latin America's dependence on creditors in the core" (Hey, 1995, p. 212). One way or the other, the point Hey makes is to present a kind of model in which economic dependence negatively influences political compliance. The majority of cases, however, are cases of positive models, which we shall discuss in the next subsection.

III.1.2 The positive models

Positive models are those in which economic dependence has positively influenced the dependent country to take the same political position as the dominant one. Armstrong (Armstrong, 1981, p. 406-7) presents four positive models for compliance. Her models are based on the importance of the issue for the dependent country and for the dominant one. She tries to develop a rational idea of how these

countries would behave depending on their interests on the policy issue to be sorted out. She considers the issue either as of a high interest or of a low interest for the countries. It must not be forgotten that this is a very basic analysis. More detailed models would consider possibilities in which the importance of the issue could have more different values than only two. It is worthwhile to present Armstrong's models, if only because she presents these models in extreme cases.

III.1.2.1 Armstrong's first model

Armstrong's first model presents the case in which the issue is of low interest both for the dominant country and for the dependent one. In this case, as Armstrong (Armstrong, 1981, p. 406) says, the dependent country would not be explicitly pressured in order to take the same political position as the dominant one, since the interest of the latter in the issue is low. The dependent country, nevertheless, would comply with the dominant one. It would do so because, as the dependent country was not very interested in the policy issue, the cost of taking the same position as the dominant one would be very low as well. Moreover, there might be implicit and subtle pressure by the dominant country. Yet, it would not be worth for the dependent country to oppose the interests of the dominant country since what the first would gain with it would be very little.

III.1.2.2 Armstrong's second model

The second model relates to the case in which the policy issue is of high interest for the dependent country and it is of low interest for the dominant one. Armstrong (Armstrong, 1981, p. 406-7) suggests that in this case it would be worthwhile for the dependent country to oppose the interests of the dominant one, since, due to its high interest, it would pay to disagree with the dominant country. With regard to the position of the dominant country, Armstrong says that it would be very likely to apply no explicit pressure in order to get compliance of the dependent country. "In most cases," she says, "[the dependent country] would not use any form of explicit economic pressure, for the cost of employing this pressure are greater than the benefits derived from it" (Armstrong, 1981, p. 407). It is important to say that this is the only model in which the dependent country seriously dares to oppose the

interests of the dominant one and succeeds, apart, of course, from those situations described by the negative models.

III.1.2.3 Armstrong's third model

The third model is concerned with the situation in which the policy issue is very important to the dominant country but has low importance for the dependent one. In this case, as suggests Armstrong (Armstrong, 1981, p. 407), the dependent country is very likely to comply with the interests of the dominant. The dependent country would do so in part because the costs of compliance would not be so high for it and in part motivated by the pressure done by the dominant country. This pressure might be explicit, as says Armstrong (Armstrong, 1981, p. 407). It would, however, suffice to be an implicit pressure in most cases.

III.1.2.4 Armstrong's forth model

This is the most problematic model. Here, both countries are highly interested in the policy issue. Yet the dominant one is in most cases able to get compliance from the dependent country. The former, however, has to use all its explicit capacities of economic pressure in these situations. That is, in the majority of the cases, the pressure is explicit and can take forms of economic sanctions, for example. In despite of the resistance of the dependent country, it has to comply with the dominant one in most cases. Yet it is expected that there would be less compliance under this model than under Armstrong's first model. This is so because the costs involved in a rebellion of the dependent country in Armstrong's first model are significantly smaller than they are here.

III.2 Difficulties in testing the models

There are great difficulties in testing the models in order to find out which one is the most adequate to explain real situations. We shall discuss some of the difficulties. The first one is related to the method of measuring implicit pressure. As it was seen, implicit pressure plays a great role in some models, especially in Armstrong's models 1 and 3. For her, for example, the main difficulty in measuring

implicit pressure is because “in most situations there is no interaction to observe” (Armstrong, 1981, p. 425). If there were any interaction, it would be so subtle that would go undiscovered by the common public. At this point, as it can be seen, the issue of public manipulation is considered. Important issues with regard to this subject are considered by Parsons (Parsons, 1995, p. 110-25). Indeed, cases in which public information is manipulated are problematic when it comes to analysis. We have then to focus on the cases in which it seems that compliance has explicitly happened. Yet, there would still be the problem of how to deal with implicit pressure, which is very important for the analysis of dependent foreign policy.

One way or the other, it could be said that what will inform us whether there was compliance is the situation in which the case happened. The comprehension of the situation still is, however, a supposition. To state what the situation was like is to choose one of the aforementioned models and regard it as the most appropriate one. In other words, one could say that the point is that, apart from very few cases, analysts depend upon suppositions. We must accept that Armstrong and authors who say the same thing make a point of showing the difficulties of determining whether there is tentative of compliance.

Another great difficulty is related to the methodology utilised by the researcher to address the issue of detecting compliance. Hey (Hey, 1995, p. 205-8) points out two methodologies, which, in her opinion, are the principal ones in this field of studies. These are the “case studies” and “UN voting and quantitative analysis”. There are pros and cons related to those two methods. We are not going to go into too much detail, but it must be said that the issue of determining an empirical methodology to deal with dependent foreign policy is rather problematic. It has to be determined, for example, whether the data really reflect the policies of the countries, that is, whether they represent significant information to deal with or are camouflaging the real policies behind the scenes.

IV. Conclusion

Many difficulties related to natural science appear in the studies of dependent foreign policy. In natural science, however, the difficulties are softened by

the controlled empirical experiment. In what concerns dependent foreign policy, those experiments are very unlikely to be made. They are so for the difficulties aforementioned in the previous section. Yet rational models are created in order to interpret what is happening. The criteria for choosing one of those models as the most appropriate one for a given situation, nevertheless, is not a matter of easy apprehension.

Like the case of the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces controlled by Saddam Hussein in 2nd august of 1990, many policy making processes take into account terms that are not strictly rational. For example, some Muslim countries take into account arguments in the Koran that would be unthinkable for the policy making process in western countries. Situations like those make even more difficulty to realise the role of dependent foreign policy in the decision making process.

On the other side of the coin, there are policy making processes that are very rational but not ethical, which makes even stronger the idea that rationality and ethics might not go together. As an example of a policy making process that was very rational but not ethics, one could cite the Nazism in Germany, which, in spite of having done absurdities in terms of ethics, was extremely rational. We could conclude that dependent foreign policy is predictable only in terms. That is, it is predictable, at least, up to the limits in which human unpredictability begins.

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