

# The Embodiment of Hegemony: Diplomatic Practices in the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry

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## **Abstract**

In this article, we explain Ecuador's foreign policy shift away from the counter-hegemonic project of the Pink Tide and toward the US-led international order. Current scholarship assumes that small states pursue moral recognition from great powers by reproducing the normative principles of the hegemonic order. However, the dynamics of small state status seeking remain underexplored. Why do small states pursue moral authority within one international order rather than another? How do variations in the intensity of international subordination shape small states' strategies for status recognition? Bourdieu's practice theory enables us to demonstrate how senior Ecuadorian diplomats embody the principles of the US-led hegemonic order. By analyzing documents, speeches, and the results of semi-structured interviews, we show how diplomats' tacit background knowledge led them to reject former president Rafael Correa's initiatives and replace them with a "professional" diplomacy and "pragmatic" foreign policy. Diplomats pursue moral authority for its own sake but also as a means of alleviating stigmas associated with Ecuador's intense subordination. In this way, diplomats legitimated the restoration of the pre-Correa liberal state. Their experience of hysteresis, or a mismatch between their habitus and field position, drove them to assert their taken-for-granted truths as a new orthodoxy once Correa departed.

## Introduction

On 21 December 2018, President Lenin Moreno of Ecuador issued Decree 625 initiating the reopening of the Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Academy. The Academy was previously closed in 2011 by Moreno's predecessor, Rafael Correa, and replaced with a postgraduate institute designed to train all civil servants. According to the decree, the new Academy fulfilled the Ministry's need for "trained and specialized professionals in the disciplines associated with International Relations and execution of international politics" (Republic of Ecuador 2018). The Academy's reopening was championed by José Valencia, newly appointed Foreign Minister and career diplomat. It also complemented Valencia's reorientation of Ecuador away from the Bolivarian project of building an anti-imperialist international order associated with Latin America's Pink Tide. Instead, Valencia cultivated a cooperative relationship with the United States that culminated in a February 2020 Oval Office meeting between US President Donald Trump and Moreno. In only two years, Ecuador had transitioned from being an ardent US opponent to a regional partner recognized for its "leadership role in advancing security, prosperity, and democracy in the Western Hemisphere" (White House 2020).

Existing scholarship claims that small states seek recognition as "do-gooders" from great powers which establish the arrangements that define international order. By upholding or extending existing principles and norms, they can claim moral authority through their maintenance of the international system (de Carvalho and Neumann 2015, Wohlforth, et al. 2018). This literature implicitly assumes that the status seeking practices of small states are continuous over time and that only one ordering project exists within the international system. However, the Ecuadorian experience indicates that the competitive dynamics of small state status seeking remain underexplored. Valencia's successful pursuit of moral recognition from the

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United States was part of a broader struggle among Ecuadorian elites and their preferred political projects. It suggests that domestic elite competition within a small state can generate a variety of status seeking practices oriented toward different international orders. But precisely how domestic and international political competition generate status seeking practices is still an unaddressed puzzle. To make sense of how and why Ecuador pursues status requires investigating the social contexts that inform diplomats' understandings of moral authority, including their preferred strategic narratives, histories of elite socialization, and struggles for state power. How do these processes generate policymakers' preferences for status within alternative international orders?

We investigate elite perspectives about moral authority by applying Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory to the study of Ecuadorian diplomats. Below, we demonstrate how Valencia's reforms were inspired by the *habitus*, or embodied disposition, learned by senior Ecuadorian diplomats during the formative years of their careers. For them, Ecuador successfully gained moral recognition when it expanded US-inspired human rights norms after the Cold War. They claimed that vocational professionalism combined with a pragmatic foreign policy enabled the Ministry to represent Ecuador as a liberal state within a hegemonic field organized by the United States. Once diplomats embodied the classificatory schemes associated with US hegemony, they accrued capital from Washington through competent performances. More broadly, our analysis uncovers how policymakers' knowledge constitutes how they understand moral action. Their history of experiences shapes how small states position themselves in relation to hegemonic orders or revisionist alternatives (Cooley, et al 2019).

To explain why Ecuador reverted to a pro-US orientation, we examine the results of 33 semi-structured interviews with Ecuadorian diplomats in the context of official government

documents, speeches, and field observations. Our analysis shows that Valencia's return to the diplomatic and foreign policy status quo is inspired by hysteresis (Pouliot 2010:48), or a mismatch between an actor's *habitus* and its position within a social field. During Correa's presidency (2007-2017), diplomats found themselves maladjusted to new status hierarchies within both the Ministry and world politics. In their telling, the Ministry became a politicized institution guided by an ideological foreign policy divorced from Ecuador's national interests. They repeatedly contrasted politicization/ideology with professionalism/pragmatism, a classificatory scheme that structured how they valued diplomatic and foreign policy practices. The internalization of these categorical binaries left them feeling socially unmoored as Correa reordered the Ministry's bureaucratic hierarchy and sought to overturn key aspects of the US-led international order. Valencia's initiatives must be understood in this context. His reorganization of the Ministry and the restoration of a status quo foreign policy is a response to the open questioning of diplomats' taken-for-granted assumptions during the Correa era. By representing Ecuador as moral partner in preserving the US-led ordering project, senior diplomats stabilized their social environment in ways consistent with their *habitus*.

This article makes two main contributions. First, we build on Dezalay and Garth's (2002) analysis of professional fields and struggles for state power to show how domestic elite competition and transnational socialization can drive shifts in small states' status seeking strategies. The existing literature on small states does not analyze how the pursuit of status is shaped by the intersection of domestic and international politics within state institutions. Not only do bureaucracies possess their own institutionalized policy prescriptions (Allison 1971), but they can deploy such policy programs to contest governance arrangements favored by their opponents and delegitimize alternative institutional practices and the systems of knowledge that

justify them. From this perspective, the Ministry's return to the institutional status quo undermined both Correa's counter-hegemonic foreign policy and his socialist state building project. As senior diplomats position Ecuador as a supporter of the US-led international order, they gain access to multiple forms of capital from Washington that enable them to execute institutional reforms consistent with background knowledge learned from educational experiences in North America and Europe. The result is a new diplomatic orthodoxy that emerges in reaction to Correa's questioning of the Ministry's self-evident truths. Overall, we demonstrate how small state status seeking cannot be understood without accounting for political competition and transnational elite socialization.

Second, we extend the status literature's analysis of small states by differentiating between those with more or less unequal relationships. All small states are characterized by an absence of significant military capabilities, but the intensity of their subordination to other states (especially great powers) can vary dramatically (Long 2017a). For poor small states in the developing world, their more intense subordination constitutes them with stigmas that normalize the characteristics of wealthy states from the Eurocentric core (Zarakol 2010). Ecuador's economic dependence on the United States and history of economic and political instability constitute it as more intensely subordinated and stigmatized compared to European small states usually studied in the status literature. Its unique position in world politics leads Ecuadorian diplomats to pursue status in ways suggested by Schulz (2017): their interpretation of moral action is shaped by US definitions of competent foreign policy. When diplomats promote US-favored moral principles, they enable Ecuador to alleviate stigmatization by acquiring symbolic capital and exchanging it for economic and cultural capital controlled by Washington. In this way, intensely subordinated small states act morally not only as an end but also as a means.

We proceed as follows. First, we discuss the literature on small state status seeking and diplomacy. Second, we identify the foreign policy narratives of Ecuadorian diplomats and scholars. Third, we report the findings of our interviews. After illustrating how diplomatic identities are structured around the professional execution of a pragmatic foreign policy, we show how Valencia's initiatives are undertaken in response to bureaucratic and international hysteresis experienced during the Correa administration.

### **Small State Status Seeking and Asymmetrical Relationships**

Status refers to a state's perceived standing within a community of peers that compete for a relatively higher position (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, Renshon 2017). A state gains recognition of status from others by acquiring symbolic markers that denote group membership and one's ranking within it (Larson, et al. 2014). The existing literature distinguishes between great and small powers' status seeking strategies. Great power status is associated with management of international crises, exemplary military capabilities, and control of a sphere of influence (Murray 2018). By definition, small states lack the resources needed to acquire military platforms associated with greatness. Instead, they obtain status by gaining recognition of their moral authority from great powers (de Carvalho and Neumann 2015). By adopting right conduct consistent with an established body of principles and maintaining the hegemonic international order, they can share the spotlight alongside great powers while rising above their peers (Wohlforth et al. 2018).

Our current understanding of small state status seeking is undertheorized in three ways. First, the literature does not account for domestic sources of status seeking behavior. States are composed of bureaucracies that possess their own cultures and policy routines which shape bureaucratic norms about policymaking (Allison 1971, Chwieroth 2010). Bureaucrats are thus a

key source of a state's knowledge about the pursuit of status, but how they conceptualize strategies for gaining moral recognition can vary depending on domestic struggles for state power among competing elite networks. To legitimate their rule, elites who lead state institutions draw upon ideological resources from abroad to define bureaucratic expertise while also delegitimizing their rivals' institutional projects (Dezalay and Garth 2002). How bureaucratic elites import knowledge about status and institutionalize it locally is an important yet unaddressed aspect of small state status seeking.

Second, current scholarship presupposes a relatively static international order and a commitment by small states to uphold it (Neumann and de Carvalho 2015:10). Hegemonic-order theory offers a more dynamic perspective. Not only are interstate governance arrangements subject to bargaining and contestation (Goh 2013, Ikenberry and Nexon 2019), but aspirant great powers may exit the hegemonic order entirely and construct an alternative one (Cooley and Nexon 2020, Flockhart 2016). In this context, even small powers can adopt revisionist anti-order postures grounded in novel moral principles.<sup>1</sup> As rising powers institutionalize new channels of public goods provision and redefine moral standards that sustain international ordering, they provide small states with new status recognition and economic opportunities. Why small states pursue moral authority within one ordering rather than another remains unexplained.

Third, the "small state" concept remains imprecise. It includes many states whose only commonality is the absence of significant military capabilities. Long (2017a) argues that smallness is better conceptualized in terms of the asymmetrical relationships between dominant and subordinate actors. This perspective reinforces the relational aspect of status, itself a product of relational structures rather than actor attributes (Duque 2016). Further, asymmetries are

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<sup>1</sup> On the varieties of revisionism, see Ward, et al. (2019).

multidimensional and consist of not only class inequalities (such as military or economic imbalances) but also unequal relationships of authority (Schulz 2017). Broad approaches to the study of international hierarchies suggest that small states' different positions within systems of stratification constitute them with their respective subjectivities and normalize their subordination (Zarakol 2017, see also Musgrave 2019:295). Extending this insight requires uncovering how knowledge transmitted through asymmetric relationships generates status seeking strategies from within state bureaucracies. Since the status literature on small states only focuses on developed Scandinavian countries possessing wealth and cultural status, its application to developing small states outside of the Eurocentric core is limited.

*Practice Theory: Status as Symbolic Capital*

We argue that Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory explains the dynamics of small state status seeking. Bourdieu's work is grounded in methodological relationalism, or scientific analyses that focus upon configurations of social relations rather than ontologically distinct agents or structures (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:15).<sup>2</sup> Relationalism allows for a structural theory that privileges historically contingent processes of social transactions rather than universal generalizations about opportunities and constraints (Bigo 2011:237). A Bourdieusian approach begins with relations and seeks to explain agent practices, or patterns of socially meaningful action that denote performative competence (Adler and Pouliot 2011:6). Rather than relying on logics of consequences or appropriateness, Bourdieu develops a logic of practicality in which agents unconsciously act toward social objects from their tacit knowledge of past experiences (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:19-22, Pouliot 2010). The logic of practice is thus a "fuzzy" set of intuitive principles and can only be studied by uncovering the classificatory schemes sustained

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<sup>2</sup> On methodological relationalism in IR, see Adamson (2016).

by a history of transactions that enable agents to cognitively order their social world (Bourdieu 1990:92).

Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, field, capital, and *doxa* illustrate the effects of relations upon practices. *Habitus* refers to a "system of durable, transposable dispositions" learned from a lifetime of transactions with others that inform its socially intelligible practices (Bourdieu 1990:53). The background knowledge that makes up a *habitus* generates improvisations across a range of circumstances based on other agents' anticipated evaluations and responses (Bigo 2011:241). An actor's *habitus* complements the field, or the objective network of social relations linking actors together in unequal positions. Actors compete over forms of capital, or any resource whose value is historically constructed, that organize them within the field. The entire social space is organized by various interlocking yet relatively autonomous fields, each arranged by the distribution of a relevant type or species of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:16-19). Over time, actors internalize principles of the social game as an unspoken truth, or *doxa*, which establishes the basic premises of social life. Practices thereby emerge from the intersection of an agent's disposition and field position (Pouliot and Mérand 2014:30). Once the field's organizing principles are imprinted upon an actor, it can intuitively sense what social performances are recognized as competent and accrue capital from others.

A Bourdieusian analysis allows us to explore how social relations inform status seeking in a hegemonic international ordering. Much like sovereign states (Bourdieu 2012/2015), hegemons establish the value of symbolic capital within the broader field of power relations and determine the exchange rate of species of capital across fields (Nexon and Neumann 2018). This perspective allows us to reconsider small state status seeking in terms of the accrual of capital from a hegemon while accounting for multiple unequal relationships. The "strategic moves"

(Mérand and Forget 2014) undertaken by a small state to acquire symbolic capital can vary depending on its position across fields and its reliance upon a hegemon for other forms of capital. A small state that already possesses economic and cultural capital can accumulate symbolic capital via moral authority for its own sake rather than for conversion into other species. For example, Norway distanced itself from the United States after the 2003 invasion of Iraq based on its violation of state sovereignty (Grager 2015:92). Its Western identity and institutions along with its high level of economic development enabled it to challenge a hegemon for breaching non-interference norms without significant costs.

Small states that are more reliant upon hegemonies for cultural and economic capital must pursue status in more cautious ways. While they certainly can claim moral authority as an end itself, their intense subordination in the economic and cultural fields forces them to accumulate symbolic capital as a means of alleviating deficits of those species. Not only are these states economically dependent on great powers, but those outside the Eurocentric core of world politics are discursively marked with the stigmas of backwardness, instability, and underdevelopment (Zarakol 2010). Their relational position constitutes them with the tacit knowledge of their own inferiority and disposes them to play the symbolic game as a means of overcoming it. In this way, small states that lack wealth and cultural prestige can manage stigmatization by obtaining symbolic capital from a hegemon for eventual conversion into economic and cultural capital. To make moral claims in ways deemed incompetent by a hegemon, including the application of normative standards to that same hegemon, would be understood as impractical.

In a world system composed of multiple ordering projects, intensely subordinated small states can theoretically exit one hegemonic field and pursue capital in another (Cooley and Nexon 2020). Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis, or the mismatch between an actor's *habitus* and

their field position (Bourdieu 1990:62, Neumann and Pouliot 2011:108) suggests they are unlikely to do so. The experience of hegemonic subordination constitutes small state policymakers with a *habitus* incommensurate with its prospective field position in a new international ordering. Their internalized doxic truths, including the classificatory schemes that define performative competence, will be ill-suited to the new field's ordering principles.<sup>3</sup> Unless small state policymakers transform their understanding of statecraft through new recruitment and training processes, the enactment of practices deemed valuable by revisionist great powers would feel incompetent and reinforce stigmatization.<sup>4</sup> Their embodiment of hegemony acts as a “heavy weight” (Pouliot 2017:124) that prevents dramatic shifts in how they seek status recognition as moral actors.

#### *The Embodiment of Hegemony among Subordinate Small State Diplomats*

If intensely subordinated small state policymakers embody hegemony, an analysis of their pursuit of status must investigate how they learn the background knowledge which informs their practices. We study foreign ministries as the primary institutional site in which knowledge about status is managed by diplomats who represent the state to international counterparts (Neumann 2012). Diplomats' vocational knowledge enables them to mediate estrangement between states, or the boundaries separating one state from another (Der Derian 1987, Constantinou 1996). Through recruitment and socialization within foreign ministries, diplomats performatively learn how to represent their state's foreign policy as compliant with international

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<sup>3</sup> Classificatory schemes are “social and mental structures” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:13-14) that operate on the cognitive level. Once habitually embodied by a subordinate actor, they suggest how the world is organized and legitimate domination by superordinate actors.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Cuba embraces a socialist international order by turning stigma into pride after the 1959 revolution. It gained moral recognition from the USSR and South American peers through opposition to the United States (Adler-Nissen: 2014:165-169).

norms and law (Sending, et al. 2015, Hurd 2015).<sup>5</sup> The inherently social dimension of diplomacy ensures that vocational knowledge within a ministry is transnational and shared by counterparts from other states. Depending on how a ministry's bureaucratic field is embedded within a transnational diplomatic field, diplomats practically represent the state's classificatory schemes as compatible with a transnational epistemic community of fellow practitioners (Haas 1992). Within both bureaucratic and transnational fields of diplomacy, competent diplomats can claim symbolic power over their counterparts by mastering diplomatic practices (Kuus 2015).

Diplomats' vocational expertise regarding the procedures of international lawmaking informs how they make normative claims about international order. Although the specialization of diplomacy enables judgments about competence to be made within its respective bureaucratic and transnational fields, it remains embedded within the broader field of hegemonic power relations and other specialized fields nested together within it. Diplomats from small states who are recognized as competent within the diplomatic field, or who can play the game of diplomatic representation and negotiation, will be more successful at claiming moral authority and advancing their state up the multilateral pecking order (Pouliot 2016).<sup>6</sup> Their knowledge of procedural rules suggests how they can extend or modify international laws and norms that regulate state behavior, while those same norms serve as the foundation for rules and procedures that guide the peaceful resolution of disputes (Bjola and Kornprobst 2013:131-132, Raymond 2018). As diplomats experientially learn to pursue moral claims through vocational practices, the classificatory schemes that define competent foreign policy and diplomacy become sedimented within a diplomat's *habitus*.

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<sup>5</sup> See Pouliot (2010) on how tacit knowledge enables diplomatic practices.

<sup>6</sup> On the reproduction of hierarchies by international organizations, see Fehl and Freistein (2020).

Once we embed diplomatic bureaucracies and practices within the broader field of power relations, we can evaluate how intensely subordinated diplomats learn to take competent moral action. If diplomats wish to offset their small state's deficit of economic and cultural capital, they must accrue symbolic capital from a hegemon and then make a competent claim for its conversion into other desired species. In this way, specific combinations of foreign policy practices associated with right moral conduct and rule-making practices associated with vocational mastery enable diplomats from subordinated states to manage stigmatization. Over time, the collective experience of acquiring capital in relation to a great power defines a foreign ministry's bureaucratic knowledge. Classificatory schemes disseminated by a hegemon across fields become embodied within a diplomat's disposition, and their competent forms of moral action reproduce the broader hegemonic field and legitimate hegemonic leadership.

By placing the formation of a diplomatic *habitus* in the context of multiple fields, we can evaluate how diplomats' vocational knowledge becomes embroiled in domestic political competition. Bureaucracies are often sites of local struggle between opposing elites who import alternative kinds of technocratic expertise to justify their own policies and institutional structures (Dezalay and Garth 2002). Diplomats engage in similar forms of competition by offering alternative representations of their state's identity and the norms of a specific ordering project as legitimate through practices associated with vocational expertise. Rival practitioners within a ministry interpret each other's diplomatic practices and preferred norms as anti-diplomacy, or incompetent practices associated with an oppositional state identity and normatively transgressive international order (Cornago 2013:194-198). These distinctions also shape which strategies intensely subordinated diplomats use to cope with stigmatization: either management

via the accrual of capital within a hegemonic order or rejection via the accrual of capital within a revisionist counterpart (Adler-Nissen 2014, 2015).

When domestic politics results in dramatic shifts in a state's executive, hysteresis within a foreign ministry is likely. Sovereign policymakers who exit one international order for another that complements their preferred state identity place their diplomats in a field position to which they are unaccustomed. Their tacit understanding of how to gain various kinds of capital, informed by the taken-for-granted assumptions learned from their position within an old field, is maladapted to valuations of capital within the new field. As the value of traditional diplomacy and anti-diplomacy becomes inverted, diplomats who occupy high ranks will lose their status and professional identity. The destabilization of their social environment will create a longing for the old bureaucratic hierarchy and a foreign policy that reproduces the hegemonic order.

#### *Hysteresis in the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry*

To explore the effects of diplomatic hysteresis on the foreign policy of an intensely subordinated small state, we study Ecuador's Foreign Ministry. Ecuador has multiple highly unequal relationships with the United States. Its peripheral position in the world economy constitutes it as one of South America's least wealthy nations and highly dependent upon the US market. Unlike small European states, its history of economic and political instability constitutes it with the stigmas associated with the developing world. Most importantly, its adoption of the US dollar as its currency in 2000 economically subordinates it directly to the United States, which effectively controls its monetary sovereignty.<sup>7</sup> Ecuador has also experienced dramatic foreign policy shifts. During the Correa presidency (2007-2017), Ecuador embraced a counter-

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<sup>7</sup> Ecuador adopted the dollar following its economic collapse in the late 1990s and devaluation of the Sucre, its former currency. For Lake (2011:150), ceding monetary sovereignty marks the most intense form of economic subordination. See Riofrancos (2020) on Ecuador's broader economic position in world politics.

hegemonic foreign policy and aligned itself with revisionist powers and the broader Pink Tide. Correa subsequently provoked a profound identity crisis among diplomats rooted in their inability to position themselves within the bureaucratic and hegemonic fields to which they were accustomed. Their need to confirm their professional and national identities made possible a rapid restoration of the status quo once Correa left office.

We evaluate how Ecuadorian diplomats responded to *correista* foreign policy by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews, field observations, and documentary analysis. Between June and September 2019, we interviewed 33 active and retired diplomats regarding their professional experiences prior to Correa, during his presidency, and the following two years when Valencia led the Ministry. Interviews lasted between one and two hours. Our respondent sample was developed from initial personal contacts and then supplemented by the Ministry, which provided access to a larger pool. Interviewees possessed at least 10 years of diplomatic service, were trained within the Ministry, and had completed two overseas diplomatic postings. They mostly occupied the highest ranks of the Foreign Service: 31 of 33 were Ministers, Ambassadors or Retired Ambassadors.<sup>8</sup> Our sample provided both limitations and opportunities for analysis based on the Foreign Service's generational cohorts. It prevented us from gaining the perspective of more junior diplomats whose formative experiences were learned during the Correa years. However, it allowed us to focus on senior diplomats who possessed the deepest reservoir of bureaucratic knowledge and connect their experiences to transnational socialization processes. Although our interviews with this group produced somewhat skewed data, they permitted us to determine how the most intensely socialized diplomats responded to Correa's initiatives.

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<sup>8</sup> Almost one-third of our interviewees were women. On gender and diplomacy, see Towns, et. al. (2017), Aggestam and Towns (2018).

In addition to interviews, we uncover the strategic narratives articulated by Ecuadorian policymakers and scholars. Narratives communicate rhetorical claims that establish the boundaries of possibility for foreign policy by legitimating some actions and delegitimizing others (Goddard 2018). A specific narrative that legitimates a complementary foreign policy is a unique telling of a country's master narrative, or the vague foundational discourse that defines a country's national biography (Berenskoetter 2014:279). When policymakers utter a version of a master narrative, they emphasize some aspects at others' expense to frame novel policies in ways consistent with its historical sense of self (Subotić 2016). These stories serve as a bridge between discourse and practice that enable actors to make new practices intelligible in reference to old practices (Neumann 2002:637). They legitimate routine relationships with states that recognize its specific narrative and, in turn, stabilize its identity (Mitzen 2006). However, new practices that contradict collective memories expressed in traditional narratives can destabilize a state's identity and compel a longing for its practical restoration (Beaumont 2017).

We begin by establishing the narrative background of Ecuadorian foreign policy by examining strategic documents released by either the Foreign Ministry or presidential administrations, ministers' public statements, and foreign policy analyses of Ecuadorian scholars. According to Miskimmon, et al. (2013), strategic narratives give meaning to a state by establishing its past, present, and future. We identify three strategic narratives, each building upon the master narrative of smallness and stigmatization. Within each narrative, we highlight a specific Ecuadorian national identity, a preferred international order, and the issues prioritized within that story (Ibid:7). We then use our interviews to show how specific narratives are embodied as doxic truths among diplomats. Our examination of both interviews and narratives allows us to triangulate among our respondents subjective perspectives (Pouliot 2010:71-72). By

comparing diplomatic interpretations and existing knowledge about Ecuador's foreign policy, we go beyond the simple reporting of individual perspectives and uncover how diplomatic expertise is tacitly conceived.

### **Narratives of Ecuadorian Identity and Foreign Policy**

Ecuador's master narrative is about how smallness left it historically vulnerable to international predation. According to former Foreign Minister Francisco Carrión, Ecuador is "a small country subject to the suffocating circumstances in the world distribution of power" (1986:186). Its need to "escape its own weaknesses" (Bonilla 2002:43) is understood through the memory of domination by more powerful states, such as Peru, which seized a large portion of the Ecuadorian Amazon following its victory in their 1941 war. Since then, Ecuador has sought security by developing international rules that constrain state power (Carrión 1986:142-156). The realization of moral authority is a logical extension of Ecuador's strategy, but how it claims a normatively upstanding role and the international order it seeks to reproduce can vary across specific strategic narratives.

The first narrative emerges during the 1970s when Ecuadorian diplomats embrace the Non-Aligned Movement to offset its weaknesses (Ruilova 1976). For Ecuadorian Ambassador to the United Nations, Leopoldo Benites (1974), both the New International Economic Order and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries enabled Ecuador to overcome the constraints on development perpetuated by dependent relationships. Ecuador also led negotiations that generated the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to codify protections against predatory fishing by Global North countries (including the United States). These initiatives reflect Ecuador's pursuit of an international order favorable to small states rather than any single great

power. Ecuador sought moral recognition by developing a new multilateral consensus around rules and institutions that upheld the Global South's interests (Carrión 1986:142-56).

A second neoliberal narrative emerged in the post-Cold War period when Ecuador sought to restore its credibility with the United States amid domestic political and economic crises. Foreign Minister Diego Cordovez's (1990) national address, in which he calls for the professionalization of the Foreign Service and warns against international isolation, is an early version of this story. Its full articulation is found in the Ministry's 2006-2020 foreign affairs strategy (PLANEX), which explicitly describes Ecuador in the gravitational field of the United States (Republic of Ecuador 2006:57). The most prominent diplomat of this period, José Ayala Lasso, demonstrated how Ecuador could enhance its moral authority by extending US-inspired human rights norms. His service as the first UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) from 1994 to 1997 enabled him to bolster human rights norms and legitimize the office (Ayala Lasso 1994). He subsequently drew upon the legacy of Ecuadorian President Jaime Roldós, who declared that Latin American states could investigate human rights abuses across the region (2019:23). Ayala Lasso thus discursively converted an element of Ecuador's identity into a marker of status valued by the United States.

A third socialist narrative corresponds to the decline of US unipolarity and the commodity boom. The rise of the BRICS in the late 2000s and sharp increase in the price of oil enabled Ecuador to distance itself from the US-led order and participate in the construction of a post-hegemonic regional alternative (Riggirozzi and Tussie 2012, see also Mielniczuk 2013).<sup>9</sup> In this context, the Correa administration redefined Ecuador's identity in terms of advancing "socialism of the twenty-first century" alongside socialist peer countries such as Venezuela and

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<sup>9</sup> The price per barrel of oil changed from \$11 in 1998 to \$134 in 2008.

Bolivia. The new National Plan for Good Living, or *Buen Vivir*, described Ecuador's foreign policy as "maintaining an elevated position" in relation to the United States (SENPLADES 2009:255).<sup>10</sup> Correa thereby used the prospect of multipolarity to gain status recognition of a novel identity through the construction of regional institutions that supported the counter-hegemonic order. These included the South American Community (2004) renamed as UNASUR (2008) and ALBA (2004), among others. For Correa, these initiatives insulated Ecuador from structural vulnerabilities in the international system while complementing his domestic agenda (Jaramillo 2020).

To varying degrees, all three narratives about Ecuadorian identity provide the background knowledge that structures the *habitus* of Ecuadorian diplomats. Each offers a symbolic system of classification by which diplomats judge policies as practical or impractical. As we show below, the neoliberal narrative mostly informed how diplomats interpreted Valencia's reorganization of the Foreign Ministry and engagement with the United States. We focus on two distinct themes - professionalism and pragmatism – which indicate how diplomats understood Valencia's policies as a commonsensical response to *correista* diplomacy. We then contrast these themes with what diplomats understand as the opposite categories – politicization and ideology – associated with the socialist narrative.

## **Two Themes of Ecuadorian Diplomacy: Professionalism and Pragmatism**

### *The Professional Habitus and Bureaucratic Field of the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry*

Our diplomatic respondents consistently relied on the theme of "professionalism" to describe their vocational identity within the Foreign Ministry. It encompassed what they

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<sup>10</sup> *Buen Vivir* is a concept drawn from Andean indigenous cosmology encapsulates the notion of "living a full life" (SENPLADES 2009:18). It was grounded in a holistic relationship between society and nature otherwise absent in Western notions of development.

described as “the diplomatic life,” or a commitment to represent Ecuador by adhering to bureaucratic procedures and technical processes institutionalized within the Ministry (Respondent 1, 16 July). “The diplomatic career” comprises a set of values and capacities, including a sense of patriotism, multilingualism (especially fluency in English), and the ability to live among peoples of various cultures (Respondent 29, 25 June). Smallness is a constant factor in structuring diplomatic dispositions. Since its approximately 330-person Foreign Service is too small to enable policy specializations, members must represent the country’s interests on all issues: “a diplomat is an expert in generalities” (Respondent 9, 25 June). These limitations force the Ministry to prioritize country-specific embassies in the Western Hemisphere and Europe, where Ecuador has significant interests or cultural affinities. Many countries in Africa and Asia are served by “micro-embassies” while others represent Ecuador to multiple countries simultaneously.

The transnational diplomatic field powerfully shapes how the Foreign Ministry institutionalizes vocational competence. The primary site for socialization is the Diplomatic Academy, which graduated recruits into the Foreign Service as Third Secretaries. Not only did they learn about Ecuadorian history, international law, and negotiations, but recruits were steeped in the art of elite socialization through training in protocol and etiquette. A diplomat who mastered these skills could competently stand among their international counterparts and realize Ecuador’s interests through the practical performance of diplomacy: “sometimes people thought protocol was everything. The tuxedo, that Versailles spirit of diplomacy, the ceremony. But really, it’s instrumental” (Respondent 16, 25 August). As the Academy imprinted the professional ethos upon recruits’ *habitus*, it enabled them to be recognized by vocational

counterparts. Diplomats were thus constituted as the sole caretaker of Ecuador's overseas image and interests by adapting them to transnational expectations associated with the vocation.

The broader transnational educational field further shaped the meaning of professional competence. To be a professional is associated with a Western-facing identity and Eurocentric experiences gained from attending US or European universities. Harvard University provided a notable example.<sup>11</sup> Some diplomats displayed Harvard memorabilia, a symbolic indication of valued experiences shared by many counterparts abroad. Its unique role in defining competent diplomatic practices was cemented by the negotiation process concluding the Cenepa War fought between Ecuador and Peru in January-February 1995. Multiple diplomats emphasized how Roger Fisher, Harvard Law professor and director of the Harvard Negotiation Project, advised Ecuadorian and Peruvian diplomats to resolve their disputes by specifying their precise needs and objectives: "Fisher offered a simple story about a dispute over an apple. Two sides want it, but no one is asking why. One party just wants the skin, the other wants the pulp. Sometimes problems can be solved if you ask both parties their interests rather than divide the apple in two." (Respondent 26, 15 July). Fisher's importance was reinforced by his relationship with Jamil Mahuad, the Ecuadorian president and former Harvard student who concluded the negotiations in 1998 and dollarized the Ecuadorian economy in 2000. He later contributed a chapter to Fisher's 2006 co-edited volume on negotiation: "[Mahuad] was Fisher's disciple" (Respondent 1, 16 July).

These experiences illustrate how the value of diplomatic capital within the Ministry was structured by other fields centered upon the United States. Through participation in US educational institutions, diplomats learned to practice negotiation in ways that stabilized

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<sup>11</sup> Other universities are relevant: Valencia gained a Master's Degree from Columbia University. His successor, Ambassador Luis Gallegos, had a Master's Degree from Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Ecuador's territorial frontiers and neutralized its primary interstate threat. Their incorporation into the US educational field also gave them access to bureaucratic capital. Once negotiation enabled diplomats to achieve vocational success, it became a tacit form of institutional knowledge reproduced in the Ministry. Technocratic expertise learned from US academic institutions became an organizing principle of the bureaucratic field, and the context of US hegemony provided the setting in which Ecuadorian diplomats envisioned additional successes using similar practices.

Diplomats' conceptualization of how to accrue capital was also informed by Ayala Lasso's work within the UN, where he successfully climbed the ranks of the transnational diplomatic field. Nearly all respondents described Ayala Lasso as a role model for their work. During his appointment as Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, he enhanced Ecuador's status by serving as President of the Security Council in August 1991 and September 1992 during Ecuador's two-year non-permanent term.<sup>12</sup> Ayala Lasso's expertise was widely recognized following his implementation of recommendations made at the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights to establish UNHCHR, an initiative publicly supported by US President Bill Clinton (1993).<sup>13</sup> These efforts, combined with Ayala Lasso's service as Foreign Minister during the Cenepa War negotiations, led respondents to describe him as a "reference for diplomats" (Respondent 1, July 16) and "a paradigm for Ecuadorian diplomacy" (Respondent 32, 21 June). For one senior diplomat, working for him provided "the experiences that give specific forms of looking at life" (Respondent 30, 24 June). Ayala Lasso thereby provided diplomats with historical knowledge of how to position Ecuador alongside the United States in the premier

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<sup>12</sup> See Malone (2000) on state motivations for obtaining a non-permanent Security Council seat.

<sup>13</sup> NGOs recognized how Ayala Lasso's "skillfully achieved consensus" (Amnesty 1997:3-4) enabled passage of the General Assembly Resolution authorizing UNHCHR's creation, a function his "dapper" self-presentation as "the very model of a diplomat" (Korey 1998:370).

institution of global governance and stabilize its role in the US-led order. Vocational success became associated with a diplomat's ability to enhance Ecuador's status by claiming authority over human rights norms in ways consistent with the liberal narrative.

These descriptions demonstrate how collective knowledge about professionalism structures the *habitus* of Ecuadorian diplomats and suggests which practices denote competence within the Ministry's bureaucratic field. Diplomats are expected to adopt a professional disposition based on training at home and acquisition of technocratic knowledge from elite Global North universities. Those who blend mastery of protocol and negotiation with an awareness of Ecuador's smallness are viewed as most capable of representing Ecuador abroad. The Ministry's bureaucratic field is thus integrated within a transnational diplomatic field, itself embedded within the US-led hegemonic field. Role models such as Ayala Lasso illustrate how diplomats can harmonize Ecuador's identity with its Andean peers and gain status by reproducing the moral principles of the dominant order: "he changed the horizon of Ecuadorian diplomacy. [It] became opened to the world...Before, we were conditioned by the territorial conflict" (Respondent 29, 25 June). From Ayala Lasso, diplomats learned to accumulate diplomatic capital and convert it into symbolic capital for Ecuador through multilateral engagement.

#### *Foreign Policy Pragmatism and the Embodiment of Hegemony*

Interpretations of Ayala Lasso's work illustrate how practices associated with professionalism delimit Ecuadorian foreign policy. Since Ecuador's master narrative defines it as a weak and underdeveloped state, a practical foreign policy is defined by *pragmatism*, or recognition of Ecuador's constraints. The meaning of pragmatism is fixed in relation to two concepts: "realism" as an awareness of power politics and "dignity" as principles upheld in the conduct of foreign affairs (Respondent 26, 15 July). Both concepts were described by diplomats

as consistent with Ecuador's historic "personality" as a state threatened by stronger powers (Ibid.). Instead, they used normative obligations as a "diplomatic trench" to prevent domination by more powerful countries: "[w]hen principles become more important, small countries will become stronger" (Respondent 33, 16 July).

Diplomatic stories of Ecuador's foreign policy history reveal how the meaning of pragmatism is defined within specific strategic narratives. Diplomats drew upon the Non-Aligned Movement narrative to valorize Ecuador's "balanced positions" during the Cold War and establish its identity as a mediator state (Respondent 2, 25 June). They pointed to Ecuador's leading role in negotiating UNCLOS and support for Palestinian sovereignty as evidence of its leadership in upholding international law. Within South America, this approach led Ecuadorian policymakers to prioritize collective preferences over their own: "The moment when you have singular interests in a regional forum, you cannot be a leader" (Responder 10, 21 June). Ecuador's smallness enabled this role, which converted weakness into a virtue: "It's easier when you are down. It's easier to play neutrality" (Ibid.).

The meaning of pragmatism changed as diplomats adopted the neoliberal narrative consistent with post-Cold War US leadership. Diplomats observed that the United States is "our first trade partner" (Respondent 29, 25 June), a major destination for Ecuadorian emigrants, and the source of Ecuador's currency. These dependent and diasporic relationships led respondents to view the United States as a template for Ecuador's domestic and foreign policy: "the US is our model, our example. We don't have to agree on everything, but we need to follow the hegemony" (Respondent 12, 16 July). For another diplomat, "it is a natural relation" (Respondent 14, 4 July), symbolizing how US authority was commonsensical. The Cenepa War negotiations affirmed the importance of the United States. Because "Washington weighs more"

than other regional powers, its recommendations could not be ignored (Respondent 26, 15 July). In this context, diplomats' *habitus* became oriented towards the United States and its valuation of symbolic capital.

Ecuador's resolution of its territorial disputes and claim to moral status as a promoter of human rights led diplomats to embody their subordinate position in relation to the United States. For them, the context of US hegemony was conducive to both professional and foreign policy successes and enabled advancement within the bureaucratic and hegemonic fields. In this way, the US hegemonic order and narrative that naturalized it became part of the background knowledge that structured their *habitus* and reinforced Ecuador's Western identity. For example, they challenged socialist appropriations of Simón Bolívar by representing him as the source of liberalism in South America, an ideology that enabled state sovereignty but had first traveled from Europe to North America: "We are the heirs of liberalism" (Respondent 7, 2 July). The adoption of liberal forms of sociopolitical organization enabled them to manage the stigmatized shortcomings of Ecuador's Latin American identity: "Latin Americans are not pragmatic, not efficient," (Respondent 20, 17 June), traits associated with Latin American IOs' institutional failures. Diplomats' history of Ecuador and Latin America is thus infused with a narrative that addresses stigmatization by becoming "liberal" on the US model.

The sense that the United States was worthy of emulation was reinforced by Ecuadorian immigrants' desire to assimilate into US culture, a function of US economic prosperity and perception that its political institutions were functional and stable. These aspirations led diplomats to claim that Ecuador had to present itself as a "good neighbor" and not be seen by Washington as a stranger with "immature politics" (Respondent 26, 15 July). One diplomat compared the relationship to a postcolonial state and a former empire: "India has the same

relationship with the United Kingdom that Ecuador has with the United States. I lived in India. There, some people dream about living in the UK, while others publicly abhor the UK. But, if they could go there, they would" (Respondent 30, 24 June). Once diplomats internalized the symbolic values associated with US hegemony, Ecuador's relative lack of symbolic worth constituted it with a stigma that could only be overcome through US recognition of its own liberalism.

Diplomats' embodiment of hegemony is further revealed by foreign policy objectives, such as neoliberal trade integration, associated with pragmatism and their complementarity with professionalism. Many argued that participation in regional trade blocs such as the Andean Community and Pacific Alliance were most useful to Ecuador, along with emulation of its neighbors' trade policies. "The entrepreneurial spirit of Chile" was a positive example because it balanced exports among the United States, Europe, and Asia while avoiding dependency on any one market (Respondent 6, 26 June). Like Colombia and Peru, diplomats argued that Ecuador could improve its economic position by signing a bilateral agreement with the US providing greater export access for food products without threatening domestic industries. The practical skill of negotiation could enable this outcome: "this can be a win-win relationship. The work of a diplomat is to maximize the benefits for Ecuador in negotiations. There cannot be an absolute winner or loser." (Respondent 28, 20 June). By describing trade negotiations in mixed-sum terms, diplomats represented the US-led hegemonic field as non-exploitative and beneficial to Ecuador so long as diplomats pursued national interests in vocationally competent ways. Not only did they seek validation of Ecuador's status in the US-centric hierarchy by mimicking

liberal peers within preferred regional forums,<sup>14</sup> but they also sought access to economic capital that would enhance national wealth.

Ecuador's courtship of the Trump administration further illustrates how status can function as a means of acquiring specific forms of capital that alleviate its stigmatization as a developing and politically unstable polity. Guided by the 2006 PLANEX, Valencia's Ministry abandoned UNASUR as Moreno accused Correa and Venezuela of organizing a nationwide uprising in October 2019 against cuts to fuel subsidies (Lissardy 2019). It subsequently reaped material benefits by reorienting toward the United States, including a new foreign loan with the IMF and an assistance agreement with the US Agency for International Development. Valencia's exit from the Pink Tide's counter-order project was rewarded with a visit by US Vice President Michael Pence to Ecuador in 2018 and Moreno's Oval Office meeting with Trump in February 2020. As the White House recognized Ecuador's regional leadership for its promotion of liberalism, it bestowed status among its liberal peers by describing it as "the Gateway to the Andes" (White House 2020). Valencia had achieved recognition of Ecuador as a moral partner of the United States and confirmed its shift away from its former socialist allies. He was rewarded with economic capital in the form of loans and foreign aid as well as cultural capital in the form of recognition as a successful democratic polity, and these achievements helped to validate Moreno's broader agenda.

Diplomats supported this endeavor while expressing discomfort with Trump - "he is not a saint of my devotion" (Respondent 12, 16 July) - because he acted in ways that contradicted the US' liberal identity. The Trump administration's violations of migrants' human rights and threat to democratic values led diplomats to view it as possessing the stigmatized traits of Latin

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<sup>14</sup> On status seeking within a regional "friendly neighborhood," see Røren (2019).

America. "The United States has historically been a serious country. It cannot resemble a third world country...The problem with Trump is that he does not want to follow the script" (Respondent 28, 20 June). Despite their misgivings, diplomats knew not to turn the moral principles of the US hegemonic ordering back upon the United States. To claim moral authority in opposition to the dominant actor who controlled economic assistance and cultural prestige would be self-defeating. Moral action had to be undertaken in a way understood as competent to Washington rather than purely for its own sake. Doing so allowed Ecuador to manage the stigmatization related to its various subordinate positions while simultaneously legitimating the Moreno administration.

### **Hysteresis and the Loss of Identity among Ecuadorian Diplomats**

#### *Politicization and the Transformation of Ministry's Bureaucratic Field*

Diplomats' emphasis on professionalism and pragmatism is a direct response to hysteresis experienced during the Correa administration. Hysteresis had two sources. The first was their understanding of the Ministry's politicization by Correa's foreign ministers. According to diplomats, these ministers enacted institutional reforms conducive to Correa's domestic political objectives that eroded diplomats' bureaucratic identity as impartial representatives of the Ecuadorian state: "The axe blow that Correa delivered to the institution was a catastrophe" (Respondent 17, 11 July). For them, the value of capital within the Ministry became distorted as Correa delinked the bureaucratic field from the transnational diplomatic field. The result was a "gray area" within the Ministry in which professional diplomacy was lost (Respondent 20, 17 June). Overall, diplomats' responses suggest that the internalized self-evident truths and classificatory schemes which constituted their vocational identity were no longer applicable: "the

problem with the [Correa] administration was that he wanted to destroy the diplomatic career” (Respondent 13, 24 June).

Diplomats understood the Correa administration as undermining the autonomy of state institutions and subordinating them to its own needs. They accused Correa’s Foreign Ministers of using the political quota, or the political appointment of diplomatic personnel outside of formal recruitment mechanisms, to transform the structure of the Foreign Service (Respondent 21, 25 July). The most dramatic change involved closure of the old Diplomatic Academy in 2011 by Ricardo Patiño, the longest serving *correista* Foreign Minister. Rather than permitting the Ministry to train its own recruits, future diplomats were channeled into the National Institute of Higher Education (IAEN), a postgraduate institution that offered preparation for state service. Diplomats viewed this initiative as an attempt to socialize new members of the Foreign Service into *correista* values rather than those associated with professional competence. Through IAEN, “*compita militantes*” (militant comrades) of Correa’s party, *Alianza Pais* could become diplomats by virtue of their partisan sentiments rather than vocational expertise (Respondent 22, 15 July). “Some people tried to engage the diplomatic experience, but others were friends of Correa and felt they did not need learn diplomacy. They could complain to Correa about being mistreated in the Ministry...They thought they could make revolution” (Respondent 2, 25 June).

By altering the terms by which non-diplomats could obtain a bureaucratic identity, the Correa administration falsified the bedrock assumptions that defined how diplomats interpreted their professional mission. They saw the practical work of the Ministry as directed toward representing *Alianza Pais* rather than the Ecuadorian state. The *habitus* of junior diplomats trained in IAEN was structured to match this purpose by including *Buen Vivir* in its curriculum. Senior diplomats recoiled from this new institutional orientation and subsequently viewed the

Ministry as compromised by politics: “you need to safeguard the collectivity. You are not here to do proselytism” (Respondent 30, 24 June).

The Ministry's role in relation to other state institutions also became unrecognizable. One diplomat lamented the loss of policymaking authority over human rights, management of border disputes, and trade negotiations to other ministries (Respondent 16, 5 July). Another described feeling unable to justify their bureaucratic existence based on knowledge of those issue areas. “We were left as *tramitadores*,” or paper pushers without control over any meaningful decisions (Respondent 31, 26 June). Their use of a professional-political binary in describing the Ministry's reorganization demonstrates how their cognitive categories no longer corresponded to the bureaucratic field.

The reordering of the Ministry's hierarchy left veteran diplomats in a hysteretic condition characterized by feelings of maladjustment. Aesthetic standards regarding professional attire became relaxed as new diplomats wore blue jeans to work rather than a suit or dress: “The Ministry was treated like a public market” (Respondent 12, 16 July). Senior diplomats were skipped over for promotion while new IAEN graduates advanced rapidly (Respondent 10, 21 June). Professional service, which formerly enabled them to accumulate bureaucratic capital, suddenly had little meaning. “They told us ‘here, you are the ambassador of nothing’” (Respondent 31, 26 June). Multiple respondents described how *correista* leadership subdued career diplomats by posting them to non-Western countries or threatening to do so (Ibid., Respondent 16, 5 July). One spoke negatively about diplomats who acquiesced to the new bureaucratic hierarchy, describing them as abandoning their professional commitments: “They sold themselves.” (Respondent 25, 18 July).

These experiences suggested to diplomats that the forms of bureaucratic knowledge which previously denoted vocational expertise had become symbolically worthless. All the forms of self-representation learned from both the Diplomatic Academy as well as overseas educational experiences appeared to be discarded by *correista* ministers. Instead, they relied on knowledge articulated by *Alianza Pais* to restructure institutions and practices in ways that reinforced the legitimacy of the Correa administration. Diplomats' experience of hysteresis led them to reinstitutionalize the doxic truths that informed their disposition. Moreno's abandonment of Correa's legacy and appointment of Valencia as Foreign Minister enabled diplomats to restore preexisting bureaucratic hierarchies and valuations of bureaucratic capital: "Valencia gained momentum without having to do anything exceptional. He just had to return to old patterns and traditions" (Respondent 1, 16 July). The reopening of the Diplomatic Academy combined with the disavowal of ministerial leadership under Correa produced a new bureaucratic orthodoxy inspired by diplomats' pre-Correa *habitus* that also complemented Moreno's governmental vision.

#### *Ideology and the Bolivarian Counter-Hegemonic Project*

The restoration of "logical and moral conformity" (Bourdieu 2015:167) within the Ministry served another purpose. It complemented diplomats' delegitimation of Correa's foreign policy and the socialist narrative that complemented it. Senior diplomats described this counter-hegemonic project as a "useless confrontational strategy" guided by ideology (Respondent 17, 11 July), or a worldview disconnected from Ecuador's needs and international environment. Rather than pragmatically cope with Ecuador's smallness by gaining moral recognition from the United States, they understood Correa's adversarial posture as an ideological misreading of Ecuador's place in world politics:

“Correa wants revenge for Ecuador’s past treatment. Instead, we need genuine leadership that says ‘we belong to a community, we want a common, better future.’ It’s not us against them... There’s no need to humiliate the other” (Respondent 10, 21 June).

For diplomats who habitually sought recognition from Washington, Correa's foreign policy was understood as abandoning the relationship that confirmed their sense of self. Ecuador suddenly presented itself in ways that contradicted the small state identity they unconsciously understood as genuine and subsequently pursued impractical objectives: "In diplomacy, you have to be honest with how you see yourself in the international arena... You have to be consistent about your country and its interests" (Respondent 13, 24 June).

Diplomats conceived of the ideological origins of *correista* foreign policy in terms of the personal goals of Pink Tide presidents. UNASUR was a glaring example of how the counter-hegemonic project offered no benefits to Ecuador: “I think of [UNASUR] as a club of presidents that wanted to satisfy their vanities” (Respondent 9, 25 June). The statue of Argentine President and first UNASUR Secretary-General, Nestor Kirchner, erected at UNASUR headquarters in North Quito, exemplified how the organization was disconnected from Ecuador's developmental needs. "UNASUR was unnecessary and costly. Take the Kirchner statue. It is perfectly useless but made of good quality material. By melting it down, we could provide electricity [to Ecuadorians]" (Respondent 28, 20 June). Ecuador’s participation in ALBA and focus on Bolivarian diplomacy was another deviation from its national interest: “it represents the problem of ideologizing foreign policy. There are permanent objectives in international law and diplomacy. But we founded our foreign policy in something fleeting, something in the interests of a passing government” (Respondent 14, 4 July).

Descriptions of *correista* diplomacy further illustrate how foreign policy hysteresis was fueled by cooperation with socialist peers. Diplomats were highly critical of how the Ministry

delegated routine decisions about voting on UN Human Rights Council resolutions to socialist allies. “Patiño represented what not to do. In Geneva, we received the same instructions for speeches given to Venezuela. Speeches were prepared in Caracas or Havana” (Respondent 2, 25 June). Another described the challenge of addressing North Korean kidnappings of Japanese civilians, an act typically denounced by Ecuador as a human rights violation: “I asked Quito for instructions, they said ‘do exactly what the Cubans tell you to do’” (Respondent 22, 15 July). As Ecuador became aligned with socialist small and middle powers, diplomats lost the ability to make foreign policy based on their understanding of national interests and claim Ecuador’s traditional markers of moral status. “Our foreign policy was in the hands of foreigners who had a different agenda than our national agenda...our diplomacy was basically outsourced to the regional agenda, which was an ideological, multinational agenda of far-left ideology” (Respondent 16, 25 August).

Hysteresis was compounded by the Ministry’s violation of diplomatic commitments while promoting the counter-hegemonic order. One diplomat cited Ecuador’s withdrawal of support for Japan during the 2008 elections for the non-permanent Asia seat on the UN Security Council. Despite past promises to Tokyo, Ecuador voted for Iran to challenge the United States. This action suggested that Ecuador was incapable of being a viable multilateral partner: “credibility is the main virtue...if you change positions, then you are cheating” (Respondent 1, 16 July). Since breaking promises was seen as a breach of their vocational responsibilities to their counterparts, they felt the erosion of their own professional status within the transnational diplomatic field as well as Ecuador’s loss of moral authority.

Correa’s grant of asylum to Julian Assange of Wikileaks provoked the most intense feelings of hysteresis because it ignored Ecuador’s smallness, the defining characteristic of its

national biography. By backing a non-state actor that sought to harm the United States, Ecuador put itself into a vulnerable position in relation to the regional hegemon: “We got into a very big problem, in the major leagues of international relations, that did not correspond to us” (Respondent 9, 25 June). Diplomats' preservation of Ecuador's moral claim to uphold international law was further threatened by Wikileaks' purported interference in the internal affairs of the US, UK and Spain and violation of basic diplomatic customs (Respondent 1, 16 July; Respondent 3, July 1). One diplomat rejected Correa's free speech justification for hosting Assange as hypocrisy: "The ironic thing is you are defending human rights but at the same time, we fought against the Inter-American Court of Human Rights because it was supposedly biased” towards the United States (Respondent 1, 16 July). Correa’s anti-US stance led Ecuador to contradict the core element of its master narrative and positioned itself in the worst possible location relative to Washington. Rather than achieving good standing within the hegemonic order, Ecuador was socially isolated from a primary source of status recognition.

Diplomatic reactions to *correista* foreign policy illustrate how their *habitus* prevented them from adapting to Ecuador’s role in an anti-American order. By labeling Correa's foreign policy as "ideological," they indicate how the neoliberal narrative about Ecuador’s identity, one inspired by post-Cold War US unipolarity, became the reference point for practical judgments about Ecuadorian foreign policy. It also served to delegitimize the “revolutionary” foreign policy knowledge of the Correa administration along with its socialist narrative while validating mainstream understandings cultivated from both domestic and Western educational institutions. Although one senior diplomat acknowledged that representing Ecuador as economically liberal was itself an ideological project, the collapse of ideological competitors to liberalism suggested that no alternative was possible:

“One might argue that neoliberalism is an ideology, but we have to be clear that we have aligned in a liberal scheme...Not only Ecuador, but many countries have reached a conclusion that it is more convenient to maintain the liberal economic scheme...Liberalism is the most successful model, although it's not a perfect model” (Respondent 32, 21 June).

By pursuing a "pragmatic" foreign policy, diplomats believed that Ecuador could again demonstrate competence within the only international order imaginable. The explicit articulation of liberalism as pragmatic suggests how senior diplomats created a new political orthodoxy in the wake of anxieties provoked by the Correa administration. It also indicated how gaining moral authority from the United States was its own reward. Doing so enabled diplomats to stabilize their understandings of themselves and Ecuador as they resolved the mismatch between *habitus* and position that otherwise fueled hysteresis.

#### *Incomplete Homogenization amid Transnational Polarization*

Our interviews demonstrate how diplomats' *habitus* drove a hysteretic backlash to Correa's transformation of both the Foreign Ministry and Ecuadorian foreign policy. By embracing a neoliberal orthodoxy, they negated the *correista* legacy while homogenizing the Ministry and promoting bureaucratic conformity. However, a small number of respondents continued to offer descriptions that matched the Non-Aligned Movement narrative. For them, Ecuador was best served by a foreign policy that sought to contest the existing international order without adopting an anti-American posture: “Correa used antagonism against the US for his own purposes. That was incorrect. What you need to do is get along well but not be obedient.” (Respondent 22, 15 July). Another suggested that Ecuador could position itself as neutral among the great powers: “We need relations with multiple actors...We have to acknowledge that the world is there, beyond our traditional partners, whether they like it or not” (Respondent 21, 25 July).

Within this narrative, some of Correa's multilateral initiatives were framed in terms of the master narrative of Ecuador's smallness while reclaiming its moral authority regarding human rights. One such endeavor was the Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Transnational Corporations and Other Businesses with Respect to Human Rights, a UN treaty process initiated by Ecuador and South Africa in 2014, which seeks binding regulations on transnational business operations. It was discussed as consistent with Ecuador's adherence to all nine existing human rights treaties and an extension of Ecuador's role as a human rights leader: "[t]his was not Correa's initiative, though he liked it. It could be framed as a fight against imperialism, but we never used those political criteria. Instead, the purpose was based on justice for victims, having quality investment, restoring economic balance" (Respondent 2, 25 June). Another diplomat discussed his role in drafting the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: "The first ones to oppose this were the Americans, but I got them to change their position...Obama sent me the pen with which he signed the treaty, and it reminds us that you can change a country the size of the US with a just cause" (Respondent 4, 9 September).

Although less than 10 respondents expressed these sentiments, they indicate a multiplicity of perspectives about Ecuador's role in world politics beyond the anti-*correista*/pro-*correista* binary that structured senior diplomats' identities. This small group tacitly believed that Ecuador could claim moral authority through norm contestation<sup>15</sup> rather than reproducing US-favored norms or discarding them altogether. However, the continued polarization of Ecuadorian domestic politics and Latin America will likely inhibit the dissemination of this non-alignment narrative. Consistent with Dezalay and Garth's (2002) arguments about the internationalization of domestic conflicts, dominant anti-*correista* diplomats can associate a pro-US posture with

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<sup>15</sup> On norm contestation, see Wiener (2014).

technocratic knowledge as a means of legitimizing the restoration of a liberal state and delegitimizing the *correista* political movement. Their habitual rejection of the Pink Tide and attachment to the United States forecloses the possibility of novel forms of diplomacy that combines vocational expertise with non-US internationalist principles. To promote a new form of internationalism as a moral obligation would be incompetent since it would forego economic and cultural capital that Ecuador can access from the United States.

## **Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated how the intersection of domestic politics and international ordering projects constitutes small state status seeking. Our analysis shows how domestic elite competition shaped Ecuadorian diplomats' pursuit of moral recognition within the US-led international order. Diplomats' history of socialization experiences, both within the Foreign Ministry and Western educational institutions, led them to internalize a neoliberal narrative about Ecuador's identity and a classificatory scheme consistent with the broader values of the US-led order. Their commitment to upholding US-favored moral principles reinforced hysteretic anxieties produced by the Correa administration and the diplomatic practices employed to establish its counter-hegemonic ordering project. By asserting both professionalism and pragmatism as the lodestars of Ecuadorian diplomacy, senior diplomats sought to delegitimize both *correista* diplomacy and their domestic political agenda.

Our analysis of Ecuadorian diplomats has important implications for IR scholarship. Status seeking is not merely a single set of continuous practices but can shift dramatically as domestic elites struggle against each other while drawing upon discursive and material resources from abroad. This competitive aspect often reinforces status seeking practices among one set of bureaucrats alienated by their domestic rivals, a phenomenon that may extend to other states in

the international system. When US President Biden (White House 2021) declares “America is back” and commits to opposing authoritarianism around the world, he effectively discredits his predecessor’s far-right political project while reasserting the US hegemonic role in upholding a nominally liberal international order. Future scholarship might investigate how hysteresis rooted in domestic political competition inspires alternative status recognition practices in other polities.

We further demonstrate how small state status seeking is both a means of offsetting intense subordination across multiple dimensions of hierarchy and also an end in itself. By reproducing US-favored moral axioms, Foreign Minister Valencia obtained symbolic capital for conversion into economic and cultural capital. In turn, diplomats legitimated the Moreno administration’s construction of a liberal state based on their ability to manage Ecuador’s stigmatization. But the simple reassertion of Ecuador’s position within the US-led liberal order also served its own purpose for diplomats: it helped resolve the hysteretic anxieties experienced during the Correa administration. Their understanding of how to conduct competent diplomacy was a product of background knowledge learned during the apex of US global hegemony and their rejection of Correa’s revisionist foreign policy. By reclaiming moral authority alongside the United States, diplomats stabilized their institutional identity after years of crisis. However, we should not expect that all states in the Global South will engage in status seeking as Ecuador. Those states that experience less intense forms of subordination and are less habitually reliant on a single great power might be more comfortable modifying their status seeking practices.

Lastly, our research suggests more scholarly attention should be focused on how small states may be structurally constrained from changing international orders. Long (2017b) rightly argues that small states’ military weakness does not foreclose upon opportunities to influence

world politics.<sup>16</sup> However, the Ecuadorian experience implies that states with a history of intense subordination are less likely to successfully wield such power absent major transformations of their domestic politics and bureaucratic norms. Once the elites of a small state internalize cognitive structures associated with unequal relationships, the horizon for reforming the arrangements of an ordering project will be limited.

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<sup>16</sup> See also Hay (2003), and Braveboy-Wagner (2008).

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