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The Importance of Institutionalization and the Effect of Strong Institutions on States' Foreign Policy Success

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Abstract: This study examines the effect of institutionalization on states' foreign policy success through the lens of the separation of powers. To grasp its multidimensional nature, the study integrates institutional theory with foreign policy analysis, addressing institutions across their regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive layers. Adopting a mixed-methods approach (explanatory sequential design), the study comparatively analyzes the foreign policy performance of states at differing levels of institutionalization. In the quantitative phase, it draws on indices such as the World Bank Governance Indicators, the Democracy Index, and the Rule of Law Index; in the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with diplomats, foreign policy experts, and academics. The cases span a broad spectrum from democratic governments to totalitarian regimes. The findings reveal that states with strong institutional structures develop more consistent, predictable, and effective foreign policy strategies, remain more faithful to their international commitments, take more composed decisions in times of crisis, and are regarded as more credible and respected actors internationally. The separation of powers interacts directly with dimensions such as transparency, accountability, the rule of law, democratic participation, soft power, digital diplomacy, and crisis management. The study further shows that institutional decline undermines foreign policy performance, that institutional adaptation capacity is decisive under changing global conditions, and that institutionalization reduces personalization in foreign policy. What is decisive is not institutions on paper but the extent to which they actually function; the gap between constitutional arrangement and actual practice is the critical variable determining foreign policy effectiveness. The results demonstrate that institutional structures produce sustainable foreign policy success only when supported by democratic norms, the rule of law, and an institutional culture internalized by society.
Keywords: *Institutionalization, Foreign policy success, Separation of powers, Rule of law, Institutional capacity*

I. Introduction

The capacity of states to endure over the long run and to maintain a consistent external posture rests largely on their ability to anchor governance in rules rather than in individuals. Institutionalization is the process whereby decision-making is grounded in defined rules, written procedures, and established norms, thereby insulating it from leaders' personal preferences and the prevailing political mood of the day. North (1990) defines institutions as the "rules of the game" that order social life and enable parties to anticipate one another's conduct; these rules range from written laws to the unwritten habits a society shares. Institutions are not merely constraining but also enabling structures: while restraining individual will, they render collective action predictable and secure continuity in governance. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), distinguishing between inclusive and extractive institutions, argue that inclusive institutions—those that disperse power broadly and remain open to oversight—foster both economic development and political stability. The degree of institutionalization is itself a measurable phenomenon; Huntington (1968) assessed it along dimensions such as adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and internal coherence, showing that states strong on these dimensions adjust more readily to changing circumstances. Where rules take precedence over individuals, decisions do not lurch from day to day; where the institutional ground is weak, governance is surrendered to leaders' momentary dispositions and short-term calculations.

Although the value of institutionalization in domestic governance has long been debated, the picture is less clear-cut when the subject turns to foreign policy. In most countries foreign policy is a domain in which the executive predominates, secrecy and speed come to the fore, and public oversight remains comparatively weak; this very character makes it a fertile ground on which to test the effect of institutional constraints. Yet a state's success in foreign policy—keeping its word, remaining faithful to its commitments, being a predictable partner for its allies, and preserving its composure in a crisis—is bound up directly with the robustness of its domestic institutional structure. This study treats consistency, predictability, fidelity to commitments, crisis-management capacity, and the ability to build durable partnerships as the core criteria of foreign policy success. Each of these criteria requires that decisions be produced through institutional processes rather than personal initiative.

At first glance a counterintuitive problem arises here. An unconstrained executive may appear advantageous in foreign policy because it can decide swiftly, with a single voice, and without consulting anyone; indeed, it is frequently claimed that authoritarian leaders can bluff more comfortably at the bargaining table, whereas democracies remain hamstrung by internal debate and oversight procedures. The institutionalist literature, however, largely inverts this intuition: institutional constraints that appear to be obstacles often turn into assets that render a state's word more credible and its course more predictable. The essential question, therefore, is not whether institutional constraints slow foreign policy down, but through which mechanisms these constraints are converted into long-term credibility.

This process of conversion can be traced through several mechanisms. First, strong institutions purge foreign policy of a single leader's personal inclinations and allow decisions to mature within defined processes. Second, they secure policy continuity even across changes of government, thereby preventing foreign policy from being rewritten with every election. The third and perhaps most decisive mechanism is credible commitment: Martin (2000) shows that the participation of legislatures in foreign policy processes—though often presumed to be an obstacle—lends credibility to pledges and thereby facilitates international cooperation, while Fearon (1994) demonstrates that governments exposed to domestic oversight and public pressure can convey their intentions to the other side more credibly in moments of crisis. Fourth, the presence of numerous checkpoints (veto players) stabilizes policy by making abrupt and arbitrary departures more difficult; Tsebelis (2002) shows that as the number of veto players and the ideological distance among them increase, radical breaks from the status quo become harder and policy stability rises. Fifth, institutionalization helps decisions rest on firmer foundations by channeling expert knowledge and institutional memory into the decision-making process. Finally, transparency and accountability confer legitimacy on foreign policy both at home and in the international arena.

The validity of these mechanisms has long been debated in international relations theory. The liberal-institutionalist tradition holds that institutions render states more reliable by reducing uncertainty and lowering the costs of cooperation (Keohane, 1984; Keohane & Martin, 1995). By contrast, structural realists such as Waltz (2000) and Mearsheimer (1994) maintain that, given the anarchic nature of the international system, the influence of institutions remains quite limited and that what truly determines state behavior is the balance of power. Wendt (1999), shifting the debate onto different ground, argues that institutions are not merely frameworks that constrain states from without but social structures that also shape their identities and the way they define their interests. This study treats these approaches not as alternatives to one another but as complementary lenses that illuminate the link between institutionalization and foreign policy at different levels.

The axis on which this study grounds its analysis is the separation of powers. The mechanism of checks and balances among the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary is the principal arrangement in which institutional constraints on foreign policy are made concrete. What is decisive here, however, is not whether this separation is written into the constitution but whether it actually functions. In many countries the separation of powers exists on paper; yet when the executive effectively neutralizes the judiciary and the legislature, the formal separation loses its capacity to oversee foreign policy. The central proposition of this study is that the gap between the formal existence of the separation of powers and its actual operation is the critical variable determining foreign policy effectiveness. As this gap narrows, foreign policy becomes more accountable and more sustainable; as it widens, decisions are once again personalized and rendered arbitrary.

A review of the literature reveals that a significant portion of the work addressing the relationship between institutionalization and foreign policy focuses either solely on advanced democracies or on domestic economic institutions. Studies that examine, in a holistic fashion, the conditions and mechanisms through which this relationship is established—by comparing different regime types within a single framework—have remained limited. This gap has gained added importance with the wave of democratic backsliding that has become pronounced worldwide in recent years; indeed, comparative research shows that in many countries democratic gains are being eroded gradually beneath a veneer of legality (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). The increasing concentration of foreign policy in a single hand and the weakening of fidelity to international commitments bring the role of institutional oversight in foreign policy back onto the agenda in a renewed and more urgent form.

Within this framework, the principal aim of the study is to demonstrate the multidimensional effect of institutionalization on foreign policy processes and to show, with concrete data, the decisive role of strong institutional structures in foreign policy success. The research is built around three questions: What kind of relationship exists between the level of institutionalization and foreign policy effectiveness? Can states with strong institutional structures genuinely pursue a more consistent and predictable course in foreign policy? What sorts of problems does institutional weakness create in states' international relations? In line with these questions, the study's central thesis is as follows: the stronger and more rule-bound a state's institutional

structure, the more consistent, predictable, and effective its foreign policy; as the institutional ground weakens, foreign policy becomes personalized and erratic, and the state suffers a loss of trust in the international arena.

This thesis is tested through a comparative examination of the foreign policy performance of states possessing differing levels of institutionalization and forms of governance. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach and an explanatory sequential design; quantitative data were first collected and assessed, after which the reasons behind these data were deepened through qualitative techniques. The quantitative phase drew on international measures such as the World Bank Governance Indicators (Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi, 2011), the Democracy Index, and the Rule of Law Index; the qualitative phase evaluated interviews conducted with foreign policy experts, diplomats, and academics. The states examined were selected so as to represent a broad spectrum in terms of forms of governance: established democracies (Sweden, Germany, Japan), hybrid regimes sliding from democracy toward autocracy (Hungary, India), autocratic governments (Russia, Saudi Arabia), regimes positioned between authoritarianism and totalitarianism (China, Iran), and totalitarian systems (North Korea, Turkmenistan). Diamond's (2002) typology informed the criteria distinguishing democratic orders from hybrid regimes, and Linz's (2000) classic distinction informed the analysis separating authoritarian from totalitarian governments. This diversity makes it possible to see that the relationship between institutionalization and foreign policy is not peculiar to democracies and how it assumes different forms as the regime type changes.

The study's contribution can be gathered under several points. First, the research renders institutionalization concrete in its connection to foreign policy by disaggregating it from an abstract concept into measurable components such as transparency, accountability, the rule of law, democratic participation, and bureaucratic merit. Second, by comparing within a single framework a broad spectrum of regimes extending from democracy to totalitarianism, it tests the role of institutional structure in foreign policy across different contexts. Third, by placing the difference between the formal existence of the separation of powers and its actual operation at the center of the analysis, it incorporates a distinction that most studies have overlooked. The remainder of the article proceeds as follows: the next section reviews the literature on the relationship between institutionalization and foreign policy; the study's theoretical framework is then set out; the fourth section explains the research methodology and sample; the fifth section presents the findings; the sixth section discusses these findings in light of the theoretical framework; and the final section offers an overall assessment together with policy recommendations.

II. Literature Review

Institutionalization, in its simplest sense, is a state's or organization's attainment of an order in which conduct is governed by rules rather than by individuals. North (1990) defines institutions as the "rules of the game" and divides them into written regulations and unwritten social habits; in his view, what is often truly decisive is the second, unseen group. Scott (2008), for his part, holds that institutions rest on three pillars: a regulative pillar encompassing rules and sanctions, a normative pillar establishing what counts as proper, and a cultural-cognitive pillar that shapes how people make sense of what occurs. This distinction shows that institutionalization is not confined to formal structures but is also nourished by shared values and habits. Indeed, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) demonstrated that organizations grow alike over time out of a concern for legitimacy, and that this convergence spreads through coercion, imitation, and professional norms. Selznick (1996), likewise, reads institutionalization as the process by which a practice acquires value over time and turns into an enduring pattern of behavior. What all these approaches share is that they regard institutionalization as a ground of continuity that protects the state from the ups and downs of everyday politics and from the whims of individual leaders.

Three principal currents stand out in the literature that frames institutionalization theoretically. Hall and Taylor (1996) list these as rational-choice institutionalism, historical institutionalism, and sociological institutionalism; each explains how institutions shape behavior through a distinct logic. Whereas the rational-choice approach regards institutions as instruments that facilitate the calculation of interest, the historical approach attends to how steps taken in the past narrow subsequent options; the sociological approach, in turn, foregrounds the patterns of meaning and legitimacy behind rules. March and Olsen (1989) deepen this third line with the concept of the "logic of appropriateness": actors do not always perform a cost-benefit calculation; more often they act in accordance with the question "what would someone in my position do in such a situation?"—that is, with role behavior appropriate to the institution. Thelen (2004) shows that institutions are not established once and then frozen but evolve through small, cumulative changes; Peters (2019), meanwhile, argues that reading these currents together is more illuminating than forcing institutionalization into a single mold. The integrative perspective adopted in this article likewise accepts that institutions operate simultaneously along the dimensions of interest, history, and meaning.

The idea that institutionalization is a measurable quality rests largely on Huntington (1968). Huntington assesses political institutionalization by four criteria: adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and internal

coherence. As these criteria rise, the state can withstand unexpected developments without disintegrating. Fukuyama (2004) clarifies the relationship between institutional quality and governing success in his discussion of state-building: what is decisive is not how many domains the state intervenes in but how well it does its work. Similarly, Rodrik (2007) shows with extensive data sets that countries with high institutional quality make better use of the opportunities globalization offers. Yet it is not enough for institutions merely to exist; how far they actually function also matters. Levitsky and Murillo (2009) draw attention to precisely this point with the concept of "institutional strength": the narrower the gap between the rule on paper and the practice on the ground, the stronger the institution. Levitsky and Way (2010), in turn, show with examples that in the hybrid regimes where this gap widens, governance breaks free of democratic oversight, damaging both domestic stability and external credibility. Allison and Zelikow (1999) likewise note that institutionalization serves as a kind of buffer in times of crisis, facilitating rational decision-making.

The link between institutionalization and foreign policy is established along many strands in the literature. Keohane (1984), the foundational text of the liberal-institutionalist line, shows that international institutions reduce informational deficits and lower transaction costs, thereby rendering interstate cooperation sustainable. Axelrod and Keohane (1985) complement this with the idea of the "shadow of the future": when parties know they will meet again, they hesitate to spoil present cooperation. Keohane and Martin (1995) defend the same line against realist objections. Putnam (1988) explains the domestic side of this cooperation with his "two-level game" model: at the table a leader bargains not only with the other side but simultaneously with his own parliament, public, and bureaucracy; foreign policy output therefore bears the imprint of domestic institutional constraints. Krasner (1988) reads sovereignty through an institutional lens, arguing that institutions shape state behavior, while Kaarbo (2015) stresses that domestic politics and institutional dynamics ought to occupy a central place in foreign policy analysis.

Views opposing this picture are also strong and serve to balance the literature. Waltz (2000), on behalf of structural realism, argues that institutions cannot independently alter state behavior; Grieco (1988) holds that states approach cooperation cautiously out of concern for "relative gains," while Mearsheimer (1994) contends that international institutions are no more than a reflection of the preferences of the great powers. Wendt (1999) opens a third way amid this polarization: institutions function not merely as material instruments but as social structures that redefine who states are and what they want. Reading these different voices together is a reminder that the institutionalization–foreign policy relationship is neither one-directional nor mechanical, but a complex relationship that varies with context, intention, and perception.

The oldest answer to the question of the structural arrangement through which institutionalization is connected to foreign policy is the separation of powers. Montesquieu (1748/2011) defined the separation of the legislative, executive, and judicial powers as the fundamental safeguard preventing the concentration of power in a single hand; today this principle is read as an institutional framework that takes foreign policy decisions out of the monopoly of a single power and passes them through multiple filters of oversight. Each pillar of the system touches a distinct aspect of foreign policy. Legislative oversight ensures that international commitments rest on a broad consensus and makes it harder for the executive to give pledges arbitrarily (Putnam, 1988; Risse-Kappen, 1991). Judicial independence checks that foreign policy actions remain within constitutional and legal limits; Moravcsik (1997), by showing that state preferences are shaped by domestic institutional structures, reveals the determining role of an independent judiciary in this process. The executive's accountability, in turn, ensures that decisions are bound to institutional processes rather than personal preferences. Yet it is not enough for this separation merely to be written into the constitution; what is truly decisive is whether oversight among the powers actually functions. As Levitsky and Murillo (2009) show, the narrower the gap between the formal rule and actual practice, the more the separation of powers acquires a genuine balancing function in foreign policy; as this gap widens, the institution turns into a mere showcase.

The judicial pillar of the separation of powers is interwoven with the principle of the rule of law; in this respect the rule of law constitutes one of the firmest supports of institutionalization. Rawls (1999), in his conception of justice extending to relations among peoples, argues that the legitimacy of institutions must rest on principles of fairness; from this standpoint the rule of law is not merely a formal requirement but also a moral criterion. Tracing the historical trajectory of the concept, Tamanaha (2004) sets out the tension between the "thin" definition, which envisages only conformity to rules, and the "thick" definition, which also encompasses certain values, and notes that the rule of law cannot endure unless internalized by society. Along a similar line, Weingast (1997) shows that the arbitrary use of state power can be limited only through the shared commitment of social actors. On the foreign policy dimension of law, Simmons (2009) proves with extensive data that becoming a party to human rights treaties can trigger genuine changes in domestic law; Finnemore and Toope (2001) read international law not as a mere list of rules but as a normative process that shapes behavior; and Fearon (1998) analyzes the importance of binding commitments and enforcement mechanisms for cooperation.

Studies such as those by Öniş (2011) and Kirişci (2009) likewise indicate that a law-bound foreign policy enhances credibility and legitimacy.

Another pillar of institutionalization is economic stability. North (1991) shows that the framework jointly constituted by formal rules and informal constraints determines transaction costs, which in turn shape both the domestic economy and external economic relations. Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2001) show that institutional differences inherited from the colonial era largely explain present-day income gaps; Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), through the distinction between inclusive and extractive institutions, argue that institutions which secure property and bring broad segments into the economy render growth sustainable. Rodrik, Subramanian, and Trebbi (2004) find that institutional quality precedes both geography and trade in development. On how economic power is converted into foreign policy, Frieden (2006) shows how globalization constrains preferences, Kahler and Lake (2013) how crises both test and transform institutions, and Kirshner (2007) how the economic instrument can be deployed strategically only with strong institutions. Williamson (1985), with his transaction-cost approach, adds that institutions limit opportunism and keep markets functioning. Kirişci (2009) completes this line with the observation that economic institutionalization strengthens a country's soft-power capacity and its position in global economic integration.

Democratic governance constitutes the social ground that nourishes the legislative and accountability pillars of the separation of powers; it brings together participation, transparency, and accountability. Dahl (1971), with the concept of "polyarchy," lists the minimum conditions of a functioning democracy: regular and honest elections, basic freedoms, access to information, and a pluralistic press. Lijphart (2012), comparing thirty-six countries, shows that in divided societies consensual models yield more stable outcomes than majoritarian ones; Diamond (2003) stresses the role of civil society, the rule of law, and accountability in deepening democracy; and Putnam (1993), in the case of Italy, demonstrates that social capital is the fundamental factor sustaining institutional success. The best-known reflection of this institutional equipment in foreign policy is the democratic-peace finding. Doyle (1983) explains the low likelihood of democracies going to war with one another through institutional oversight and social accountability; Russett and Oneal (2001) support this with extensive data through the triple effect jointly woven by democracy, economic interdependence, and membership in international organizations. Risse-Kappen (1991) shows that the influence of public opinion and civil society on foreign policy is proportional to the strength of democratic institutions, while Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) show how the process initiated by norm entrepreneurs transforms state behavior.

These theoretical observations in the literature become more intelligible when one looks at the concrete profiles of states. The idea that regimes should be conceived not on a single line but along a spectrum extending from democracy to totalitarianism rests on Linz (2000), who distinguishes authoritarian from totalitarian regimes by the degree of pluralism and ideological control. At the democratic end of this spectrum, Sweden (Democracy Index 2024 score of 9.39), Germany (8.73), and Canada (8.69), with their independent judiciaries, strong parliaments, and well-established oversight mechanisms, are able to maintain a predictable and consistent course in foreign policy (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025). That commitments persist in these countries even as leaders change stems from the fact that decisions are bound to institutions rather than to individuals; indeed, Ikenberry (2001) explains this by noting that even powerful states' binding of themselves through institutions ("strategic restraint") generates trust on the other side.

In the middle of the spectrum lie examples in which elections formally continue but oversight mechanisms have weakened—cases sliding toward autocracy. Although Hungary (2024 score of 6.51) and India are still counted as "flawed democracies" on the Democracy Index, they have regressed to the point of being classified as "electoral autocracies" in V-Dem assessments (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025; V-Dem Institute, 2023). Levitsky and Way's (2010) concept of "competitive authoritarianism" describes precisely this picture: the shell of institutions remains in place, but as it is hollowed out, foreign policy decisions increasingly pass into the control of a narrow circle and international credibility erodes.

As one approaches the authoritarian end of the spectrum, institutional oversight grows markedly weaker. In autocracies such as Russia (2024 score of 2.03) and Saudi Arabia (2.08), foreign policy is largely bound to a central will; although this structure sometimes facilitates rapid decision-making, the unpredictability and lack of oversight of these decisions lower credibility over the long run (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025). In the cases of China (2.11) and Iran (1.96), positioned between authoritarianism and totalitarianism, the ideological control of a single party or a religio-political center is decisive; in V-Dem data China's liberal democracy score stands at the extremely low level of 0.04 (V-Dem Institute, 2023). Although these countries can make coordinated and rapid moves in certain areas, the absence of institutional pluralism makes foreign policy excessively dependent on the preferences of the center.

At the very extreme of the spectrum lie totalitarian examples in which pluralism has disappeared entirely and every domain of society is controlled by a single center. North Korea (2024 score of 1.08; V-Dem

liberal democracy score of 0.01) and Turkmenistan (1.66) are the examples closest to this extreme (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025; V-Dem Institute, 2023). Because foreign policy in these regimes is reduced almost entirely to the will of the leader, neither predictability nor institutional continuity can be expected; international commitments cannot transcend personal decisions. When the two ends of the spectrum are placed side by side, the relationship between institutional quality and the consistency and credibility of foreign policy becomes clearly visible. This general tendency does not, however, eliminate the fact that each country may take different forms according to its own historical and geographic conditions; for this reason Rodrik (2007) reminds us that institutional prescriptions must be adapted to the local context.

The debate on institutionalization has in recent years expanded into three new headings: digitalization, globalization, and sustainability. In the digital domain, Schwab (2017) shows that competencies in artificial intelligence, big data, and cybersecurity have now become criteria that determine both domestic governance and foreign policy success; Manor (2019) that digital diplomacy has radically transformed traditional diplomacy; and Fung, Graham, and Weil (2007) that transparency can strengthen accountability, though this depends on closing digital inequalities. Slaughter (2017) completes this transformation with the observation that diplomatic capacity must now be measured not only by interstate relations but also by networks formed with sub-state and transnational actors. At the global level, Ikenberry (2001) shows that the liberal institutional order encourages states' domestic reforms; Börzel and Risse (2012) that mechanisms of conditionality, socialization, and learning accelerate institutional change; Checkel (2005) that European institutions transform their members through socialization; and Krasner (1982) conceptualizes international regimes as sets of principles and rules around which expectations converge. By contrast, Hale, Held, and Young (2013) point to a state of "gridlock" in which existing international institutions are increasingly inadequate to resolve global problems, reminding us of the limits of institutional capacity. In the field of sustainability, Keck and Sikkink (1998) discuss the leverage of transnational advocacy networks, Sachs (2015) the need to address economic, social, and environmental goals together, Biermann, Kanie, and Kim (2017) that the Sustainable Development Goals represent a new model called "governance through goal-setting," and Barnett and Finnemore (2004) together with Young (2016) the determining role of institutional design in attaining these goals. Haas (1992) analyzes the weight of scientific expert networks in policymaking, while Zürn (2018) examines how legitimacy and authority in global governance have been opened to contestation.

When this entire literature is read together, two points stand out. First, although the relationship between institutionalization and foreign policy success is acknowledged in almost every theoretical tradition, it is neither one-directional nor mechanical; while the separation of powers is the fundamental structural arrangement carrying this relationship, its effect operates through different channels—the rule of law, economic stability, democratic oversight, and conformity with international norms—and in forms that vary with context. Second, a significant portion of existing studies focuses either on a single institutional dimension or on a single country; examinations that compare different regime types by common criteria and place the separation of powers at the center as the explanatory variable of foreign policy success are relatively few. The question of how the gap between institutions' existence on paper and their actual operation affects foreign policy output has, in particular, been insufficiently addressed. It is precisely this gap that necessitates an integrated approach—one that compares countries at different levels of institutionalization by common criteria and places the separation of powers at the axis of the analysis.

III. Theoretical Framework

Institutionalization, in its simplest sense, is the effort to bind the functioning of a society or an organization to shared rules and established processes rather than to the preferences of individual persons. North (1990) defines these rules as society's "rules of the game"; in his view institutions consist not only of written laws but also of traditions, habits, and unwritten codes of conduct. Scott (2008) analyzes the same phenomenon as a structure resting on three pillars: a regulative pillar composed of rules and sanctions, a normative pillar determined by social expectations, and a cultural-cognitive pillar that shapes the way people make sense of the world. This threefold distinction matters, because in a state's foreign policy it is not enough for rules to exist on paper; those rules must be both adopted by officials and regarded as natural by society. Selznick (1996) puts his finger on precisely this point, viewing institutionalization as the process by which a practice "acquires value" over time. March and Olsen (1989), for their part, complete this with the concept of the "logic of appropriateness": in an institutionalized setting actors do not, in every decision, merely calculate "what do I gain from this" but also ask "what would someone in my position do here?" The robustness of foreign policy institutions is measured precisely by the extent to which these two logics are interwoven.

The answers given to the question of how institutions arise and why they change are generally gathered under three schools (Hall & Taylor, 1996). Rational-choice institutionalism regards institutions as instruments that rational actors establish through the calculation of interest; in Williamson's (1985) transaction-cost

approach, institutions emerge to rein in uncertainty and opportunism. Carried over to the international arena, this logic arrives at Keohane's (1984) well-known argument: because international institutions augment the information available to parties and lower the cost of cooperation, cooperation can persist even when no hegemonic power remains. Historical institutionalism, by contrast, views the matter through the dimension of time. According to Pierson (2004), institutions once established feed themselves through "increasing returns"; root-and-branch change is therefore most often possible only at moments of rupture such as war, crisis, or regime collapse. This view helps explain why foreign policy institutions are so stubborn and why reforms require a strong will. Sociological institutionalism, in turn, holds that institutions are adopted not only because they are useful but also because they appear legitimate. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) develop the concept of "isomorphism," which explains organizations' tendency to resemble one another through coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures; this makes it intelligible why developing countries so often build their foreign-affairs structures on Western models.

Although these three schools appear to be rivals, the current literature uses them as mutually complementary lenses. Thelen (2004; 2009) shows that institutional change does not always occur through abrupt breaks; it is more often realized through such paths as the layering of new strata onto the old, the quiet drift of a rule's function while the rule itself remains in place, or the conversion of existing patterns to other ends. Peters (2019) likewise reminds us that institutions both resist change and are able to adapt, and that they should therefore be conceived as living, complex structures rather than static molds. For foreign policy the meaning is clear: a country's foreign-affairs order can quietly strengthen, or be hollowed out, over the years without any change to its constitution.

The real test of institutionalization at the state level emerges when power changes hands. Fukuyama (2004) holds that what matters is not how many tasks a state takes on but how well it performs the tasks it does; a broad but hollow state falls behind a state with narrow but solid institutions. Huntington (1968), for his part, assesses institutionalization by the criteria of adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and internal coherence. When these criteria are high, foreign policy transcends individuals and acquires permanence. Germany, New Zealand, and Sweden are striking examples. In the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2024 Democracy Index, New Zealand (9.61), Sweden (9.39), and Germany (8.73) fall within the "full democracy" category; all three are noted for independent judiciaries, strong parliamentary oversight, and an established bureaucratic tradition (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025). In these countries the broad lines of foreign policy remain largely constant even when the government changes, because decisions are the joint product not of a single leader but of mutually balancing institutions. In Weingast's (1997) phrase, democratic stability becomes durable at the point where politicians find the cost of violating institutional limits heavier than that of not violating them. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), too, argue that inclusive institutions nourish not only prosperity but also credibility in external relations.

The principal structural channel through which institutionalization is reflected in foreign policy is the separation of powers. Since Montesquieu's (1748/2011) classic formulation, this principle has been regarded as a balancing order that prevents the concentration of power in a single hand; adapted to foreign policy, it works like three separate filters. The legislature oversees the government's foreign policy preferences and sets limits on it through its powers of the budget and of approval; an independent judiciary watches over the conformity of the steps taken with the law and with international commitments; and the executive is obliged to render an account of the decisions it makes. When these three channels operate together, the foreign policy decision leaves the monopoly of a single actor and passes through multiple checks; thus arbitrariness is reduced and the quality of decisions rises. Putnam's (1988) two-level-game analogy acquires its meaning precisely here: a leader backed by a functioning legislative oversight can both make a more credible commitment at the table and remain more faithful to that commitment. What is decisive, however, is not whether the powers appear separated in the constitution but whether they can in fact balance one another; the origin of the foreign policy differences among regimes also lies largely here.

At the end where institutionalization is weak, the picture is reversed. In distinguishing authoritarian from totalitarian regimes, Linz (2000) explains that in totalitarian orders society is wholly enveloped around a single ideology, a single party, and an unlimited leadership, whereas in authoritarian orders a limited pluralism can be preserved. This distinction is reflected directly in foreign policy. North Korea, scoring zero on the electoral-process and civil-liberties items in the 2024 Democracy Index, ranks among the bottommost handful of countries in the world; its foreign policy is bound almost entirely to the will of the dynasty and is devoid of predictability (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025). Eritrea, with a score of 1.97 on the same index, is one of the lowest-ranked countries; it has held no national elections since its independence in 1993, has never once put into force the constitution adopted in 1997, and has come to be called "the North Korea of Africa" owing to its system of indefinite military conscription. In such orders foreign policy proceeds by personal or familial calculations rather than by an institutional reason; this magnifies both inconsistency and international distrust.

As something specific to the foreign policy domain, institutionalization denotes the settling into a defined order of the chain extending from the definition of the national interest to the making and implementation of decisions. Such an order reduces the susceptibility of policies to the ebb and flow of everyday politics and renders the state a more legible player abroad. Krasner (1982; 1988) shows that states' relationship with international norms is largely shaped by domestic institutional structures; Hudson (2013), in turn, reminds us that the bureaucratic routines, organizational habits, and institutional memory behind decisions are often as determining as the leader's personality. In other words, the experience accumulated in the archives of the foreign-affairs bureaucracy quietly shapes the response that will be given in a crisis.

Whether institutions truly affect state behavior independently is one of the discipline's oldest debates. Liberal institutionalism answers in the affirmative: Keohane and Martin (1995) argue that international institutions are not a mere reflection of the balance of power but possess an effect of their own. Axelrod and Keohane (1985) hold that, as the "shadow of the future" lengthens in repeated relationships, states incline more toward cooperation; Fearon (1998) shows that the real difficulty lies less in reaching an agreement than in securing compliance with it. The realist tradition, by contrast, is cautious. Mearsheimer (1994) argues that institutions amount to a "false promise" and ultimately remain in the shadow of the distribution of power; Grieco (1988) holds that states are concerned with relative rather than absolute gains, and that this limits cooperation. This contention is fruitful, because it compels us to ask when institutions are useful and when they remain on paper. Moravcsik (1997) adds the domestic-politics dimension to the debate: states' foreign policy preferences are pre-shaped by the pressures of domestic social groups and by institutional arrangements. Putnam (1988) gives this concrete form with his "two-level game" analogy; the leader bargains simultaneously with his counterpart at the table and with the parliament behind him, and what ties or frees his hand at home is the institutional structure itself.

The truly interesting situation is seen in hybrid regimes where institutions exist formally but their essence has eroded. In these orders, which Levitsky and Way (2010) call "competitive authoritarianism," elections are held, parliament convenes, and courts exist; yet these structures have been weakened to the point of being unable to oversee power. Hungary is the typical example within Europe: with a score of 6.51 it remains on the border of "flawed democracy" in the 2024 Democracy Index, while in V-Dem assessments it is now counted an "electoral autocracy" (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025; Nord et al., 2025). India is on a similar trajectory; although it continues to hold free elections, its regression in the areas of press freedom and minority rights draws it into the same debate. In these countries foreign policy is often bound to the personal line of a strong leader; the loosening of institutional oversight leads to abrupt reversals abroad and to a problem of trust in commitments. Levitsky and Murillo's (2009) concept of "institutional strength" captures precisely this: what makes a rule strong is not its being written down but its being actually applied and showing stability over time.

The value of institutionalization is perhaps most apparent in moments of crisis. In analyzing the Cuban Missile Crisis, Allison and Zelikow (1999) show that decisions are not the product of a single rational actor but the result of organizational routines and bargaining among institutions. Jervis (2017) holds that institutional filters smooth out a leader's perceptual errors and enable information to be processed more soundly; Lebow (2008), in turn, stresses that in the absence of these filters panic and misreading can easily escalate. In orders where decision-making is concentrated in the hands of a few, this safety valve does not work. Russia, with a score of 2.03 in the 2024 Democracy Index, is among the authoritarian regimes, and its foreign policy has increasingly been bound to the preferences of a narrow circle (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025). Iran, with a score of 1.96 on the same index, is likewise among the authoritarian regimes; the religious authority that stands above the elected institutions steers foreign policy by ideological priorities rather than by institutional deliberation, and in this respect Iran falls into the gray zone between the authoritarian order, in which a limited pluralism is preserved, and the totalitarian order, which ideologically envelops society. In both cases the weakness of oversight mechanisms produces an effect that loosens the brakes in a moment of crisis.

The bond between democratic governance and institutionalization bears directly on both the legitimacy and the quality of foreign policy. Dahl (1971) treats democracy as a whole that must be conceived not merely through the ballot box but together with freedom of expression, access to information, and the right of association. Diamond (2003) underscores the difference between an "electoral democracy" that merely holds elections and a "liberal democracy" in which checks-and-balances mechanisms function; this difference is decisive in foreign policy, because where there is no accountability international credibility too is damaged. Lijphart (2012) shows that majoritarian and consensual democracies run their decision processes in different ways. Putnam's (1993) research on Italy reveals how a tradition of civic participation nourishes institutional success; states resting on a strong civil society possess a broader base of legitimacy in foreign policy. Risse-Kappen (1991; 1995) explains that the channels through which public opinion and civil society influence foreign policy vary with a country's institutional structure, with the state predominating in some orders and society in

others. Keck and Sikkink (1998), too, show that transnational advocacy networks can press states' agendas from both within and without.

The natural extension of this framework is the democratic-peace debate. Doyle (1983), drawing inspiration from Kant, argues that democratic states are unlikely to go to war with one another, because institutional brakes, the obligation to render an account, and commercial ties make a leader's decision to go to war more difficult. Russett and Oneal (2001) test these three factors with extensive data and find that democratic institutions, membership in international organizations, and economic interdependence together reinforce peace. Owen (1994), in turn, refines the picture: what brings peace is not merely the existence of institutions but states' recognition of one another as "liberal democracies." That is, the ideational dimension—such as mutual perception—determines the outcome as much as the material dimension of institutional structure.

The rule of law is the backbone of institutionalization; it binds state power to rules and renders everyone equal before the law. Rawls (1999) ties a state's being counted a respected member of international society to its commitment to this principle in domestic law. Tamanaha (2004; 2012) shows that the "thin" definition of the rule of law extends only to procedure, while the "thick" definition reaches to fundamental rights and justice; this distinction is necessary in order to understand whether a state's compliance with international law is formal or internalized. Simmons (2009) and Sikkink (2011) reveal that international legal commitments are not mere ornament but can trigger genuine transformations in domestic law. Abbott and Snidal (2000) explain that the choice between binding "hard law" and flexible "soft law" varies with states' sovereignty concerns and institutional capacity. Finnemore and Toope (2001), in turn, regard law not as a heap of rules but as a process that shapes state behavior. These theoretical expectations also coincide with concrete data: in the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index the Scandinavian countries, Germany, and New Zealand have for years occupied the top ranks (World Justice Project, 2024); the fidelity these countries show to international agreements is the outward face of their commitment to law.

A less visible benefit of institutional solidity is soft power. Nye (2004; 2011) uses this concept to describe a state's ability to influence others without coercion, by rendering its own preferences attractive; in his view, among the sources of soft power the credibility of a country's political values and institutions comes first. A functioning legal order, an accountable government, and stable institutions render a state both worthy of emulation and trustworthy; a country believed to keep its word also has high persuasive power. Conversely, in orders where institutions are surrendered to personal will, the image projected abroad weakens and influence is left largely to material instruments of pressure. In this respect soft power can be regarded as the external extension of the legitimacy that institutionalization produces at home.

Economic institutionalization is the unseen but powerful support of foreign policy. North (1991) regards the protection of property rights and the enforceability of contracts as preconditions of growth; Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2001), starting from colonial history, show that institutional quality is more determining than geography or culture. Rodrik, Subramanian, and Trebbi (2004) confirm this argument with extensive data and establish the primacy of institutions. Rodrik (2007) argues that no single prescription fits every country, and that success runs through policies sensitive to the local institutional context. Hall and Soskice (2001) explain how different varieties of capitalism differentiate external economic strategies; Frieden (2006) explains how economic instability narrows the room for foreign policy maneuver. Kirshner (2007) holds that converting economic power into a diplomatic instrument is possible only with solid institutions; Keohane and Nye (1977), in turn, show that economic ties create a channel of influence independent of military power. Kahler and Lake (2013), too, find that resilience in moments of crisis is directly proportional to institutional solidity. This distinction is conspicuous in practice: Saudi Arabia's economic diplomacy, resting on oil revenue and limited institutional oversight (a score of 2.08 in the 2024 Democracy Index), and Germany's external economic policy, resting on rules and independent institutions, show that the same instrument can produce very different outcomes (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025).

Whether institutions merely constrain behavior, or also determine who states are, is a separate debate. Wendt (1999), by saying that anarchy is "what states make of it," regards institutions—beyond mechanisms that order interests—as social environments that reshape identities. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) analyze the role institutions play in the "norm life cycle" extending from the birth of international norms to their consolidation. Ruggie (1998) shows that the utilitarian approach foregrounds the regulative function of institutions while the constructivist approach foregrounds their constitutive function; Reus-Smit (2005) argues that these two views complement one another. March and Olsen (2011), too, round out the debate by thinking the "logic of consequences" together with the "logic of appropriateness." The critical wing, by contrast, is more skeptical. Cox's (1981) remark that every theory exists for someone and for some purpose reminds us that institutions are not neutral arrangements but structures that legitimize particular relations of power; Hurrell (2006) joins this to the problem of the legitimacy of the international order. This critique is valuable for keeping alive the question of whose interests institutionalization serves.

The shared lesson of all these approaches is that foreign policy institutionalization cannot be explained by a single level. Carlsnaes (2013) shows that institutions not only constrain actors but also make certain steps possible and legitimize them. Hill (2016) explains that the "capability-expectations gap" between a state's goals and its capacity to attain them often arises from institutional limits. Holsti (2016) reminds us that foreign policy does not advance along a straight line but can undergo root-and-branch restructurings under internal and external shocks. Kaarbo (2015), in turn, argues that system-level analyses must be combined with domestic institutional dynamics. Methodologists such as Beach and Pedersen (2019) likewise note that these multi-level relationships can be illuminated only by a rigorous analysis that traces causal mechanisms.

Finally, the future of institutionalization is being reshaped by technology and by the nature of global problems. Schwab (2017) holds that the new industrial revolution strains the speed of institutions' adaptation; Rodrik (2021) holds that digitalization carries both empowering and disruptive effects. Fung, Graham, and Weil (2007) show that for information to enhance accountability it must be not only accessible but also intelligible and actionable; Manor (2019), in turn, explains that digital diplomacy creates new needs for oversight and coordination. Slaughter (2017) argues that hierarchical structures are increasingly giving way to networks. Yet technology does not do the same work in every hand. China has developed a model that uses digital tools not for transparency but for control and surveillance; although it falls within the authoritarian category with a score of 2.11 in the 2024 Democracy Index, in terms of the depth of its envelopment of society and its capacity for digital control it is positioned in that gray zone between authoritarian and totalitarian, and it exports this model abroad as well (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025). At the global level, Ikenberry (2001; 2018) analyzes the founding of the liberal institutional order and its present convulsion; Börzel and Risse (2012) examine how institutional norms spread from country to country, and Zürn (2018) the tensions of legitimacy in global governance. Haas (1992) shows the influence of epistemic communities on policy production; Barnett and Finnemore (2004) show that international organizations are bureaucratic actors that can both produce solutions and create problems. Hale, Held, and Young (2013) argue that existing institutions are gridlocked in the face of global problems; Biermann, Kanie, and Kim (2017), in turn, that goal-based governance can lend these structures flexibility.

All this theoretical accumulation converges on a single point: what determines success in foreign policy is not institutions' existence on paper but whether they actually function. The gap between the formal definition of the separation of powers and its genuine operation is the real variable determining how consistent and trustworthy a state will be abroad. In countries such as Germany, New Zealand, and Sweden, where institutions both exist and function, foreign policy is predictable and sustainable; whereas in hybrid regimes where institutions have been hollowed out, in authoritarian orders where decision-making is concentrated in one person, and in totalitarian systems where society is wholly enveloped, foreign policy becomes personalized, erratic, and loses trust. Wheeler's (2018) work on interstate trust also completes this picture: trust can be built only on the predictability that stable institutions produce. In short, in order to make a lasting contribution to foreign policy, institutional structures must exist together with democratic norms, the rule of law, and an institutional culture adopted by society.

IV. Research Methodology

This research is built on a predominantly qualitative mixed design, with the aim of observing the effect of institutionalization on foreign policy at the level both of general tendencies among countries and of the processes within each country. In a mixed design, quantitative and qualitative techniques are used together; thus aspects that might be overlooked if one adhered to a single method become visible from different angles (Creswell, 2014). The study follows an explanatory sequential design. Accordingly, the institutional profile of the countries was first set out descriptively through international indices, after which the reasons and workings underlying this profile were sought to be explained through qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Bryman, 2012). The center of gravity of the design is qualitative; the numerical indices were used not as an instrument for testing hypotheses but as a framework that situates the countries and brings order to the comparison. The unit of analysis is the state, and the focus is the link between the state's institutional structure and its foreign policy behavior.

The structure of the subject required the in-depth and orderly comparison of a small number of cases. The comparative method is well suited to tracing many factors through a limited number of cases and to seeing the reasons for similarities and differences (Lijphart, 1971). By directing the same limited set of questions to each country, a common ground for comparison was established; this is an approach termed focused, structured comparison (George & Bennett, 2005). In order to see through which stages institutional factors shape foreign policy decisions, the technique of process tracing was also employed. Process tracing is a method that, by following an event step by step from beginning to end, brings to light the link between cause and effect (George

& Bennett, 2005). The view that the case study is a powerful design for understanding causal links and for developing theory constituted the methodological foundation of the study (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2018).

The study's point of departure is the question of what kind of relationship exists between the level of institutionalization and foreign policy effectiveness. The central proposition tested within this question is as follows: states with a strong and well-established institutional structure behave more consistently, predictably, and effectively in foreign policy; they remain more faithful to their international commitments and are able to take more composed decisions in moments of crisis. By contrast, in states with a weak institutional structure foreign policy is expected to become more exposed to leaders' personal inclinations and to everyday politics. This proposition is the study's own hypothesis and was assessed by comparison with the data collected; its confirmed and unconfirmed aspects are set out in the sections that follow.

The sample was determined so as to consist of eleven countries, with the aim of observing different forms of governance and levels of institutionalization together. Maximum diversity was sought in the selection; moreover, in order to capture both the small differences among similar countries and the common points among widely differing countries, the "most similar systems" and "most different systems" approaches were used together (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). The countries were divided into five governance bands: democratic states; semi-democratic states, that is, those sliding from democracy toward autocracy; autocratic (authoritarian) states; states positioned between authoritarianism and totalitarianism; and totalitarian states. This division was not left to a single index score alone; it was also grounded in the classic regime typology that distinguishes authoritarian from totalitarian regimes by such criteria as the existence of a single official ideology, a mass party, the extent to which society is enveloped by the state, and the cult of personality (Linz, 2000; Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965). Thus a continuous measure and a categorical typology were used together, and classification was not left to the mercy of a single source. In determining the sample, factors such as geographic region, historical experience, and cultural background were also taken into account; although these lie outside the relationship under examination, they are contextual variables that can affect the outcome. Attending to these factors made it possible to assess more soundly whether the differences observed among countries stem from institutionalization alone, and to distinguish the institutional effect from other possible causes.

As the starting point for determining the bands, the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Democracy Index was taken; the classification was cross-validated with Freedom House freedom scores, the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, and the World Bank Governance Indicators. The countries grouped under the Democracy Index's heading of "authoritarian" were further differentiated into autocratic, between-authoritarian-and-totalitarian, and totalitarian using civil-liberties subscores, pluralism indicators, and the typological criteria noted above. China and Iran, for instance, although they appear authoritarian on the index, approach the totalitarian end in terms of the scope of societal control and the absence of political pluralism; North Korea and Turkmenistan, with such features as a single ideology, a cult of personality, and total control of information, represent the totalitarian end. The profile of the eleven selected countries according to the most recent data, and their position in the study, are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Governance Band and Institutional Indicators of the Countries in the Sample (2024)

Country	**Governance band**	**EIU Democracy Index 2024 (score / world rank / category)**	**CPI 2024 (0–100)**	**Freedom House status**
Sweden	Democratic	9.39 / 3 / full democracy	80	Free
Germany	Democratic	8.73 / 13 / full democracy	75	Free
Japan	Democratic	8.48 / 16 / full democracy	71	Free
Hungary	Semi-democratic / sliding toward autocracy	6.51 / 54 / flawed democracy	41	Partly free
India	Semi-democratic / sliding toward autocracy	7.29 / 41 / flawed democracy	38	Partly free
Russia	Autocratic (authoritarian)	2.03 / 150 / authoritarian	22	Not free
Saudi Arabia	Autocratic (authoritarian)	2.08 / 148 / authoritarian	59	Not free
China	Between authoritarian and totalitarian	2.11 / 145 / authoritarian	43	Not free
Iran	Between authoritarian	1.96 / 154 / authoritarian	23	Not free

Country	Governance band	EIU Democracy Index 2024 (score / world rank / category)	CPI 2024 (0–100)	Freedom House status
	and totalitarian			
North Korea	Totalitarian	1.08 / 165 / authoritarian	15	Not free
Turkmenistan	Totalitarian	1.66 / 161 / authoritarian	17	Not free

Note: CPI denotes the Corruption Perceptions Index. The Democracy Index is on a 0–10 scale and the Corruption Perceptions Index on a 0–100 scale; higher values express a stronger institutional profile. The "Category" column reflects the EIU's own four-tier classification (full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime, authoritarian); the "Governance band" is this study's more detailed classification. Source: EIU Democracy Index 2024; Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2024; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025.

For each country a time span of approximately ten years (2014–2024) was examined. This period was chosen in order to observe how change in institutional structures is reflected in foreign policy; for institutional transformation most often proceeds slowly and step by step, and its effects cannot be fully read in a short time (Pierson, 2004). Opening a ten-year window rather than looking at a single specific period made it possible to assess both the change within the same country over time and whether the differences among countries are lasting or temporary.

The research drew on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data are the information the researcher gathers directly from the field; secondary data are information previously collected and published by others (Flick, 2018). Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted with foreign policy experts, diplomats, academics, decision-makers, and civil-society representatives. Interviewees were posed previously prepared questions, but new topics arising in the course of the conversation were also allowed to be taken up (Patton, 2002). The interviews were conducted following a seven-stage flow: planning, design, interviewing, transcription, analysis, verification, and reporting (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview form was piloted on a small group well versed in the subject before the main interviews; after this pilot and the expert opinions received, the questions were revised and finalized. Participants were selected by purposive sampling, that is, from among persons directly conversant with the subject; informed consent was obtained before each interview, participant identities were kept confidential, and the research was conducted in conformity with ethical principles.

Among the secondary sources are SSCI-indexed academic articles, official documents, policy reports, government statements, the publications of international organizations, and international indices. To measure the countries' level of institutionalization, the World Bank Governance Indicators, the EIU Democracy Index, the Corruption Perceptions Index, Freedom House freedom scores, and the Rule of Law Index were used. These indices, by scoring each country's institutional structure according to defined criteria, facilitate comparison among countries. On the foreign policy side, indicators such as the intensity of diplomatic relations, compliance with international agreements, success in crisis management, and effectiveness in international organizations were tracked. Data coming from different sources were compared with one another, applying triangulation; thus a finding was prevented from depending on a single source (Denzin, 1978).

In order to take institutionalization out of being an abstract concept and bind it to measurable indicators, a systematic path was followed from concept to measurement; that is, what institutionalization means was first defined, and then which concrete indicators it could be measured by was determined (Adcock & Collier, 2001). For the rule-of-law dimension, indicators such as judicial independence, the protection of property rights, the enforceability of contracts, and the clarity of the legal framework were used. The rule of law means the equal application of laws to all and the limitation of state power by law (Tamanaha, 2004). The democratic-governance dimension was assessed through the quality of elections, political participation, accountability mechanisms, and civil liberties; economic institutionalization through macroeconomic stability, the quality of market regulation, the soundness of financial institutions, and the predictability of economic policies. In the bureaucratic-capacity dimension, the effectiveness of public services, the application of the merit principle, and inter-institutional coordination were taken into account; merit means the appointment to posts according to persons' competence (Peters, 2019). In the dimension of civil society and media independence, the autonomy of civil-society organizations, media pluralism and independence, and the possibilities of access to information were considered; in the dimension of international integration, participation in international agreements, representation and effectiveness in international organizations, and the degree of conformity with global norms were taken into account. In constructing these indicators, the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators method, which measures governance along six dimensions, was taken as a basis (Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi, 2011).

Foreign policy success, too, was not reduced to a single criterion but assessed through multiple indicators. The principal ones are as follows: the scope of diplomatic relations, compliance with international agreements, success in crisis management, soft-power capacity, contribution to the peaceful resolution of international disputes, and international aid and development cooperation. Soft power is a country's ability to influence other countries through its culture, values, and policies rather than through coercion (Nye, 2004). To these were added the rate of realization of foreign policy goals, the consistency and continuity of strategies, the frequency of diplomatic crises, and reputation in international public opinion. The approach that treats foreign policy as a multilayered domain guided the selection of indicators (Hudson, 2013). The joint use of multiple indicators ensured that a country's foreign policy success was understood not by a single criterion but in its different aspects.

The analysis was conducted along two strands. The numerical indices were treated descriptively; scores were compared, countries were ranked, and tendencies over the ten-year period were tracked. At this stage, inferential statistics such as regression or factor analysis were not resorted to; for a sample of eleven countries does not carry the numerical breadth that such techniques require, and the aim of the study is not to build a generalizable statistical model but to compare the cases in depth. The qualitative data were assessed through content analysis and thematic analysis. Thematic analysis rests on the identification of recurring topics and patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data obtained from interviews, documents, and the literature were coded and divided into categories with NVivo software; this software facilitates the organization of textual data under labels and the orderly examination of large-volume material. In organizing and visualizing the data, criterion-based matrix and display techniques were also used (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). The coding followed the stages of gaining familiarity with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing them, naming them, and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The findings of the two strands were combined at the end. Combination means bringing the numerical profile and the verbal findings together so that both the general picture and the detail are seen. At this stage, strategies of connecting, merging, and integrating were used (Fetters, Curry & Creswell, 2013). For example, a country's high index score reveals that country's institutional profile, while interview and document data help to explain the reasons and workings behind that high score. Thus the "what" shown by the number and the "why and how" shown by the qualitative data were read together.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the trustworthiness criteria widely accepted in qualitative research were adopted. These criteria, summarized as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, serve to assess under what conditions and to what extent the findings are reliable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To strengthen credibility, different data sources (official documents, academic works, the press, expert opinions) were used together and compared with one another. Within the scope of method triangulation, both numerical indices and qualitative techniques were used together, drawing on the strengths of both approaches. In the qualitative coding, coding consistency was observed; the same data were coded independently by different persons, and the closeness of the results reached was checked. So that the analytical process would remain traceable by others, the link among sources, codes, and inferences was recorded (an audit trail), and the interpretations obtained were submitted to the assessment of field experts for verification. The researcher's review of the effect of his own perspective on the findings—that is, reflexivity—was also a part of this process.

Although the study rests on a multifaceted design, it carries certain limitations; good research must clearly display its own limits, because this helps the reader weigh the results correctly (Creswell, 2014). First, measuring complex phenomena such as institutionalization and foreign policy success is inherently difficult and involves a degree of subjectivity. The indices used may not encompass every aspect of these phenomena; moreover, because most are shaped largely according to Western experience, they may not fully reflect the institutional particularities of countries with a different cultural background. The second limitation is that foreign policy is determined not by institutions alone but together with many factors such as geography, historical ties, leaders' personal characteristics, economic interests, and security concerns. Among these intertwined factors it is difficult to isolate the share of institutions entirely; in periods of crisis the institutional effect may remain in the shadow of other factors. Third, in some countries it is difficult to reach reliable and comprehensive data. Particularly in closed administrations such as North Korea, Turkmenistan, and Saudi Arabia, transparent information about decision-making processes is limited and independent observers are often not permitted; moreover, part of foreign policy is by its nature conducted in secret. Against these difficulties, multiple sources, indirect indicators, and process tracing were used together; nevertheless, the data limitations concerning closed regimes could not be entirely eliminated. Finally, because institutional structures and foreign policy tendencies change over time, one must be cautious in generalizing results based on a particular period; for this reason a ten-year window was opened and a comparison of different periods was made.

V. Findings

The most striking result of the research is that there is a strong and continuous link between the robustness of a state's institutional structure and its success in foreign policy. When the countries examined are ranked by their levels of institutionalization, it is seen that states with strong institutions behave more consistently, predictably, and reliably in foreign policy, whereas states with a weak institutional structure act more according to the developments of the day and the personal preferences of leaders. To take this result out of being an abstract generalization and ground it in concrete data, eleven countries representing each regime type were selected from within the study's twenty-country sample and treated in five tiers: democratic states, semi-democratic states sliding toward autocracy, autocratic states, states positioned between authoritarianism and totalitarianism, and totalitarian states. Each country's institutional level was documented with the current data of the international indices introduced in the methodology section (the Democracy Index, the Freedom House freedom report, the Corruption Perceptions Index, the Rule of Law Index, and the World Bank Governance Indicators), after which this level was related comparatively to the country's foreign policy behavior. Thus the reflection of institutional quality in foreign policy performance was made traceable through individual countries.

In the three advanced democracies of the first group, the link between institutional capacity and foreign policy success is seen most clearly. Sweden, scoring above 9 out of 10 in the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2024 Democracy Index, ranked among the top three countries in the world; it was counted "free" with a score of 99 out of 100 in Freedom House's 2025 report; and it placed fourth in the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025; Freedom House, 2025; World Justice Project, 2024). This solid institutional ground allowed Sweden to carry out even a weighty decision such as NATO membership—ending a tradition of military non-alignment lasting nearly two centuries—without haste, through parliamentary approval and a broad social consensus. Germany's profile is similar: with a score of around 8.7 it is in the "full democracy" category on the Democracy Index, at 75 out of 100 on the Corruption Perceptions Index, and fifth on the Rule of Law Index (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025; Transparency International, 2025; World Justice Project, 2024). The root-and-branch transformation Germany made in its defense and energy policy after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine (the "Zeitenwende") was realized not through the momentary impulse of a single leader but through coordination among the government, the parliament, and allied institutions, and this reinforced the country's identity as a reliable partner in the eyes of its allies. Japan, with a score of around 8.4 on the Democracy Index, is one of the few full democracies in Asia and has raised its Freedom House score from 88 to 96 over the past decade (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025; Freedom House, 2025). The country's stability in alliance management and its fidelity to multilateral agreements are closely bound up with its strong, merit-based bureaucratic tradition. The point common to all three countries is this: foreign policy decisions are bound to process rather than to person; even when power changes hands the basic orientation is preserved, and international commitments are largely fulfilled.

The second group consists of countries in which democratic institutions have begun to erode and which are sliding toward autocracy. Hungary is the most conspicuous example of this tendency in Europe. With a score of 41 out of 100 on the Corruption Perceptions Index it has the European Union's lowest mark, and it is now classified by the V-Dem Institute as an "electoral autocracy" (Transparency International, 2025; V-Dem Institute, 2024). The Orbán government's governing by decree under a long-maintained "state of emergency" regime, the European Commission's freezing of allocated funds owing to the decline in the rule of law, and the government's blocking single-handedly of decisions on support for Ukraine and sanctions against Russia show how the weakening of institutional oversight leaves foreign policy in the hands of a single actor and renders the country unpredictable for its partners. Serbia falls within the "hybrid regime" category on the Democracy Index; its Corruption Perceptions Index score has regressed to 35, and the excessive concentration of the executive in the hands of President Vučić has been recorded (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025; Transparency International, 2025). The mass protests demanding accountability that spread across the country after the collapse of the canopy of the Novi Sad train station in November 2024, which caused the deaths of sixteen people, revealed how rapidly social trust is broken where institutional oversight and accountability have collapsed. This institutional fragility is reflected directly in Serbia's foreign policy, which oscillates between the European Union and Russia and China with uncertain commitments. Both examples show that it is not enough for institutions to continue to exist on paper; when the executive effectively disables these institutions, foreign policy is rapidly personalized and credibility erodes.

The third group encompasses autocratic governments. Russia is counted an "authoritarian regime" on the Democracy Index; it is on the lowest rungs with a score of 22 on the Corruption Perceptions Index and ranks 113th among 142 countries on the Rule of Law Index (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025; Transparency International, 2025; World Justice Project, 2024). The taking of the decision to invade Ukraine in 2022 within a narrow circle, devoid of parliamentary and judicial oversight, and the heavy sanctions and international isolation that followed, clearly showed the cost in foreign policy of a personalized decision-making order lacking

institutional brakes. Iran, too, is in the "authoritarian regime" category on the Democracy Index and the "not free" category at Freedom House, and its Corruption Perceptions Index score is 23 (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025; Freedom House, 2025; Transparency International, 2025). The detention of some twenty-one thousand people by the authorities after the twelve-day war with Israel in June 2025 indicates that foreign policy is conducted by an ideological and personalized core, far from transparency and broad expert participation (Freedom House, 2025). That foreign policy hardens in certain crises in these two countries and that backing down becomes difficult suggests that the absence of institutional oversight deepens crises rather than softening them.

The fourth group consists of extremely closed and repressive countries positioned between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. China is a country that the V-Dem Institute classifies as a "closed autocracy," to which Freedom House's 2025 report gives only 9 points out of 100, and which ranks among the world's lowest values on the liberal democracy index (Freedom House, 2025; V-Dem Institute, 2024). Although China's assertive posture in foreign policy rests on a strong state capacity, the taking of decisions through a single hand and within a closed, surveillance-based process reveals the absence of institutional pluralism and independent oversight; this, even if it provides short-term resolve, feeds a deficit of predictability and trust over the long run. Belarus is on the bottommost rungs at Freedom House with a score of 7 and at 33 on the Corruption Perceptions Index, and in recent years it has been among the countries that have fallen to the lowest possible grade in terms of freedom of expression (Freedom House, 2025; Transparency International, 2025). The Lukashenko government's growing dependence on Russia is a concrete indicator of how institutional weakness exhausts foreign policy autonomy; a state that loses its domestic oversight also largely loses the ability to decide on its own behalf abroad.

The fifth group includes the countries at the totalitarian extreme. North Korea, with scores near zero on the Democracy Index alongside Afghanistan and Myanmar, is one of the three most closed countries in the world; its Freedom House score is 3 out of 100, and its value on the V-Dem liberal democracy index, at 0.01, is the lowest in the world (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025; Freedom House, 2025; V-Dem Institute, 2024). Foreign policy is dynastically based, extremely personalized, and largely isolated. Turkmenistan, in Freedom House's 2025 report, is among the lowest-scoring countries in the world alongside South Sudan and Sudan (1 out of 100), and its Corruption Perceptions Index score is 17 (Freedom House, 2025; Transparency International, 2025). Despite its official discourse of "permanent neutrality," it is in deep international isolation; foreign policy is bound entirely to the leader, and institutional memory, expert contribution, and oversight mechanisms are dysfunctional. In the states at this extreme, foreign policy is seen to be produced not by an institution but by almost a single person.

When the five tiers are placed side by side, a clear gradient emerges. As institutional scores rise, so do predictability, fidelity to commitments, and international reputation in foreign policy; as scores fall, these qualities disappear one by one. At the democratic end decisions are bound to processes, rules, and accumulated expertise, while at the totalitarian end they are bound to a single will; the countries between the two ends are positioned precisely according to the extent to which their institutions actually function. The critical finding here is that the existence of the separation of powers on paper is not by itself sufficient. The examples of Hungary, Serbia, and Russia show that even when constitutional structures formally remain in place, the executive's effectively disabling them personalizes foreign policy and erodes credibility. The real variable determining foreign policy effectiveness is therefore not the formal existence of institutions but their actual operation; the degree of consistency between formal rules and everyday practices directly determines states' capacity in foreign policy, as Levitsky and Murillo's (2009) concept of "institutional strength" also indicates.

One of the most concrete contributions of institutionalization in foreign policy is that it limits personalization in the decision-making process. In states with strong institutions, foreign policy is shaped with the contribution of the foreign-affairs bureaucracy, the parliament, think tanks, and academic circles, resting on institutional memory. In systems where institutional mechanisms are weak, decisions are left largely to the preference of the leader or a narrow elite circle; this renders policies unpredictable and inconsistent. While in Sweden and Germany the departure of one government and the arrival of another does not disrupt the main line of foreign policy, in countries such as North Korea and Turkmenistan the binding of foreign policy entirely to the leader's personality constitutes the two ends of the same mechanism. The process March and Olsen (1989) called the "logic of appropriateness" is operative here: institutions, by binding the decision-maker to certain norms and conventions, reduce the weight of personal impulses on policy. Within this framework, it is seen that institutionalization produces not merely formal procedures but also a foreign policy culture that settles over time; the taking of decisions within a certain style and convention strengthens the continuity of institutional identity.

The data examined also reveal a pattern regarding the course of the relationship between institutionalization and foreign policy over time. The positive reflection of institutional improvements in foreign

policy generally appears with a lag of a few years, and an interval of two to three years on average is observed between reforms and their results. This shows that institutional transformation is a gradual rather than an abrupt process and does not occur detached from the legacy of the past; as North's (1990) concept of "path dependence" indicates, existing structures directly determine the pace and direction of reforms. When institutional gains can be sustained, the positive effects in foreign policy acquire a lasting and cumulative character; conversely, in countries undergoing institutional decline, foreign policy performance too falls rapidly. The decline observed in recent years in Hungary and Serbia and Russia's growing isolation are concrete examples of this fall. That institutional gain is a slow and labor-intensive process while loss is experienced much more rapidly suggests the fragility of institutional capital and its need for constant maintenance.

It is also among our findings that the effect of institutionalization on foreign policy is not uniform, and that each dimension of the institutional structure nourishes a different aspect of foreign policy. The rule of law affects compliance with commitments, transparency affects international reputation, bureaucratic capacity affects the power of implementation, and democratic participation affects legitimacy. The historical, rational-choice, and sociological institutionalist approaches distinguished by Hall and Taylor (1996) show that institutions affect behavior through different channels; Krasner (1988), in turn, reveals that the effect of institutional structures on state behavior is differentiated. This multidimensionality also explains why two countries at the same institutional level may display different strengths in foreign policy. Moreover, the effect of institutional mechanisms varies with regime type: while democratic systems channel the positive effects of institutions better, in hybrid regimes where institutions are weak or for show foreign policy is conducted devoid of democratic oversight and international credibility is seriously harmed (Levitsky & Way, 2010).

Crisis management is perhaps the area in which the effect of institutionalization is most visible. States with a strong institutional structure can respond to crises more calmly and in a more coordinated manner; coordination among the foreign-affairs, defense, intelligence, and economic institutions makes a rapid and sound flow of information possible. The organizational-process and bureaucratic-politics models that Allison and Zelikow (1999) developed through the Cuban Missile Crisis show that in a moment of crisis decisions are in fact the product of interaction among institutional actors. In systems where institutional oversight exists, the operation of certain procedures blocks momentary and emotional decisions; as Jervis (2017) points out, institutional structures, by ordering decision-makers' processes of perception and misperception, allow for sounder information processing. Lebow (2008) completes this picture with the cultural dimension, revealing that institutions shape not only rational processes but also the normative frameworks of decision-makers. By contrast, as seen in Russia's decision to invade or in Iran's mass detentions after the crisis, where oversight is disabled the crisis most often deepens and the state's room for international maneuver narrows. Institutional memory, in turn, by carrying lessons drawn from past crises into subsequent processes, makes this difference even more pronounced over time. The remark of a security expert we interviewed—"In a crisis, information management and strategic communication are as important as physical capacity; a state weak in these areas, however strong it may be, can stumble in crisis management"—sums up that crisis management is a matter not only of power but of institutional capacity.

Another dimension of crisis management is international cooperation and coordination. States with strong institutional relations are more successful in securing international support and coordination in moments of crisis; by using existing organizations and diplomatic channels effectively, they can develop multilateral solutions. Wheeler (2018) shows that in international crises interstate trust is built through institutional mechanisms, and that interpersonal trust relationships are not lasting when not supported by an institutional framework. This finding reveals that institutional infrastructure assumes not only an operational but also a relational function in crisis management; that democratic countries with strong institutions can rapidly mobilize their alliance networks in a crisis also supports this.

The rule of law is another fundamental support that institutionalization reflects in foreign policy. That countries ranking high on the Rule of Law Index take their decisions within the framework of constitutional principles, laws, and international agreements lends predictability to their policies and strengthens compliance with international commitments. That Sweden ranks fourth and Germany fifth while Russia remains in 113th place coincides with the reflection of this difference in foreign policy (World Justice Project, 2024). Simmons (2009) shows that the embedding of international legal norms in domestic law nourishes both international reputation and domestic transformation; Tamanaha (2004), in turn, stresses that the rule of law requires not merely formal rules but a body of values internalized by society. In states where the legal framework has weakened, foreign policy decisions can often be taken without legal grounding, by personal or ideological preferences; this confirms once again, as Weingast (1997) notes, that law not nourished by the shared commitment of social actors is unsustainable.

Transparency and accountability, too, stand out among the variables determining foreign policy success in our findings. It is seen that countries with a high level of transparency remain more faithful to their

international commitments and are counted more reliable partners in diplomatic relations (Fukuyama, 2004). The wave of protests in Serbia concretely exemplifies how, in the absence of this mechanism, society's demand to hold the government to account spills into the streets and how the administration's international reputation declines. The statement of an academic we interviewed—"Without accountability, the rule of law and democracy remain incomplete, because the mechanism that makes these values work in practice is accountability"—sums up that the three elements form a mutually nourishing whole. A point that increases the value of transparency in foreign policy is that it is not enough for information merely to be accessible; as Fung, Graham, and Weil's (2007) concept of "targeted transparency" emphasizes, it must be intelligible, comparable, and actionable.

The relationship between democratic governance and foreign policy is important in that it renders decision processes more participatory and accountable. In democratic systems foreign policy is shaped with the contribution of the parliament, civil society, think tanks, and academia, and this pluralism produces more balanced policies. Dahl's (1971) concept of "polyarchy" shows that democratic institutionalization is not limited to elections but also encompasses freedom of expression, access to information, the right of association, and public deliberation. Diamond (2003) reveals that the strengthening of civil society, the rule of law, and accountability form a mutually nourishing ecosystem; Lijphart (2012), in turn, that consensual democracy models better preserve stability in pluralistic societies. Risse-Kappen's (1991) "domestic structures" model shows that the channels through which public opinion influences foreign policy differ according to the institutional form of the society-state relationship. As the Democratic Peace Theory predicts, mechanisms of oversight and transparency require leaders to behave more cautiously in decisions hard to reverse, such as war (Doyle, 1983); Russett and Oneal's (2001) "Kantian peace triangle" empirically confirms that democratic institutionalization, membership in international organizations, and economic interdependence together strengthen peaceful relations. That the democratic countries examined prefer negotiation over conflict in their relations with one another, while the countries at the autocratic and totalitarian extreme are more open to the use of force, supports this prediction.

Economic institutionalization is a factor that directly nourishes foreign policy capacity. The security of property rights, the enforceability of contracts, and the predictability of the regulatory framework expand both states' economic growth and their room for maneuver in foreign policy (North, 1991; Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2001). Rodrik, Subramanian, and Trebbi (2004) showed that institutional quality is a more determining factor of development than geography and trade integration; Frieden (2006), in turn, revealed that economic dependencies can limit foreign policy autonomy, but that states with strong institutions can manage these constraints better. Economically stable states with a strong institutional infrastructure use instruments such as trade agreements, investment partnerships, and development aid more effectively in line with their diplomatic goals. As seen in the examples of Germany and Japan, economic power turns into a sustainable lever of foreign policy only when combined with a solid institutional structure. Kahler and Lake (2013) show that global economic crises test institutional structures and that states with strong institutions are more resilient in post-crisis recovery; this confirms that economic institutionalization preserves the room for foreign policy maneuver not only under normal conditions but also in periods of crisis.

Qualified human resources and inter-institutional harmony are also decisive for an effective foreign policy. Merit-based career systems, specialization, and the preservation of institutional memory ensure the professionalization and continuity of foreign policy (Fukuyama, 2004). Our findings show that countries with strong diplomatic institutions are more successful in international negotiations, develop more effective strategies in crisis management, and use their diplomatic networks more efficiently. Strong coordination among the foreign-affairs, defense, economic, and intelligence institutions, in turn, makes it possible to pursue foreign policy goals consistently. Allison and Zelikow's (1999) bureaucratic-politics model reveals that inter-institutional coordination is not merely a technical matter but a complex process requiring the management of the balance among organizational cultures, routines, and interests. That this coordination is institutionalized in the countries at the democratic end ensures the holistic use of foreign policy instruments; whereas in single-handedly governed systems, because coordination remains bound to the leader's personal control, it remains fragile.

The capacity of institutional structures to adapt to changing conditions is also an important factor determining foreign policy success. A rapidly transforming international system, new technologies, and transboundary problems make it imperative for foreign policy institutions to renew themselves. Holsti's (2016) concept of "foreign policy restructuring" shows that this adaptation is not always gradual but can also occur through root-and-branch transformations bound to internal and external shocks; Thelen (2004), in turn, reveals that institutional evolution proceeds through such mechanisms as layering, drift, and conversion. It is observed that countries that adopt a learning-institution culture and encourage innovation adapt more rapidly to global changes and make better use of new opportunities. Information-management systems, regular evaluation

mechanisms, and feedback processes are the principal instruments that nourish institutional learning. Institutions in which a culture of strategic planning has taken root can read the international system more holistically; whereas in states where this capacity is weak, foreign policy most often bears a reactive character and turns into reacting to daily crises rather than to long-term interests.

Digitalization is one of the most conspicuous tests of institutional adaptation today and produces a two-way effect. On the one hand, by accelerating decision processes it increases transparency; on the other, it brings new problems such as disinformation, algorithmic bias, and cybersecurity onto the agenda (Rodrik, 2021). Schwab's (2017) "Fourth Industrial Revolution" framework reveals that this transformation is qualitatively different from previous industrial revolutions and that the pace of institutions' adaptation carries the risk of falling behind technological change. Countries with developed digital-diplomacy capacity are more successful in mobilizing public support in moments of crisis, combating disinformation, and constructing their own narratives; as Slaughter (2017) points out, institutional capacity is the precondition for the effective use of network diplomacy in the digital age. At the same time, the data obtained from interviews show that the effectiveness of digital diplomacy depends not only on technological infrastructure but on institutional coordination, trained human resources, and a clear strategy. That the same technology turns into an instrument of surveillance and control in closed systems such as China, and into an instrument of accountability and public diplomacy in democratic systems, suggests that what determines technology's effect is the institutional framework.

The effect of institutionalization on foreign policy can also be traced in the areas of science and environmental diplomacy and global governance. Countries with strong environmental-diplomacy institutions take a more effective role in climate negotiations and can integrate environmental policies with foreign policy strategies; similarly, countries that develop their science-diplomacy institutions articulate better with global scientific networks and can keep channels of dialogue open even in tense periods. Haas's (1992) concept of "epistemic communities" explains that, in problems requiring technical expertise such as climate change or pandemics, the transfer of scientific knowledge to institutional structures is a critical component of foreign policy capacity. The remark of an environmental diplomat we interviewed—"Environmental diplomacy is no longer a luxury but a strategic necessity; to be effective in this area, all foreign policy institutions must internalize an environmental perspective"—stresses the need for institutional integration in this field. The transformation of global governance, in turn, tests states' capacity for adaptation; while Ikenberry (2018) draws attention to the fragility of the liberal international order in the face of rising powers, populist movements, and shifting balances of power, Börzel and Risse (2012) show that the transfer of international norms to the national level is not limited to the European Union but operates on a global scale as well.

Relations with international organizations are another area in which institutionalization is reflected in foreign policy effectiveness. Countries that can take an active role in regional and global organizations, contribute to decision-making mechanisms, and partake in norm formation attain a broader sphere of influence in foreign policy (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). Checkel (2005) shows that international institutions transform the structures of member states through processes of socialization; Krasner (1982), in turn, reveals that regimes, as sets of principles, norms, and rules that bring actors' expectations closer together, form the basis of global harmonization. That the democratic countries examined show a continuous and institutionalized presence in these organizations enables them to use multilateral channels and the ability to form coalitions effectively. By contrast, the influence of countries undergoing institutional decline in these organizations also weakens over time; Hungary's growing isolation within the European Union and Russia's exclusion from numerous international mechanisms are examples of this.

When all these findings are assessed together, it is seen that institutionalization confers on states continuity, predictability, and credibility in foreign policy, and that these gains become lasting only when supported by democratic norms, the rule of law, and an institutional culture internalized at the level of society. Transparency, accountability, the rule of law, democratic participation, economic stability, inter-institutional coordination, the capacity for institutional adaptation, and digital competence form not an independent set but a mutually interacting whole. The data compiled from eleven countries confirm that the gap between the formal existence of the separation of powers and its actual operation is the critical variable determining foreign policy effectiveness; they reveal that states with strong and genuinely functioning institutions preserve their capacity to attain foreign policy goals even under changing global conditions, reinforce their international credibility, and expand their diplomatic influence. At the extreme where institutions are surrendered to personalization, on the other hand, it is understood that, whatever the appearance of short-term resolve, foreign policy loses trust, reputation, and room for maneuver over the long run.

VI. Discussion

The most fundamental result this research has revealed is that there is a strong and continuous link between the level of institutionalization and foreign policy success. States in which the separation of powers functions not on paper but in fact, in which the rule of law has taken root, and in which accountability has attained institutional guarantee pursue a more predictable, more consistent course in foreign policy and one more trustworthy in the eyes of their international partners. This picture coincides directly with North's (1990) approach, which defines institutions as the "rules of the game" that order social interaction. Huntington's (1968) classic thesis, which finds the criterion of political order in institutionalization, also retains its validity in the field of foreign policy: when the authority to decide is not concentrated in a single hand but passes through the separate filters of the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary, arbitrariness in foreign policy diminishes markedly. Montesquieu's (1748/2011) idea of balance among the powers remains, even three centuries later, the point of departure for understanding the institutional logic of foreign policy. Here institutionalization should be defined as the settling of the state's governance and decision processes on certain rules, norms, and structures independently of personal preferences; in the foreign policy context this means that diplomacy is conducted not randomly but through established mechanisms.

The effect of institutionalization on foreign policy is seen to operate not through a single channel but through many mutually nourishing channels. Each of the components such as transparency, accountability, the rule of law, and bureaucratic capacity shapes a distinct aspect of foreign policy. This multilayered structure accords with Hall and Taylor's (1996) distinction among historical, rational-choice, and sociological institutionalism, which holds that institutional effects must be explained through different mechanisms; legislative oversight, judicial independence, and the executive's accountability contribute to the same outcome by different routes. These components do not consist merely of formal rules; a foreign policy culture that settles over time, diplomatic traditions, and a manner of viewing international relations are also shaped on the same institutional ground. Wendt's (1999) constructivist view is operative at this point: the separation of powers is not merely a material arrangement but a framework that shapes the state's international identity and patterns of behavior. March and Olsen's (1989) concept of the "logic of appropriateness" also completes this, because institutionalized roles steer actors' behavior not only by the calculation of interest but also by internalized normative expectations. The words of a foreign policy expert interviewed within the scope of the research—"Institutions are the bearers of foreign policy culture and the very mechanism that transmits it from generation to generation"—point to the institutional basis of this cultural continuity.

One of the research's notable findings is that institutionalization brakes personalization in foreign policy. In systems where institutional mechanisms are weak, foreign policy is most often determined according to the leader's personal preferences or the interests of a narrow circle; this renders decisions unpredictable and inconsistent. Acemoglu and Robinson's (2012) distinction between inclusive and extractive institutions explains this difference at the theoretical level. Hudson (2013) has shown that foreign policy analysis must encompass a broad spectrum extending from the individual decision-maker to the institutional structure, and that unsupervised and personalized decision processes lead to systematic deviations. Here the separation of powers works like an antidote to personalization; the legislature's authority to debate and approve foreign policy decisions limits the executive's unilateral steps, and in systems with strong institutions decisions are taken with broader expert participation and by drawing on institutional memory. Yet the existence of formal institutions is not by itself sufficient. Levitsky and Way (2010), with the concept of "competitive authoritarianism," issue an important caveat: institutions enhance foreign policy performance not merely because they are written into the constitution but when they are genuinely supported by democratic norms.

That states with a strong institutional structure show consistency and continuity in foreign policy manifests itself in the preservation of basic orientations even when the government or the leader changes. Keohane's (1984) thesis of "after-hegemony cooperation" argues that institutional mechanisms can sustain cooperation even without a dominant power; this study's findings, too, show that states with high institutional capacity set their goals more systematically and mobilize their resources more effectively. The origin of continuity can be explained by Pierson's (2004) concept of "path dependence": an institutional route once established keeps foreign policy on a certain course and makes abrupt deviations difficult; the legislature's power of approval and the judiciary's oversight are the principal brakes of this route. The reflection of institutional stability in diplomacy can also be traced in Putnam's (1988) "two-level game" model; institutional limits at the national level, by rendering the state's "win-set" at the international table predictable, increase its negotiating power. Slaughter (2017) stresses that this institutional capacity is also the precondition of network diplomacy in the digital age.

Transparency is perhaps the most visible of these institutional components. The openness of decision processes, access to information, and the sharing of diplomatic goals with the public strengthen the state's legitimacy both at home and abroad; for when diplomatic partners attain a clearer view of intentions, distrust and misunderstanding diminish. This observation coincides with the argument expressed in Keohane and Nye's

(1977) model of complex interdependence, that reducing information asymmetry lowers the costs of cooperation. Fukuyama's (2004) emphasis on state capacity also completes this framework. Another face of transparency is that the conformity of foreign policy decisions with international law and human rights standards becomes subject to oversight; while Rawls's (1999) framework of the "law of peoples" establishes the normative ground of this conformity, Simmons's (2009) comprehensive empirical study shows that international human rights law can create a mobilizing effect in domestic politics and trigger institutional transformation. Digitalization has carried this domain into a new dimension; while social media, open-data portals, and online diplomatic channels allow states to convey their messages directly to global audiences, the same technologies, as Rodrik (2021) reminds us, also bring with them risks such as disinformation and cybersecurity. On the other hand, transparency is not an absolute value; when national security and negotiation strategies are at stake, a certain secrecy is inevitable. Abbott and Snidal's (2000) distinction between "hard law" and "soft law" explains the institutional logic of this balance; which information will be disclosed and which will remain within strategic secrecy is bound to legal frameworks within the separation of powers. The statement of a diplomat interviewed—"Transparency and strategic secrecy do not exclude but complete one another; the issue is to discern correctly which matter should be open and which should remain closed for a certain time"—sums up the practical counterpart of this balance.

Accountability is the component that secures the effectiveness of institutionalization. Dahl's (1971) concept of "polyarchy" establishes the theoretical basis of this oversight; the legislature's oversight of the executive, the judiciary's review of legal conformity, and independent audit institutions form a multilayered architecture of accountability. Allison and Zelikow's (1999) bureaucratic-politics model shows how this oversight shapes decision processes; the competition and bargaining of different institutional actors ensure that decisions leave the monopoly of a single hand and settle into a shared framework. An important function of accountability is that it checks the conformity of foreign policy with long-term national interests rather than the interests of a narrow group. Doyle's (1983) democratic-peace theory is explanatory at this point: accountability mechanisms erect obstacles that make it harder for leaders to decide on war and reduce the likelihood of conflict among democratic states. Owen's (1994) contribution to this thesis, in turn, reminds us that democratic structures do not guarantee peace by themselves, and that liberal values and mutual recognition are also critical. At the international level, accountability includes the oversight of states' conformity with global norms; Sikkink's (2011) concept of the "justice cascade" reveals that international human rights norms transform states' institutional structure at the national level, and an independent judiciary forms the carrier channel of this transformation. Finnemore and Toope (2001), too, argue that international law is not a mere body of rules but a normative process that shapes state behavior. The words of an academic interviewed—"Without accountability, the rule of law and democracy remain incomplete, because the mechanism that puts these values into practice is accountability"—stress this element's central place in governance. Levitsky and Murillo's (2009) concept of "institutional strength" completes the discussion: what is decisive is not the rule's being written down but how far it is actually applied and how stable it remains over time.

Crisis management is one of the areas in which the effect of institutionalization on foreign policy is most clearly seen. States with a strong institutional structure respond to international crises more systematically, in a more coordinated and strategic manner. The three decision models that Allison and Zelikow (1999) developed on the Cuban Missile Crisis—rational actor, organizational process, and bureaucratic politics—reveal how institutional structures shape crisis decisions. Institutional coordination, by ensuring a rapid and accurate flow of information in a moment of crisis, makes possible the harmonious working of diplomatic institutions, intelligence units, and economic actors. The most critical contribution of institutionalization in this area is that it brakes emotional and hasty steps in a moment of crisis. Jervis (2017), in analyzing the mechanisms of perception and misperception, showed that institutionalized decision processes reduce cognitive biases and can produce more composed decisions; Lebow (2008), too, stresses that institutional structures, by ordering the flow of information, forestall panic-driven decisions and thereby prevent the escalation of crises. In matters requiring technical expertise, the scientific expert networks pointed to by Haas's (1992) concept of "epistemic communities" form the precondition of accurate assessments. The transfer of lessons drawn from past crises through institutional memory is another advantage; Thelen's (2004) theory of institutional evolution, built on the mechanisms of layering, drift, and conversion, explains how states' capacity to adapt to crisis is shaped over time. On the international dimension, states with strong institutional relations come to the fore in providing support and coordination in a moment of crisis; Fearon (1998) shows how, when bargaining and enforcement mechanisms are completed by an institutional framework, the credibility of commitments increases. The words of a security expert interviewed—"In a crisis, information management and strategic communication are as important as physical capacity; even the strongest state, if weak in this area, can fail in a crisis"—remind us that crisis management is a matter not only of material power but of institutional quality.

The rule of law is one of the fundamental supports of institutionalization. Tamanaha's (2004) analysis of the historical development of this principle sets out the tension between "thin" and "thick" definitions: while the thin definition reduces the rule of law to merely procedural requirements, the thick definition also encompasses substantive elements such as the protection of fundamental rights, democratic participation, and social justice. For foreign policy, this distinction is critically important for assessing whether the separation of powers functions only at a formal level or in a genuine sense. In countries with a strong legal system, foreign policy decisions are taken within the framework of constitutional principles, laws, and international agreements rather than arbitrary practices; Simmons's (2009) findings, too, show the mobilizing effect of international human rights law in domestic law. The capacity of an independent judiciary to oversee foreign policy actions is the backbone of this framework; Moravcsik's (1997) liberal approach reveals that judicial independence is a mechanism that ensures the pluralistic determination of national preferences. Within Rawls's (1999) framework of the "law of peoples," states' being counted legitimate actors in the international arena is directly related to their commitment to the rule of law in domestic law. While the works of Steiner, Alston, and Goodman (2008) on international human rights law show the complexity of the interaction between the national and international levels, Kingsbury and Donaldson (2011) argue that international law is evolving from bilateral relations toward a public order. In this transformation, the choice between hard and soft law is also bound to institutional processes: that hard-law commitments require legislative approval while soft-law arrangements remain within executive authority institutionalizes the flexibility-bindingness balance that Abbott and Snidal (2000) point to. The statement of a jurist interviewed—"The harmony between international law and domestic law is the sine qua non of a genuine rule of law in foreign policy"—when considered together with Hurd's (1999) analysis of legitimacy and authority, reveals that the separation of powers is the principal mechanism that enables the international legal order to acquire legitimacy at the national level.

The link between institutional reliability and the building of international trust is another relationship the research underscores. Keohane's (1984) theory of institutional cooperation defines trust as a mechanism that reduces information asymmetry and lowers transaction costs. When a commitment given by a state rests not merely on the executive's will but on a broad institutional consensus, it turns into a far more credible signal for its partners. Fearon (1998) shows that the institutional cost of unilaterally breaking an agreement approved by the legislature is high, and that this secures the sustainability of the commitment. Ikenberry's (2001) concept of "strategic restraint" completes this point: even powerful states, when they limit their own actions through institutional frameworks, create a long-term trust. Deutsch and colleagues' (1957) "security community" approach revealed at an early date that interstate trust rises on shared institutional expectations; Wheeler (2018), in turn, shows that trust built at the personal level is not sustainable when not supported by institutional frameworks. In the building of trust, consistency between word and deed is decisive; Levitsky and Murillo's (2009) concept of "institutional strength" stresses that the consistency between formal rules and actual practices must be treated as a measurable variable. The words of a diplomat interviewed—"In diplomacy, doing what you have promised and saying what you have done is the basis of trust; this consistency can be ensured only by solid institutional structures"—sum up this principle. Assessed through Wendt's (1999) constructivist view, this trust is not merely a rational trust based on the calculation of interest but a normative trust based on mutual recognition and shared identity.

Diplomatic capacity is both an indicator and a result of institutionalization. As Fukuyama (2004) notes in his analysis of state-building, institutional capacity takes priority over the state's scope; in diplomacy this means that having a broad network of representation is not by itself enough, and that this network must be supported by a merit-based, professional structure. States with a strong institutional structure can build a more professional diplomatic corps, preserve institutional memory, and obtain more successful outcomes in international negotiations. Hill (2016) argues that foreign policy has grown increasingly complex in the twenty-first century, and that diplomatic capacity must be conceived not only in its military but also in its economic, technological, and environmental dimensions. This multidimensionality increases the effectiveness of states that develop institutional structures in specialized areas such as economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, environmental diplomacy, and cyber diplomacy; Kaarbo (2015) shows that institutional specialization directly determines foreign policy outputs. Carlsnaes (2013) stresses that this capacity arises from the interaction of structural factors with individual decision-makers; the separation of powers establishes the ground that turns diplomatic skill from a personal talent into an institutional competence. Diplomatic training and continuous professional development also determine the permanence of this competence; Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) theory of organizational learning and Ruël and Wolters's (2016) study on commercial diplomacy reveal that the capacity for knowledge management directly affects foreign policy performance. The words of a foreign policy analyst interviewed—"Modern diplomacy now requires not only general skills but also in-depth expertise in particular areas; without institutional specialization it is impossible to surmount contemporary challenges"—foreground the specialization dimension of capacity. Slaughter's (2017) network-diplomacy approach, in turn,

shows that this capacity must now be measured by the multilayered networks formed with sub-state and transnational actors as well.

Soft power is another element closely related to institutionalization. The often-overlooked dimension of Nye's (2004) concept of soft power is institutional: values such as democratic institutions, the rule of law, and respect for human rights are normative assets that are made concrete through the separation of powers and form a center of attraction for other states. Institutional capacity ensures that the sources of soft power are used systematically rather than in scattered fashion and that public diplomacy is conducted in a coordinated manner; Barnett and Finnemore (2004) show that institutional structures assume both enabling and constraining functions in this projection. In cultural diplomacy, Melissen's (2005) framework of "new public diplomacy" reveals that conducting cooperation between the state and civil society on an institutional ground increases the legitimacy of foreign policy; in Wendt's (1999) view, this is a normative process through which states construct their collective identities in the international arena. Education diplomacy, exchange programs, and scientific collaborations are also important components of soft power; Pamment (2016) shows that states with a strong institutional structure can run more sustainable programs in these areas and build long-term networks of influence. In the context of Diamond's (2003) analysis, education diplomacy is not merely an instrument of soft power but a socialization mechanism that ensures the diffusion of democratic values and institutional norms. The words of an education diplomat interviewed—"Today's international students are tomorrow's leaders and opinion-makers; the bonds formed with them are an invaluable diplomatic capital over the long run"—reveal the strategic value of this area.

Institutional flexibility determines states' capacity to adapt to changing conditions and to develop innovative foreign policy. Here there is a problem of balance: institutions must be both stable and adaptable. Thelen's (2004) theory of institutional change explains this balance; the legislature's capacity to establish new policy frameworks corresponds to layering, the executive's adaptation of existing structures to new conditions to conversion, and the judiciary's preservation of institutional continuity forms a counterweight to drift. Holsti's (2016) concept of "foreign policy restructuring" shows that states' processes of institutionalization do not advance linearly but can undergo root-and-branch transformations bound to internal and external shocks; the separation of powers functions as a stability buttress that prevents radical breaks in these restructurings. Rodrik (2021) stresses that digitalization has a two-way effect that both strengthens and disrupts institutional structures. New domains of diplomacy are the grounds on which this flexibility is tested. In digital diplomacy, the technological transformation pointed to by Schwab's (2017) analysis of the Fourth Industrial Revolution directly tests the capacity for institutional adaptation; the legislature's establishment of cybersecurity frameworks, the executive's protection of digital infrastructure, and the judiciary's safeguarding of data and privacy rights correspond to the new regulatory needs noted by Manor (2019). In environmental diplomacy, Zürn's (2018) theory of global governance shows that climate problems require arrangements that transcend the traditional understanding of sovereignty; Haas's (1992) concept of epistemic communities explains the incorporation of scientific expertise into decision processes, and Biermann, Kanie, and Kim's (2017) model of "goal-based governance" explains the implementation at the national level of frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals. In science diplomacy, Ruffini (2018) shows that scientific cooperation creates a distinctive channel that keeps interstate communication open even when traditional diplomacy is blocked. Innovation carries strategic value especially for resource-limited middle powers; Cooper's (1997) concept of "niche diplomacy" reveals that middle powers resting on democratic institutions can assume leadership in areas such as humanitarian aid or mediation thanks to institutional legitimacy. Hale, Held, and Young's (2013) concept of "global gridlock," in turn, shows that in a period when existing international structures fall short, domestic institutional flexibility is the precondition for surmounting this gridlock.

The institutionalization of relations with international organizations directly strengthens states' capacity for multilateral diplomacy. Keohane and Martin (1995) showed that international institutions shape state behavior by providing information, lowering transaction costs, and increasing the credibility of commitments. Krasner's (1982) definition of international regimes as "principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge" establishes the theoretical basis of this interaction. Institutional interaction also requires an infrastructure at the national level; the legislature's making of the necessary domestic legal arrangements, the executive's ensuring of effective representation in organizations such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, and the judiciary's oversight of the implementation of international obligations form a multidimensional mechanism. Mearsheimer's (1994) realist critique that international institutions cannot independently shape state behavior should be taken into account at this point; yet this critique acquires an important nuance when one considers that the fidelity of states with a separation of powers to organizations is supported by domestic institutional mechanisms. The separation of powers, by ensuring that international commitments rest not merely on the executive's will but on a broad institutional consensus, structurally makes more difficult the "easy exit"

option that the realist critique assumes. This process also encourages norm internalization; Börzel and Risse's (2012) mechanisms of conditionality, socialization, and learning and Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) norm-life-cycle model explain how international norms are transferred to the national level; Checkel (2005), too, has shown that states with a separation of powers internalize these socialization processes more effectively. The words of a diplomat interviewed—"Today no state can solve an important global problem on its own; to be effective, one must show an institutional presence in organizations and be able to manage multilateral mechanisms"—sum up the strategic importance of this capacity.

The democratic oversight of foreign policy is the fundamental element that strengthens the legitimacy dimension of institutionalization. Dahl's (1971) concept of "polyarchy" systematically defines the preconditions of this oversight. The separation of powers is the principal mechanism that takes foreign policy out of the monopoly of a narrow elite circle and opens it to broad social deliberation. Parliamentary oversight forms the backbone of this process; as Putnam (1988) showed in his two-level-game model, a strong legislature both limits and strengthens the executive's international room for maneuver. The limitation appears in the form of the legislature's power of approval blocking arbitrary commitments; the strengthening, in the form of approved commitments giving more credible signals to partners. This dual effect explains the paradoxical but functional role of the separation of powers in foreign policy. From the standpoint of Allison and Zelikow's (1999) bureaucratic-politics model, parliamentary oversight not only monitors the executive's actions but also ensures that the competition and bargaining among bureaucratic actors are conducted within a democratic framework. Civil-society participation is another layer of oversight; Keck and Sikkink's (1998) "boomerang model" and the concept of transnational advocacy networks show that the participation of civil actors in foreign policy creates a multilayered interaction transcending national borders. Risse-Kappen (1991) reveals that in democratic regimes the influence of public opinion and civil society on foreign policy is structured through institutional channels; Diamond (2003), in turn, shows that the strengthening of civil society, the securing of the rule of law, and the increase of accountability are integrated dimensions that nourish one another and are protected by the separation of powers. The statement of a member of parliament interviewed—"Parliamentary oversight is the most important safeguard ensuring that foreign policy serves the national interest rather than narrow interests"—gives concrete form to this function of democratic oversight.

What makes this multidimensional relationship most concretely visible is the comparison of states at different levels of institutionalization. When the examples studied are treated along a spectrum extending from democratic to totalitarian, the link between institutional structure and foreign policy output becomes far clearer. In constructing this spectrum, the four-tier regime classification of the Democracy Index covering 2024 (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025), V-Dem's (2023) liberal-democracy measurements, and Linz's (2000) classic typology distinguishing authoritarian from totalitarian regimes were used together. One point must be underscored: the Democracy Index does not formally define a separate category called "totalitarian"; within the authoritarian-regime class there are systems quite different from one another in terms of closedness and the intensity of control. For this reason the bottommost examples were assessed as the totalitarian extreme on the basis both of index scores and of Linz's (2000) criteria. George and Bennett's (2005) structured, focused comparison method offers a framework well suited to assessing these different contexts systematically.

At the democratic end of the spectrum, Germany, Sweden, and South Korea offer instructive examples. Sweden, with a score of 9.39 on the Democracy Index, is one of the few countries at the very top of the world (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025); because its accession to NATO in March 2024 rested on a broad parliamentary consensus and a long process of negotiation, it was read as a credible commitment in the eyes of its allies, and so root-and-branch a break from a two-century tradition of neutrality was a decision that could be borne only with institutional legitimacy. Germany, with a score of 8.73, is among the full democracies (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025); the "Zeitenwende" declared in 2022, expressing a fundamental turn in defense policy, was turned into a lasting institutional commitment by the passage of a hundred-billion-euro special fund through parliamentary approval. These two examples give concrete form to the capacity of legislative approval to render foreign policy binding and credible. South Korea, in turn, is especially striking within the spectrum; the martial law declared by the president in December 2024 was nullified by a vote that parliament convened within hours, and the impeachment process that followed revealed that constitutional oversight was in fact functioning. Although this crisis lowered the country's index score to 7.75 and the "flawed democracy" category (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025), it is a case that directly supports the study's thesis, because it proved that the separation of powers can limit the executive even in a moment of pressure. South Korea's strengthening of its constitutional court and the parliament's expansion of foreign policy oversight during its democratization period were critical steps that carried its foreign policy from the personalized structure of the authoritarian era onto an institutional ground; Kang's (2002) analysis of South Korea and Pierson's (2004) concept of path dependence acquire joint functionality in explaining this transformation. The broader success of the Scandinavian model, in turn, can be explained by Hall and Soskice's (2001) approach,

which draws attention to the harmony between economic and political institutions, and by Lijphart's (2012) consensual-democracy model; despite limited material resources, institutional reliability and normative consistency have made these countries effective in areas such as mediation and humanitarian aid.

On a lower rung of the spectrum lie countries that possess democratic institutions but are sliding toward autocracy. Hungary, although still counted a "flawed democracy" on the Democracy Index, has with a score of 6.51 undergone one of the sharpest declines since 2006 (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025); V-Dem (2023) places this country in the electoral-autocracy class. The erosion of judicial independence and press pluralism has weakened the country's diplomatic position within the European Union; the billions of euros in funds frozen owing to concerns about the rule of law and the frequently resorted-to veto bargaining have made visible the cost of institutional erosion in foreign policy. India, too, is a notable example of this rung. With its regular elections resting on the world's largest electorate, its relatively independent judiciary, and its lively civil society, it continues to be counted a "flawed democracy" with a score of 7.29 on the Democracy Index (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025). Yet V-Dem (2024), on the basis of the gradual regression in press and expression freedom and in minority rights, has classified the country as an "electoral autocracy." This dual profile is also reflected in foreign policy: to the extent that institutional pluralism remains standing, India, by pursuing strategic autonomy, can conduct relations simultaneously with rival blocs and find broad room for maneuver at the negotiating table; in areas where institutional oversight has weakened, the personalization of foreign policy discourse carries the risk of eroding predictability. Hungary and India together reveal that the effect of institutional decline on foreign policy varies according to the extent to which institutions remain standing; Bermeo's (2016) analysis of "democratic backsliding" shows that this process works less through an abrupt collapse than through the gradual hollowing-out of institutions. Levitsky and Murillo's (2009) concept of "institutional strength" is explanatory here too: what is decisive is not that the rule is written down but how far it is actually applied.

Lower still lie autocratic systems in which pluralism has been largely eliminated. Russia is classified as an authoritarian regime on the Democracy Index and has continued to decline since its score of 2.28 in 2022 (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025); the index describes this country as a system "acquiring the features of a dictatorship." After the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia's expulsion from the Council of Europe, its exposure to wide-ranging sanctions, and the International Criminal Court's issuance of an arrest warrant for its head of state show how personalized decisions devoid of institutional oversight can turn into a root-and-branch isolation in foreign policy. Venezuela is likewise in the authoritarian-regime class; the disputed election of 2024 and the non-recognition of its result by numerous states are an example of how a system whose accountability mechanisms have collapsed loses its international legitimacy. These two countries reveal that centralized structures can produce rapid action in certain areas, but that this comes at a heavy cost in terms of credibility and legitimacy.

In the region of this scale lying between authoritarian and totalitarian are China and Iran. China is counted an authoritarian regime on the Democracy Index and, with a liberal-democracy score of 0.04 in the V-Dem (2023) measurement, is in the lowest cluster; although its centralized decision structure affords the possibility of rapid and coordinated action in major projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative, this speed is offset by a deficit of normative legitimacy and international trust. Iran, in turn, settles into this intermediate region with its theocratic-ideological institutional structure, its high level of control, and its ever-deepening isolation. Viewed in terms of Linz's (2000) criteria, these two systems contain an ideological envelopment that goes beyond authoritarian control; yet because they have not fully attained the capacity to force the whole of social life into a single mold, they are distinguished from the totalitarian extreme. In both examples, because foreign policy rests not on a broad institutional consensus but on the preferences of a narrow center, it bears a character difficult for partners to predict.

At the very extreme of the spectrum lie totalitarian systems that envelop every domain of society. North Korea, scoring 0.0 on the electoral-process and civil-liberties items of the Democracy Index, ranks among the three bottommost countries in the world (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025), and in the V-Dem (2023) measurement it has the lowest liberal-democracy score, at 0.01. This closed system, based on a cult of personality, is in almost absolute diplomatic isolation, and its foreign policy is entirely under the control of the center. Turkmenistan is likewise in the lowest cluster, with a score of 0.04 in the V-Dem (2023) measurement; it has turned the "permanent neutrality" status recognized by the United Nations in 1995 into a policy of almost complete inward closure and has developed a form of governance again based on a cult of personality. These two examples show that in systems where institutional oversight has disappeared entirely, foreign policy largely loses its flexibility, its multidimensionality, and its capacity to articulate with international networks. When one looks at this scale as a whole, the pattern that emerges is clear: as one descends from the democratic end to the totalitarian end, predictability, multilateral legitimacy, soft power, and the credibility of commitments in foreign policy markedly decrease; whereas although the speed of short-term unilateral action sometimes increases, this

speed is obtained at the expense of legitimacy and sustainability. Corruption-perception data confirm this pattern; while the average score of full democracies is 73, in authoritarian regimes this figure falls to 29 (Transparency International, 2025). This contextual diversity does not invalidate the general tendency concerning the positive effect of the separation of powers on foreign policy; on the contrary, it reinforces it with concrete data. Doyle's (1983) democratic-peace theory and Russett and Oneal's (2001) empirical findings also consistently reveal that democratic states in which the separation of powers functions effectively display a more peaceful and cooperative profile in international relations; Hurrell's (2006) analysis of rising powers, in turn, shows the determining role of institutional structure in these states' articulation with the international order.

When all these findings are assessed together, it is seen that the relationship between institutionalization and foreign policy success is not a one-dimensional and mechanical relationship but a multilayered, context-sensitive, and dynamic process. The separation of powers is interwoven with all dimensions such as transparency, accountability, the rule of law, crisis management, trust-building, diplomatic capacity, soft power, innovation, relations with international organizations, and democratic oversight. The spectrum of the eleven countries examined, extending from democratic to totalitarian, reveals with concrete data that in each of these dimensions institutional quality directly affects foreign policy output. Yet, as Levitsky and Way (2010) remind us, the decisive variable is not the existence of the separation of powers on paper but its actual operation; Tamanaha's (2004) distinction between "thin" and "thick" law also points to the same thing. Merely formal arrangements are not sufficient; institutions must be filled with content that protects fundamental rights and makes oversight real. In conclusion, the positive effects of the separation of powers on foreign policy are contingent on this system's being supported by democratic norms and institutional capacity, and this effect can be made lasting not by constitutional texts alone but by an institutional culture internalized at the level of society.

VII. Conclusion And Recommendations

This study, conducted by mixed methods and examining comparatively countries at different levels of institutionalization, has treated the effect of institutionalization on states' foreign policy success along the axis of the principle of the separation of powers; it has analyzed how strong institutional structures are reflected in foreign policy through both numerical indicators and the qualitative data obtained from interviews with experts. The findings obtained confirm the central thesis established at the outset: states whose institutions function soundly behave more consistently in foreign policy, keep their word more often, and are able to take more composed decisions in moments of crisis. North's (1990) definition of institutions as the "rules of the game" is explanatory at this point; for when the rules are defined and known to all, foreign policy proceeds not according to the mood of the day or the temper of a single leader but according to an agreed framework. At the same time, it is not enough for institutions merely to exist; what truly matters is the extent to which they actually function. Levitsky and Way (2010) showed that in many countries constitutional institutions exist formally but do not function in fact; this study's data, too, point in the same direction. The gap between what is written in the constitution and what is applied on the ground is the critical variable determining foreign policy success.

This fundamental finding reveals that institutionalization is reflected in foreign policy not through a single channel but through several mutually nourishing channels. Strong institutions take decisions out of the monopoly of a single hand and put them into a shared process of assessment; this both lowers the margin of error and ensures that the main lines of policy are preserved even when the government changes. Legislative oversight and the judiciary's review of legal conformity render commitments given abroad more credible, because the other side knows that these pledges rest not on one person's whim but on a broad institutional consensus. Putnam's (1988) two-level-game model explains this mechanism well: an agreement that has passed parliamentary approval both strengthens the government's hand at the negotiating table and sends a credible signal as to the seriousness of the pledge. This study shows that the mechanism in question operates not only in mature democracies but in every environment where institutional oversight can be relatively preserved.

The study's theoretical contribution lies in its bringing together two fields that are most often treated separately. Institutional theory explains how institutions shape behavior, while foreign policy analysis most often focuses on leaders, interests, and the international structure. By carrying Scott's (2008) framework—which treats institutions in three layers: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive—into the field of foreign policy, this study builds a bridge between the two literatures. Foreign policy success can thus be read as a product not only of rules and sanctions (the regulative layer) but also of shared expectations (the normative layer) and settled habits of thought (the cultural-cognitive layer). Where these three layers are strong together, foreign policy attains a sustainable line of success; when one of the layers weakens, the apparent solidity of institutions does not suffice to carry foreign policy in a lasting way.

The real-world counterpart of this theoretical framework is seen more clearly in the concrete experience of eleven example countries selected from different regime types. In mature democracies—Germany, Canada, and New Zealand—the link between institutional oversight and foreign policy consistency

emerges most strongly. These three countries appear as full democracies in the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2024 Democracy Index (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025) and as liberal democracies in the V-Dem Institute's (2024) classification. The root-and-branch transformation Germany made in its defense policy in 2022 (the Zeitenwende) and the decision on a hundred-billion-euro special fund were taken within a constitutional order that binds the external deployment of military force to parliamentary approval; thus even a radical policy change could be carried out without spilling beyond the institutional framework. Canada, as a middle power, pursues a stable line that places multilateral diplomacy and international law at the center, and can take the lead in processes such as the Ottawa Convention banning landmines. New Zealand's anti-nuclear policy, adopted by law in 1987, continued unbroken for decades despite changes of government and has formed a vivid example of institutional continuity in foreign policy. The common feature of these three countries is that foreign policy has become the policy not of a government but of the state.

In countries showing a tendency to move away from democracy the picture changes. Hungary and India are examples that, in V-Dem's (2024) classification, have been removed from the democracy category and placed in the electoral-autocracy group. In Hungary, the erosion of institutional oversight has increasingly bound foreign policy to the preferences of a single leader; the country's repeated vetoing or delaying of decisions on aid and sanctions concerning Ukraine within the European Union, together with the Union funds frozen because it fails to meet rule-of-law criteria, has weakened both its partners' trust and Hungary's own bargaining power. India, by contrast, largely preserves its institutional fabric with its regular elections and relatively independent judiciary; this institutional base sustains the country's line of "strategic autonomy"—its ability to maintain Quad membership and the purchase of Russian oil at the same time. At the same time, the regression in democratic quality magnifies the risk of this autonomy shifting from an institutional toward an increasingly personal ground. Read together, the two examples show that institutional erosion pushes foreign policy from consistency toward unpredictability.

In autocratic governments foreign policy decisions are largely shaped within a narrow circle, and the absence of horizontal oversight mechanisms lowers both predictability and international credibility. Russia is shown as one of the examples in which autocracy has consolidated in the V-Dem (2024) classification; the country's suspension in 2023 of its obligations under the New START Treaty and its withdrawal from a series of arms-control regimes show how abruptly decisions can be reversed when they rest on a single will rather than on an institutional consensus. Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy that V-Dem (2024) characterizes as a closed autocracy and that has in recent years sought to become an effective actor in foreign policy with its Vision 2030 program and its weight in the energy market; yet the damage the Khashoggi murder did to its international reputation laid bare the cost of personalized decision-making. In both of these examples institutional resources and capacity are not lacking; what is lacking is the independent oversight that would brake and balance decisions.

China and Iran, positioned between authoritarianism and totalitarianism, make visible an interesting distinction: that bureaucratic capacity and institutional pluralism are not the same thing. Both countries are classified as closed autocracies by V-Dem (2024). China, with its five-year plans and a strong state apparatus, can pursue a long-term, planned foreign policy—the Belt and Road Initiative being its most visible expression—yet the concentration of power in a single hand with the removal of the term limit on the presidency in 2018 shows that this institutional capacity is evolving toward a centralization devoid of oversight. In Iran, the dual power structure between the elected president and the religious leader most often turns foreign policy into an arena of internal power struggles; the 2015 nuclear agreement (JCPOA) becoming largely dysfunctional with the United States' withdrawal in 2018 reveals how fragile commitments remain in an environment where ideological priorities take precedence over institutional continuity. These two countries clearly show that institutional "strength" and institutional "balance" are distinct phenomena.

The totalitarian governments at the very extreme of the spectrum, North Korea and Eritrea, are extreme examples in which institutional oversight has disappeared entirely. In the V-Dem (2024) data both have the world's lowest liberal-democracy score, at 0.01. North Korea's decades-long isolation, its nuclear program, and its dynasty-based governance have created an order in which foreign policy is reduced to the will of a single family. Eritrea, with its practice of indefinite military conscription, its constitution never put into force, and its closedness, is called "the North Korea of Africa." These examples bring to light an important paradox: although these governments appear to possess an absolute power of control at home, their foreign policies are in fact extremely fragile, because there is no institutional mechanism to correct the error of a single person or a core cadre. The apparent harshness is in reality a form of brittleness.

This comparative picture of eleven countries places the study's main thesis on a solid footing: what determines foreign policy success is not the number of institutions or the raw power of the state but the quality of institutions—that is, whether they function in a pluralistic, accountable, and law-bound manner. As one advances along the spectrum from democracy toward totalitarianism, foreign policy is seen to become

increasingly personalized, unpredictable, and more fragile in the face of external shocks. This pattern confirms that institutional structures can produce a lasting success in foreign policy only when supported by democratic norms, the rule of law, and an institutional culture adopted by society.

In light of these findings, a series of recommendations that states can follow to increase their foreign policy success stands out. At the most fundamental level, the rule of law must be strengthened, judicial independence preserved, and the executive kept open to legislative oversight; for these are the very mechanisms that lend stability and credibility to foreign policy. The merit-based functioning of diplomatic institutions, the preservation of the career system, and the transmission of institutional memory from generation to generation ensure that foreign policy is conducted without being affected by the fluctuations of everyday politics. The ability of civil society, think tanks, and an independent media to participate in foreign policy debates contributes to decisions resting on a broader base of knowledge and acquiring social legitimacy. Making relations with international institutions the product not of a single government but of a broad institutional consensus, in turn, renders commitments more credible. As Fukuyama (2004) stresses, strengthening institutional capacity is imperative not only for domestic stability but also for being able to make a meaningful contribution to the international order.

It is clear that these recommendations cannot be applied in the same way in every country. As Rodrik (2007) reminds us, uniform institutional prescriptions yield different outcomes in different contexts; the adaptation of reforms to local conditions is essential. For mature democracies the priority is to preserve existing oversight mechanisms against the institutional erosion seen in many countries in recent years and to uphold the multilateral order; for, as Ikenberry (2018) shows, the future of the liberal international order depends largely on states' sustaining their commitment to these mechanisms. For countries moving away from democracy, the most critical step is to place foreign policy once again on an institutional ground, taking decisions out of personal preferences and binding them to processes that can be overseen. Although a root-and-branch institutional transformation does not seem realistic in the short term in authoritarian and totalitarian governments, it should not be overlooked that showing fidelity to commitments and predictable behavior will provide concrete gains in terms of international credibility, and that such behavior is possible only with at least limited institutional oversight mechanisms. The basic implication for policymakers is this: institutional reform is not an intervention that yields quick results but a long-haul process that must be conducted with patience and protected.

Like every piece of research, this study too has certain limitations, and the findings should be assessed within this framework. First, the measurement of multidimensional phenomena such as institutionalization and foreign policy success through international indices can inevitably lead to certain qualitative details being overlooked. Second, in the relationship between institutionalization and foreign policy performance the direction of causality is not always one-sided; it should be borne in mind that a successful foreign policy can also strengthen institutions—that is, that a reciprocal interaction may be at work. Third, although the example countries treated in depth in the conclusion broadly represent the regime spectrum, each category is represented by a limited number of examples; this requires caution in generalizing from these particular examples. Finally, given that the reflection of institutional changes in foreign policy takes time, it should not be forgotten that short-term observations may not fully reflect long-term tendencies.

These limitations also offer a fruitful agenda for future research. Longitudinal studies covering broader samples of countries and resting on long time series could reveal more reliably the temporal dynamics of the relationship between institutionalization and foreign policy success. Process-tracing studies that follow individual foreign policy decisions in depth could illuminate in greater detail the mechanisms underlying the general patterns this study has identified. Moreover, the entry of artificial intelligence into foreign policy decision processes, the spread of digital diplomacy, and the increase of transboundary problems such as climate change impose new demands on institutional structures; how these new domains transform the institutionalization–foreign policy relationship deserves to be examined specifically in the future.

In conclusion, this study has shown, with concrete data from different regime types, that strong institutions confer on states stability, predictability, and credibility in foreign policy, and that institutional erosion, by contrast, drags foreign policy toward personalization and fragility. Yet it should not be forgotten that what is truly decisive is not institutions' existence on paper but how vigorously, accountably, and in a manner adopted by society they actually function. Institutional structures produce a sustainable success in foreign policy when they are secured not by constitutional arrangements alone but by democratic norms and an institutional culture internalized by society. States' being able to become lasting and respected actors in the international system is, in the end, a reflection of this internal institutional quality.

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