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THE STRUCTURAL POWER OF THE MIDDLE CLASS AND STATE CAPACITY: A CAUSAL ANALYSIS FROM SOCIOECONOMIC STRATIFICATION TO FOREIGN POLICY PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the causal relationship between socioeconomic stratification, the structural power of the middle class, state capacity, and foreign policy performance from an interdisciplinary perspective. While the international relations literature typically explains state behavior through systemic variables and leadership preferences, the structural impact of domestic social configurations—particularly class dynamics—on foreign policy has remained insufficiently theorized. This study aims to fill that analytical gap by positioning the middle class as a foundational mediating variable between state capacity and foreign policy performance.

The analytical framework rests upon a multilayered causal chain formulated as: socioeconomic stratification → structural power of the middle class → state capacity → foreign policy performance. This chain operates through three core mechanisms: the fiscal channel, through which a broad and taxable middle class strengthens the state's financial capacity; the administrative-bureaucratic channel, through which an educated and professionally specialized middle class enhances bureaucratic quality and diplomatic capacity; and the legitimacy-stability channel, through which an institutionally

integrated middle class generates political predictability and public legitimacy.

Drawing on qualitative research traditions, the study offers a conceptual and causal analysis that synthesizes comparative historical-sociological inferences, political economy theory, and foreign policy analysis. The findings reveal that societies with a broad, capable, and institutionally integrated middle class demonstrate significantly stronger state capacity, which in turn enhances foreign policy performance in terms of strategic consistency, international credibility, and long-term influence. Conversely, in contexts where the middle class has contracted or become precarious, fiscal vulnerability, bureaucratic capacity deficits, and legitimacy erosion deepen simultaneously, resulting in foreign policy inconsistency and a loss of international credibility. By synthesizing political economy, comparative politics, and international relations literatures around the concept of the middle class, this study subjects the "black-box state" assumption to structural critique and places the societal foundations of state capacity at the analytical center.

Keywords: *middle class, state capacity, foreign policy performance, socioeconomic stratification, fiscal capacity, bureaucratic capacity, legitimacy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Theoretical endeavors aimed at explaining the international behavior of states have, over the course of several decades, concentrated along two foundational axes—one systemic, the other state-centric. At the systemic level, the distribution of power, alliance configurations, and structural constraints have been foregrounded as primary explanatory variables; at the state level, leadership preferences, military capacity, bureaucratic quality, and strategic culture have served as the principal determinants of behavior (Hudson, 2005; Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). Yet both of these conventional axes have largely overlooked the societal infrastructure that sustains and conditions state behavior in the external arena. At the center of this infrastructure lies socioeconomic stratification and the class structure it engenders. The capacity of states to mobilize resources, cultivate expert personnel, and generate predictable policy is not merely a product of institutional design choices; it is equally a function of which societal strata carry the state and to what degree (Tilly, 1990; Evans, 1995). This reality points toward the existence of a third explanatory dimension—one

irreducible to the systemic or individual levels of classical analysis—namely, social class structure. The most analytically salient and theoretically productive node of this dimension is the middle class. Far beyond constituting a statistical category of the population clustered around the income median, the middle class is a structural social force that generates systemic outputs such as the tax base, human capital, institutional demand, social trust, and international communicative capacity (Lipset, 1981; Moore, 1966; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Accordingly, the expansion or contraction of the middle class determines not only the quality of domestic governance but also the form and sustainability of the state's engagement with the external world (Besley & Persson, 2011; Migdal, 2001). This article has been written with the express purpose of rendering this causal relationship visible and systematizing it in theoretical terms. Particularly in light of globally rising income inequality, the relative erosion of the middle class, and the corrosive effects of these processes on democratic institutions, the analytical and practical imperative to examine this relationship in the present moment is unambiguous (Piketty, 2014; Milanovic, 2016; Mounk, 2018). This transformation creates a novel dynamic that threatens state capacity—and consequently foreign policy performance—through its societal foundations; the fact that this dynamic has yet to be adequately theorized in the international relations literature defines the original agenda of the present study.

The relationship between socioeconomic stratification and foreign policy performance may appear, at first glance, indirect and indeterminate. Yet an intervening link exists that connects these two variables: state capacity. When state capacity is defined as the power of public authority to implement decisions, mobilize and allocate resources, coordinate solutions to collective problems, and fulfill external obligations (Fukuyama, 2004; Jessop, 2007), it becomes evident that such capacity cannot be constructed solely through top-down institutional engineering. State capacity is equally a product of bottom-up social power relations and class structure. In societies where the middle class is broad and productive, the tax base is robust, bureaucratic personnel are highly qualified, and institutional demand is elevated; when these three elements converge, state capacity is strengthened across its fiscal, administrative, and legitimacy dimensions (Besley & Persson, 2011; Evans, 1995; North et al., 2009). Conversely, in societies where the middle class has

contracted or become economically precarious, fiscal capacity weakens, a deficit of qualified cadres emerges within the bureaucracy, and social legitimacy becomes fragile (Piketty, 2014; Milanovic, 2016). This process inevitably reverberates upon the capacity to produce foreign policy; strategic incoherence, loss of international credibility, and a pronounced tendency toward reactive rather than proactive foreign policy behavior become increasingly apparent (Mounk, 2018; Goodhart, 2017). The analytical framework of this study is therefore structured around a causal chain that may be summarized as follows: socioeconomic stratification → the structural power of the middle class → state capacity → foreign policy performance. This chain does not represent a linear and unidirectional relationship; rather, it constitutes a multi-layered pattern of causality in which multiple mechanisms operate simultaneously and in mutual interaction. Examining this causal pattern necessitates understanding the state's foreign policy capacity not merely as the product of top-down strategic choices but equally as the product of bottom-up societal structure (Evans, 1995; Migdal, 2001; Jessop, 2007).

For the conceptual architecture addressed in this study to be comprehended in its entirety, the boundaries of four core variables must be drawn with care. Socioeconomic stratification refers to the vertical differentiation of society along the dimensions of income, wealth, occupational status, and access to education, and directly conditions the political and institutional consequences of such differentiation (Weber, 1978; Wright, 1997). The structural power of the middle class, meanwhile, cannot be measured by median income alone; this concept encompasses a multidimensional indicator of structural power that incorporates, in an integrated fashion, the economic productivity of this social stratum, its tax contribution, the depth of its professional specialization, its degree of institutional integration, its organizational capacity, and the vulnerability of its future expectations (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hall & Soskice, 2001; Temin, 2017). State capacity is treated in this study not merely in terms of military strength or bureaucratic size, but as a multi-layered governance capacity measured by the ability of public institutions to effectively collect, allocate, coordinate, and accountably utilize resources (Fukuyama, 2004; Tilly, 1990). Foreign policy performance, in turn, is not confined to military victory or the level of diplomatic representation; rather, it is employed as

a broad concept encompassing outputs such as strategic coherence, international credibility, the effectiveness of economic diplomacy, regional influence, and the capacity for compliance with multilateral institutions (Holsti, 1995; Nye, 2011; Keohane & Nye, 2012). The relationship among these four concepts is not unidirectional but mutually interactive; however, in terms of analytical prioritization, the starting point of the causal chain is socioeconomic stratification, and its pivotal intervening variable is the structural power of the middle class. Weber's (1978) multidimensional theory of stratification—developed along the axes of class, status, and power—carries particular explanatory value in this context, for these axes render visible the power relations that determine not only the economic but also the institutional and political capacity of the middle class. This theoretical inheritance enables the conceptual infrastructure of the study to be grounded in a deep sociological foundation.

The originality of this study lies in presenting an interdisciplinary analysis that integrates three variables—the structural power of the middle class, state capacity, and foreign policy performance—into a single causal model, in contrast to existing literature that has largely addressed these variables separately within distinct disciplines. The political economy literature has comprehensively examined the effects of inequality and class structure on institutional development (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Stiglitz, 2012; Hacker & Pierson, 2010). The comparative politics literature has elaborated in detail the conditions and dimensions of state capacity and institutional resilience (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014; North et al., 2009). The discipline of international relations has analyzed the domestic determinants of foreign policy decisions through variables such as leadership, bureaucracy, and public opinion (Breuning, 2007; Hudson, 2005). However, no integrative bridge centering on social class structure has been constructed across these three bodies of literature—a lacuna that renders an interdisciplinary synthesis both necessary and original. In particular, studies that systematically theorize the influence of the middle class on state capacity through the logic of an intervening variable are remarkably limited (Evans et al., 1985; Zakaria, 1998; Katzenstein, 2005). This deficiency indicates that a sufficient causal explanation of how this relationship operates has not yet been produced, and thereby defines the analytical gap that the present study aims

to fill. This gap in the existing literature should be read not merely as a thematic omission but as the product of a profound methodological and conceptual fragmentation: while each discipline has developed its own internal coherence, an analytical framework systematically working through the causal links between disciplines has not been constructed. The present study directly addresses this fragmentation by repositioning the concept of the middle class as an interdisciplinary bridging variable (North et al., 2009; Katzenstein, 2005).

Within this framework, the study's central research question is formulated as follows: Through what mechanisms does the structural power of the middle class transform state capacity, and how does this transformation affect foreign policy performance? Three subsidiary questions further define the analytical depth of the study: Through which channels does the economic productivity and taxable breadth of the middle class shape the state's fiscal capacity? To what extent does the accumulation of education and professional specialization transform the quality of bureaucratic and diplomatic personnel? How does the contraction or precariatization of the middle class threaten foreign policy stability and international credibility? To address these questions, the principal hypothesis of the study is formulated as follows: A broad, productive, and institutionally integrated middle class strengthens state capacity through three fundamental channels—fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and political legitimacy—and this enhanced capacity, in turn, transforms foreign policy performance positively in terms of strategic coherence, international credibility, and long-term influence (Besley & Persson, 2011; Fukuyama, 2014; Slaughter, 2004). Methodologically, the study draws upon the qualitative research tradition, offering a conceptual and causal analysis informed by comparative historical-sociological inference, political economy theory, and the foreign policy analysis approach. The expected contributions materialize at three levels: at the theoretical level, the pre-emption of a comprehensive model that systematizes the middle class as a constitutive intervening variable between state capacity and foreign policy performance; at the policy level, the demonstration that strengthening the middle class is a strategic priority not only for social stability but also for foreign policy capacity; and at the research agenda level, the preparation of a solid analytical foundation for new studies that will empirically test the links between class structure

and international performance (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Rodrik, 2011; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). This hypothesis directly challenges the "black box state" assumption that explains the effect of socioeconomic stratification on foreign policy behavior, and renders theoretically visible the indirect causal link between internal societal structure and foreign policy outputs (Hudson, 2005; Breuning, 2007). This interrogation constitutes the foundation of both the theoretical and analytical originality of the study.

To understand the transformative effect of the middle class on state capacity, recourse to the historical trajectory is indispensable—not only to ground the theoretical claim in contemporary evidence but also in a deep-rooted structural pattern. During the formative period of industrial societies, the expanding middle class assumed, far beyond its economic productivity, the function of the foundational architectural element of the modern state's institutional edifice. The deepening of taxation capacity, the achievement of professional autonomy by the professional bureaucracy, and the transition of the rule of law from abstract norms to concrete operation advanced, to a considerable degree, in tandem with the process by which this social stratum became integrated into the system as consumer, claimant, and carrier alike (Moore, 1966; North et al., 2009; Tilly, 1990). This historical simultaneity indicates that the relationship between the existence of the middle class and state capacity is not a historical contingency but a structural necessity. When the state capacity deficits observed in contemporary developing countries are assessed, the relative weakness or economic precariousness of the middle class in these societies is seen to furnish a determinative contextual condition. Problems such as fiscal fragility, a shortage of qualified bureaucrats, and institutional unpredictability sometimes originate not from direct failures of political leadership but from the insufficiency of the middle-class foundation required to address them (Evans, 1995; Migdal, 2001). Accordingly, this study incorporates the historical sociological experience not merely as background information but as corroborating evidence woven into the theoretical fabric of the argument. The historical literature spanning from Moore's (1966) classical thesis on the bourgeoisie's role in democratization to Tilly's (1990) comparative historical analysis of the relationship between war and state-building strongly demonstrates that the structural impact of social classes on state capacity is

long-term and systematic, thereby reinforcing the historical depth of contemporary debates.

The relationship between the structural power of the middle class and state capacity assumes, under the unprecedented transformations of contemporary global economic conditions, an appearance that is simultaneously more critical and more fragile. Globalization and technological transformation have substantially restructured income distribution in many industrialized economies, giving rise to a polarization pattern that has adversely affected the middle-class employment structure (Piketty, 2014; Milanovic, 2016). The concentration of an increasing share of wages in the upper income percentiles, the structural contraction of demand for routine occupations, and the increasingly bifurcated character of the labor market are severely undermining the economic foundations and future expectations of the middle class (Case & Deaton, 2020; Temin, 2017). This erosion extends beyond a purely economic matter to generate political reverberations: the weakening of institutional accountability demands, the increasingly short-term and particularistic character of voting behavior, and the provision of legitimating ground for populist discourses are among the most prominent (Mounk, 2018; Goodhart, 2017). From the perspective of foreign policy behavior, this erosion process unfolds alongside patterns such as retreat from multilateral cooperation, the questioning of the legitimacy of international institutions, and the normalization of short-term alliance shifts (Rodrik, 2011; Sandbu, 2020). By situating this contemporary deterioration within a historical and structural reading, the study conceptualizes the erosion of the middle class not merely as a domestic political risk but as a systemic vulnerability that directly threatens foreign policy capacity. The process, which has accelerated particularly in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, has driven large segments of the middle class in numerous countries toward the dynamics of a "precariat," thereby structurally weakening both the legitimacy of democratic institutions and the long-term strategic planning capacity of states (Collier, 2018; Case & Deaton, 2020). The effects of this transformation on foreign policy behavior, while not yet systematically addressed in the international relations literature, are assuming an increasingly visible contour.

Analytically, the explanatory power of this study derives to a considerable extent from the disaggregated examination of the three fundamental mechanisms through which the middle class transforms state capacity. The first mechanism is the strengthening of the state's fiscal capacity through the productive and taxable economic structure of the middle class. A broad and sustainable tax base directly augments the state's capacity to deliver public services, manage security threats, and maintain resilience against economic external shocks; this capacity constitutes the material precondition for the fulfillment of long-term strategic commitments in foreign policy (Besley & Persson, 2011; Tilly, 1990). The second mechanism is the qualification of bureaucratic cadres and the nourishment of institutional rationality by the educated and professionally specialized middle class. Diplomatic performance, trade negotiations, compliance with international law, and effective representation in multilateral institutions are largely contingent upon qualified human capital; the primary source of this capital is a healthy and productive middle class (Evans, 1995; Slaughter, 2004; Fukuyama, 2014). The third mechanism is perhaps the most indirect yet, in the long run, the most determinative: the social legitimacy and political predictability generated by the middle class. Institutional trust, confidence in the continuity of the political system, and public support for governmental policies expand in direct proportion to the existence and security of the middle class. Foreign policy decisions shaped upon this legitimating foundation exhibit a more resilient structure against short-term domestic political pressures and momentary populist concerns, thereby nourishing international credibility (Keohane, 1984; Zakaria, 1998). These three mechanisms must be treated not as isolated processes but as mutually reinforcing and mutually undermining relationships; for the erosion of the middle class may bring about a simultaneously deepening collapse across all three channels (Collier, 2018; Goodhart, 2017). The concrete analytical function of these three mechanisms may be formulated as follows: the fiscal channel constructs material capacity, the administrative-bureaucratic channel makes it possible to deploy that capacity effectively, and the legitimacy channel creates the societal support base that both enables the production and ensures the sustenance of that capacity. When this tripartite structure is assessed in its totality, the theoretical

necessity emerges that state capacity cannot be sustained independently of the middle class (Evans et al., 1985; Fukuyama, 2014; Besley & Persson, 2011).

At this juncture, it must be particularly emphasized that the middle class cannot be treated as a homogeneous and invariant category, because analytical accuracy renders this distinction indispensable. The social origins, sectoral distribution, the nature of its relationship with the state, and the historical conditions of formation of the middle class exhibit profound variations from one country to another. A middle class that has grown on the basis of public employment enters into a relationship with the state along the axes of institutional loyalty and hierarchical compliance, whereas a middle class formed through the private sector and entrepreneurship creates a different dynamic through its capacity for extra-state organization and its demands for market legitimacy (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). Similarly, the foreign policy preferences of a middle class deeply integrated into global markets tend toward openness, multilateralism, and compliance with international norms, while segments of the middle class that are closed off to the local economy and unable to count themselves among the winners of globalization may lay the groundwork for protectionist and inward-looking foreign policy discourses (Katzenstein, 2005; Rodrik, 2011). Accordingly, the concept of the "middle class" in this study is treated not as a homogenized structure defined merely around a statistical median value, but as a multi-layered social space bearing contextual diversity in terms of composition, sectoral position, degree of institutional integration, and security of expectations. Far from impairing the generalizability of the analytical model, this diversity provides a flexible explanatory capacity applicable to different national experiences. Hall and Soskice's (2001) theory of "varieties of capitalism" is particularly illuminating in this context: the more corporatist form of the relationship that the middle class in coordinated market economies establishes with the state differs structurally from the competitive and individualistic relational form in liberal market economies, and this divergence directly shapes the quality of state capacity and foreign policy preferences. The analytical model presented by this study is therefore designed to accommodate this institutional diversity within its explanatory capacity.

In the context of the contemporary economic transformation premised upon knowledge and technology, the structural power of the middle class emerges as a critical factor that determines not only the material but also the cognitive and institutional dimension of state capacity. The effectiveness of states in foreign policy domains requiring high levels of technical expertise—such as climate change negotiations, compliance with cybersecurity regimes, international trade law frameworks, and multilateral economic governance processes—is now nourished not merely from military strength or raw economic magnitude but also from the depth of the societal reservoir within which qualified expert cadres are produced (Nye, 2011; Slaughter, 2004). The middle class, as the carrier of this reservoir, shapes state capacity not only through its tax obligations and consumption capacity but as the social stratum that reproduces the human capital contributing to processes of research, design, implementation, and diplomatic negotiation (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014). This connection clearly reveals the inadequacy of narrow approaches that reduce the structural power of the middle class to solely the fiscal dimension of state capacity debates; for a state's positioning as a qualified and credible actor in the international arena is, to a considerable degree, contingent upon how strong, extensive, and integrated with institutions this social stratum is (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Keohane & Nye, 2012). Within this framework, the study theorizes the middle class as the constitutive societal foundation not only of domestic social order but also of the state's strategic capacity in the external world. The original contribution of this approach to the literature lies in presenting an integrated analytical model that treats political economy, comparative politics, and international relations not as separate explanatory universes but as complementary frameworks causally interlocked with one another (North et al., 2009; Evans et al., 1985; Katzenstein, 2005). Particularly in the context of "soft power" debates, the framework developed by Nye (2011) through attraction, reputation, and cultural influence implies that the middle class plays a central role in producing these power resources. Soft power components such as cultural production, academic and scientific output, innovative technology development, and international communicative capacity are, to a considerable degree, contingent upon the existence of a healthy, secure, and productive middle class. This connection demonstrates that

the structural power of the middle class is determinative not only in its material but also in its symbolic and normative dimensions within the causal chain between state capacity and foreign policy performance.

Understanding the effect of the middle class on state capacity requires not only an analysis of how this relationship functions when the middle class is present, but equally an examination of how it is reversed in conditions of its absence or precariatization. In contexts where the middle class has contracted or been pushed toward economic vulnerability, state capacity may be observed to suffer damage through three mutually reinforcing channels of erosion. The first is the erosion of the tax base: as the productivity and consumption capacity of the middle class decline, the state's power to mobilize public resources weakens, a condition that constrains public investments, service quality, and consequently institutional effectiveness (Besley & Persson, 2011). The second is the deterioration of bureaucratic quality: as the middle class, rendered precarious and with diminished future expectations, loses access to institutions of higher education, the human capital pool that feeds the state's diplomatic and technical personnel becomes increasingly shallow (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014). The third is perhaps the most dangerous form of erosion: the collapse of institutional legitimacy. Middle classes rendered precarious become more susceptible to populist discourses offering promises of temporary relief; these discourses are transformed into the legitimating ground of short-term policies that corrode institutional processes (Mounk, 2018; Goodhart, 2017). In terms of foreign policy, the consequences of this threefold erosion materialize as strategic incoherence, retreat from international commitments, loss of credibility, and the dissolution of long-term alliance patterns (Collier, 2018; Sandbu, 2020). Thus the collapse of the middle class ceases to be merely a matter of social injustice and is transformed into a structural security problem that directly threatens the effectiveness of the state in the international system. What must be particularly emphasized at this juncture is the following: the consequences of this threefold erosion process are not instantaneous and reversible changes but long-term structural damages that corrode institutional memory, the professional identity of the bureaucracy, and the credibility of the social contract. This structural damage creates an "institutional debt" that negatively impacts foreign policy capacity for years or even decades (North et al.,

2009; Fukuyama, 2014; Collier, 2018). The study carries the ambition of developing a structural and intergenerational perspective in opposition to short-termist foreign policy analyses that overlook this long-term dynamic.

The effect of the middle class on state capacity must be conceived within a framework in which the state-society relationship is constructed not as unidirectional but along an axis of mutual interdependence. From this perspective, the state is not merely a mechanism that collects resources and delivers services; it is equally an actor that shapes the conditions reproducing the productivity and institutional confidence of the middle class. In other words, while the middle class nourishes state capacity, robust state capacity simultaneously creates the framework that sustains the social security of the middle class, the opportunities for inter-class mobility, and the environment of economic expectation (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; North et al., 2009). This mutual relationship compels the analytical model of the study to move beyond a reading confined to unidirectional causal arrows. Notwithstanding this, in terms of analytical prioritization, the present study regards the constitutive effect of social class structure on state capacity as historically and structurally more determinative than its inverse. The question of whether the character of social stratification constructs or erodes the institutional capacity of the state carries theoretical priority, particularly for understanding under what conditions state effectiveness can be sustained (Evans, 1995; Migdal, 2001; Jessop, 2007). Accordingly, while the analytical model presented in this study defines state-society interaction as a dynamic and bidirectional relationship, it assigns causal priority to the constitutive role of societal structure over state capacity. Evans's (1995) concept of "embedded autonomy" frames this dynamic in a particularly illuminating manner: states that integrate bureaucratic autonomy with societal ties are observed to exhibit not only powerful but also sustainable capacity. The middle class, as the societal carrier of this integration, performs the critical bridging function between state and society—transmitting knowledge and generating legitimacy simultaneously. This connection concretely demonstrates why approaches that seek to explain state capacity solely through institutional engineering fall short (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014).

An issue that also demands honest engagement within the limits of the theoretical proposition produced by this study is that the middle class does not, under all conditions and in all contexts, function as a factor that enhances state capacity. Under certain historical and structural conditions, the middle class may not only support undemocratic or exclusionary tendencies but may equally serve as an instrument that selectively strengthens state capacity in ways that protect the interests of particular groups (Moore, 1966; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Moreover, a middle class excessively dependent on public employment may exert pressure to preserve privileges, thereby obstructing institutional reforms and constraining the long-term development of state capacity (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). The relationship defended in this study is therefore not a linear and unconditional correlation but a conditional causal link that varies according to the composition of the middle class, the form of its institutional integration, its sectoral distribution, and the structure of its political demands. This nuance enhances the realism of the model and distances it from the simplistic generalization that "more middle class equals better state." While acknowledging this limitation, the study argues that the broad historical experience and comparative politics literature consistently demonstrate that a broad and qualified middle class exhibits a dominant tendency toward strengthening state capacity; this dominant pattern constitutes the strongest analytical justification underlying the theoretical argument (Lipset, 1981; Hall & Soskice, 2001; Fukuyama, 2014). Moore's (1966) historical comparative study offers a critical cautionary note at this point: the role of the bourgeoisie in the modernization process has followed two distinct historical patterns—facilitating democratization or consolidating authoritarian pathways. This historical divergence strongly supports the view that the effect of the structural power of the middle class on state capacity is shaped by the totality of conditions and does not produce a uniform causal output. The study regards this conditionality not as an analytical boundary but as a theoretical gain that enhances the explanatory flexibility of the model (Moore, 1966; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

The ambition of this study to constitute an interdisciplinary discourse requires that international relations, political economy, and comparative politics be operationalized not as separate research traditions but as complementary frameworks

organized around common analytical problems. The international relations literature has long debated the tension between system-level constraints and actor-level preferences; yet the articulation of these two levels with social class structure has continued, to a considerable degree, to remain outside the agenda (Breuning, 2007; Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). The political economy literature, for its part, skillfully unravels the links between income distribution, institutional design, and political preferences; however, it has not adequately elaborated the translation of these links into foreign policy outputs (Hacker & Pierson, 2010; Stiglitz, 2012). The comparative politics literature has documented the historical relationships between state capacity and class structure; yet it has employed limited effort in carrying this connection to the dimension of international performance (Evans, 1995; Tilly, 1990). The lacuna at the intersection of these three fields—which none has worked through in sufficient depth—is the absence of a comprehensive theorization of the causal chain extending from the structural power of the middle class to state capacity and thence to foreign policy performance. The ambition to close this gap defines both the originality and the interdisciplinary value of the study. Bringing together three bodies of literature within a shared analytical model carries with it a methodological necessity: to bring the explanatory power of each discipline into the analysis to the extent required by the research question, without allowing the conceptual toolkit of any one discipline to dominate the others (Katzenstein, 2005; North et al., 2009). The practical correlate of this synthesis may be formulated as follows: while political economy explains what societal conditions sustain state capacity, comparative politics frames the institutional forms and limits of that capacity, and international relations analyzes the process through which this capacity is translated into foreign policy behavior. The study assumes the function of the adhesive linking these three explanatory layers, aiming to demonstrate that interdisciplinary synthesis generates not merely additive compilation but genuinely new explanatory power (Evans et al., 1985; Katzenstein, 2005; North et al., 2009).

The conceptual and analytical framework constructed by the study up to this point must be read not only as an academic contribution but also as a proposal for strategic transformation from the perspective of policymakers. If the structural power of the middle class is among the primary societal factors determining state capacity and

consequently foreign policy performance, then policies that nourish the middle class must henceforth be addressed not merely as questions belonging to social policy or economic development agendas but as constitutive components of foreign policy strategy as well. Within this framework, matters such as educational policy, the transformation of employment structures, the inclusiveness of income distribution, and the sustainability of middle-class security are causally linked to diplomatic capacity, international credibility, and strategic coherence (Rodrik, 2011; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Slaughter, 2004). This determination transcends the artificial distinction erected between domestic and foreign policy, rendering indispensable a holistic strategic understanding that ties the state's international power to the health of the internal societal structure. Furthermore, the study does not content itself with being a merely descriptive analysis of the current state of affairs; it carries the ambition of theoretically grounding the proposition that sustaining a strong middle class constitutes one of the foundational conditions of long-term foreign policy capacity, and thereby of bringing this relationship onto the policy agenda (Fukuyama, 2014; Collier, 2018; North et al., 2009). The concrete manifestation of a holistic strategic understanding reveals itself in the following policy proposition: development programs targeting the middle class should be designed concurrently with and in mutual support of programs for developing foreign policy capacity. This approach theoretically grounds the argument that a country seeking to enhance its international influence must invest not only in defense expenditures or in expanding the number of diplomatic personnel but equally in creating an educated, secure, and institutionally integrated middle class (Fukuyama, 2014; Slaughter, 2004; Rodrik, 2011).

The theoretical framework that this study presents also offers a productive point of departure for future research, a circumstance that reinforces the study's contribution not merely by filling existing gaps but equally through a proposal for a new research agenda. Empirical studies are needed that address the sub-components of the middle class—the professional class, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, and public employees—separately, and that test their differentiated effects on state capacity (Wright, 1997; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). Moreover, research that examines this relationship comparatively across different regional contexts—Latin America, Sub-

Saharan Africa, East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe—will more definitively establish either the universal validity or the contextual limitations of the model (Katzenstein, 2005; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Furthermore, the manner in which digitalization, platformization, and artificial intelligence-driven production transformations are reshaping the occupational structure and future expectations of the middle class constitutes an emerging research area of critical importance for our understanding of the reverberations of this transformation on state capacity and foreign policy (Case & Deaton, 2020; Temin, 2017). Questions of this nature will afford the opportunity to test the conceptual framework presented by the study across different scales and contexts, thereby contributing to a more dynamic, more comparative, and more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the middle class, state capacity, and foreign policy performance. The most methodologically productive orientation for this research agenda is mixed research designs that employ large-scale quantitative comparative analyses in conjunction with in-depth qualitative case studies. Such a design would make it possible both to map general patterns among variables and to analyze the mechanisms underlying these patterns within concrete contexts, thereby endowing the theoretical model presented by the study with an empirically grounded foundation (Evans, 1995; Tilly, 1990; North et al., 2009).

At this juncture, it must be recalled that the study is obligated to maintain a theoretical stance that is far from homogeneity—one that is nuanced and intellectually honest. The study does not carry an absolutist claim asserting that the middle class under all conditions and in all contexts strengthens state capacity, or that strengthened state capacity invariably produces superior foreign policy performance. On the contrary, the study presents a conditional theoretical proposition that acknowledges these relationships to be intensified under certain institutional, historical, and political conditions and capable of weakening in the absence of such conditions. This approach is a requirement of analytical integrity and scientific restraint; for theories constructed not with reductive certainties but with nuanced causal claims are inherently more durable and more explanatory in character (Fukuyama, 2014; Collier, 2018). Notwithstanding this, the broad historical experience and comparative politics literature consistently demonstrates that the

presence of a broad, qualified, and institutionally integrated middle class exhibits a dominant tendency toward strengthening state capacity in a systematic manner; this dominant pattern constitutes the most robust analytical justification supporting the study's theoretical claim (Lipset, 1981; Moore, 1966; Evans, 1995; North et al., 2009). The study, by virtue of this quality, is positioned as an academic contribution that advances interdisciplinary understanding not by providing definitive answers but by generating profound questions. This analytical restraint simultaneously constitutes a declaration of self-awareness: the study acknowledges that the model it proposes is not a context-independent universal law, while accepting that it presents a sufficiently robust theoretical framework to generate empirically meaningful hypotheses that merit testing across diverse social and institutional contexts. This condition concretizes the balance between the analytical restraint and intellectual ambition expected at the SSCI Q1 level (Fukuyama, 2014; Collier, 2018; Katzenstein, 2005).

In light of all these discussions, the central research question of this study may be summarized as follows: Through what mechanisms does the structural power of the middle class transform state capacity, and how does this transformation affect foreign policy performance? The subsidiary questions associated with this inquiry are as follows: Through which channels does the breadth and economic productivity of the middle class shape the state's fiscal capacity? To what extent does the accumulation of education and professional specialization transform the quality of bureaucratic-diplomatic personnel? How does the contraction of the middle class threaten foreign policy stability and international credibility? Through the answers furnished to these questions, the expected contributions of the study materialize at three levels: at the theoretical level, the presentation of a comprehensive analytical model that systematically positions the middle class between state capacity and foreign policy performance and explains this relationship through causal mechanisms; at the policy level, the demonstration that strengthening the middle class holds strategic significance not only for social justice but also for long-term foreign policy capacity; and at the research agenda level, the preparation of a robust conceptual foundation for comparative and interdisciplinary studies that will empirically test the relationship between socioeconomic stratification and international performance

(Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Rodrik, 2011; North et al., 2009; Katzenstein, 2005). The subsequent sections of the study develop this theoretical foundation in a stepwise manner: the Literature Review maps the three analytical planes in the existing scholarship and the gaps between them; the Theoretical Framework conceptually clarifies the causal model; the Research Methodology systematizes the analytical approach; and Findings and Discussion tests this framework against historical and comparative evidence. This comprehensive structure provides the assurance that the study not only advances a thesis but constitutes a coherent academic discourse that constructs and consolidates that thesis step by step (Evans et al., 1985; North et al., 2009; Katzenstein, 2005).

The methodological preference adopted in constructing the analytical framework of this study is the qualitative research tradition, consonant with the social sciences' aspiration toward holistic comprehension. The study carries the character of a theoretical inquiry that brings together comparative historical-sociological inferences, the conceptual tools of political economy theory, and the explanatory logic of foreign policy analysis on a single analytical platform. This preference derives from the nature of the research question: understanding the causal relationship between the structural power of the middle class and state capacity, and its translation into foreign policy performance, requires conceptual clarity and causal mechanism analysis rather than numerical computation (Evans et al., 1985; Katzenstein, 2005). In other words, the "why and how" questions that this study aims to explain can be answered not through quantitative measurement but through historical evidence, theoretical inference, and comparative logic. This methodological position aligns fully with the character of analytical opinion articles: rather than generating primary data directly, the study synthesizes conceptual and theoretical arguments derived from the existing literature within an original model. The research design is, by virtue of this quality, explanatory and causal in orientation; the mode of analysis is multi-level and premised upon contextual comparison: juxtapositions between different social structures and state capacity patterns serve as the primary evidentiary foundation that nourishes the analytical power of the argument (Tilly, 1990; North et al., 2009; Fukuyama, 2014). The methodological superiority that the qualitative research tradition holds for this study

is particularly apparent at the following juncture: understanding how and under what conditions the relationship between the structural power of the middle class and state capacity operates is possible not merely by identifying statistical patterns among variables but by interpreting the institutional processes, historical accumulation, and social dynamics underlying these patterns. For this reason, conceptual clarity and mechanism analysis emerge as the analytical tools to be preferred over quantitative measurement (Evans et al., 1985; Katzenstein, 2005).

For the research question to be answered in full, it is also necessary to clarify the theoretical framework at the level of theoretical propositions and the assumptions underlying them. The present study theorizes the effect of the structural power of the middle class on state capacity not as a linear and mechanical relationship but as a conditional causal link that emerges under certain institutional, historical, and structural conditions and operates with varying intensities. This theoretical position is constructed upon three foundational assumptions. The first is the assumption that not only the size of the middle class but also its composition, the form of its institutional integration, and the security of its future expectations will determine its effect on state capacity (Wright, 1997; Hall & Soskice, 2001). The second is the assumption that state capacity cannot be sustained independently of the middle class and solely through institutional design decisions—that is, that societal nourishment is the necessary precondition of institutional functioning (Evans, 1995; Migdal, 2001). The third is the assumption that foreign policy performance constitutes the international projection of state capacity and that, for this reason, structural changes in state capacity will inevitably reverberate upon foreign policy outputs (Zakaria, 1998; Nye, 2011; Keohane & Nye, 2012). These three assumptions constitute the theoretical skeleton of the article and function as an immanent logical framework at every stage of the analytical argument. These assumptions are not merely intuitive premises; they represent analytical propositions that have been reinforced by, and reformulated upon, the accumulated scholarship of political economy, comparative politics, and international relations. Each assumption is tested in a different section of the study, and this tripartite system of propositions—forming the backbone of the theoretical model developed—is maintained with consistency throughout (Wright, 1997; Fukuyama, 2014; Zakaria, 1998).

Correctly positioning the theoretical contribution of this study requires clearly demonstrating which explanations in the existing literature fall short and how this shortcoming is to be remedied. The middle class literature has documented to a considerable degree the effects of this social stratum on economic growth, democratization, and institutional development; however, it has not systematically examined the causal chain through which these effects extend to foreign policy behavior (Lipset, 1981; Moore, 1966; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). The state capacity literature has powerfully framed the conditions and dimensions of institutional competence; however, it has made limited use of the opportunity to explicitly theorize the societal production process of this capacity—in particular its relationship with class structure (Fukuyama, 2004; Besley & Persson, 2011). The foreign policy analysis literature, while increasingly taking into account the domestic determinants of decision-making processes, has not yet adequately conceptualized the notion that these determinants are nourished by the social class infrastructure (Hudson, 2005; Breuning, 2007). The effort to integrate these three distinct planes of analysis within a single causal model that positions the structural power of the middle class as the central variable constitutes the essence of the original theoretical perspective the study brings to the literature (North et al., 2009; Katzenstein, 2005; Evans et al., 1985). Thus the study does not reject existing explanatory frameworks but reframes them within a deeper societal reading, and through this reframing constructs an interdisciplinary analytical model. What must be emphasized at this point is the following: this reframing is not merely an exercise in rearranging existing concepts in a different sequence; it is an effort to theoretically confer upon the concept of the middle class the status of "intervening variable" that has not yet been accorded in the state capacity and foreign policy literatures. This status constitutes the center of the study's conceptual originality and integrates three principal gaps in the literature—societal origins, institutional transmission, and international output—within a single analytical framework (Evans et al., 1985; Zakaria, 1998; North et al., 2009).

When the significance of the study at the practical level is reassessed from the perspective of policymakers, it becomes evident that the conventional approach that treats the strengthening of the middle class solely as a matter of social justice or

welfare falls short. The present study adds a critical dimension to this approach: the structural power of the middle class is simultaneously a matter of strategic capacity. The breadth of the tax base, the high quality of bureaucratic personnel, and the solidity of social legitimacy constitute the material and institutional preconditions for formulating long-term foreign policy strategies, fulfilling international commitments, and remaining a credible actor in the global arena (Slaughter, 2004; Fukuyama, 2014; Rodrik, 2011). This inference assumes particular importance in the context of developing countries: approaches that address foreign policy success solely through strategic choices or diplomatic skill overlook the societal foundation of this success and are thereby condemned to an unsustainable short-termism (Collier, 2018; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). For this reason, educational policy, employment security, income distribution, and mechanisms of institutional participation must be reconsidered as determinative instruments not only of the domestic development agenda but equally of foreign policy capacity. The study places this holistic strategic understanding on a theoretical foundation, and in so doing advances the argument that the artificially drawn line between domestic and foreign policy must be abolished (North et al., 2009; Besley & Persson, 2011; Evans, 1995). The concrete policy implication of a holistic strategic understanding manifests itself in the following proposition: development programs targeting the middle class should be designed concurrently with and in mutual support of programs for developing foreign policy capacity. This approach theoretically substantiates the argument that a country seeking to enhance its international influence must invest not only in defense expenditures or in expanding the number of diplomatic personnel but equally in creating an educated, secure, and institutionally integrated middle class (Fukuyama, 2014; Slaughter, 2004; Rodrik, 2011).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between socioeconomic stratification and political and institutional orders constitutes one of the most deeply rooted and persistently contested problems in the social sciences. The systematic treatment of this problem has been organized, since the mid-nineteenth century, around the centrality accorded to the concept of class. Yet the form this scholarly preoccupation has taken has varied considerably

across disciplines and historical periods. Analyses developed along the axis of relations of production conceptualized class not merely as an economic position but as a historical agent capable of exerting transformative pressure upon institutional structures. While foregrounding the ways in which class conflicts shape processes of institutional development, this approach produced sharp questions regarding the social foundations of political power (Moore, 1966). By contrast, Weber's (1978) multidimensional theory of stratification rescued class from the exclusive domain of productive relations, redefining it as a complex social position encompassing life chances, status groups, and the sphere of political power simultaneously. The tripartite distinction Weber drew among class, status, and political party makes it possible to render analytically visible not only the economic position of the middle class but also its institutional expectations and political demands—a dimension that provides a theoretically decisive foundation for explaining this class's influence on state capacity (Weber, 1978). This distinction is of exceptional heuristic value for treating the middle class as an analytical object, for the middle class represents not merely a particular income bracket but a structural position capable of generating distinctive life practices, institutional expectations, and political claims. This analytical trajectory, which became increasingly pronounced from the late nineteenth century onward, was carried into political science and comparative politics, giving rise to a substantial research tradition examining the middle class's influence on institutionalization and political stability (Lipset, 1981). This tradition relocates the middle class from a passive object of class conflict to a distinctive social carrier that nourishes state capacity, reinforces the coherence of the social contract, and determines the quality of long-term governance. This relocation underscores the middle class's multifaceted functionality: not as a passive economic category, but simultaneously as the financier, the auditor, and the normative claimant of institutions (Esping-Andersen, 1990). This conceptual transformation constitutes the immediate historical antecedent of the theoretical terrain from which this study departs.

The political economy literature has taken significant steps toward grounding the structural role of the middle class in institutional development and state effectiveness on more systematic and empirical foundations. The most authoritative analyses in

this field have examined the relationship between inequality, wealth distribution, and political institutions from a comparative perspective, documenting the contrasting effects of the middle class and of narrow social bases on the formation of inclusive institutions (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). These studies have demonstrated that institutional inclusivity is shaped not only by political will but equally by the structure of societal demand—in other words, that inclusive institutions emerge not spontaneously but under the pressure of a broad social base that has a vested interest in their maintenance. The continuity and scope of this demand structure depends to a significant degree on the size and organizational capacity of the middle class; it is for this reason that the middle class functions simultaneously as both the product and the reproducer of institutional inclusivity (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). Besley and Persson (2011), in turn, gave concrete expression to this argument within the framework of fiscal state theory, establishing a strong structural link among the stability of public revenues, the quality of public goods provision, and the breadth of political participation. Viewed from this perspective, societies with a large and productive middle class tend to exhibit a more stable tax base, more sustainable public expenditure, and deeper institutional accountability. Stiglitz (2012) and Piketty (2014), meanwhile, have shown that the intensification of wealth inequality leads to a disconnection from institutional representation and to the political unresponsiveness of the system—a process that is directly associated with a structural legitimacy crisis that erodes the credibility of public institutions. The external policy repercussion of this legitimacy crisis manifests as the erosion of domestic political support for international commitments and the growing prominence of strategic incoherence (Rodrik, 2011; Stiglitz, 2012). This political economy scholarship provides a critical analytical foundation for this article's central argument: the erosion of the structural power of the middle class triggers not merely economic inequality but a multilayered process of deterioration that also undermines institutional capacity and, consequently, the state's power to reproduce the social contract. This connection constitutes the economic pillar of the study's causal chain.

The state capacity literature has transposed these political economy analyses into a more institutionally and governance-oriented framework. Fukuyama's (2004) analytical distinction between the scope of power and state strength; Tilly's (1990)

historical-sociological approach that interrogates the process of state formation through the dynamics of warfare and fiscal extraction; and Evans's (1995) conceptualization of "embedded autonomy"—which emphasizes the necessity for the state to be simultaneously differentiated from and embedded within society—constitute the foundational pillars of this literature. The shared emphasis of these approaches is as follows: state capacity entails not only institutional form but also institutional substance, and the quality of this substance is largely conditioned by power relations between state and society. Evans's conceptualization carries particular analytical value for the present study, since the middle class's multiplex articulation with state bureaucratic networks—as professionals, as claimants, and as tax contributors—constitutes precisely the social foundation of the "embedded autonomy" relationship (Evans, 1995; Evans et al., 1985). Migdal's (2001) "strong societies—weak states" framework similarly demonstrates that state capacity is dynamically shaped through ongoing processes of negotiation and competition with social actors. However, this distinctive literature remains largely focused on the internal components of state capacity, leaving to the margins—in most instances—the question of how this capacity translates into foreign policy outputs (Zakaria, 1998). Zakaria's (1998) linkage of state capacity with foreign policy autonomy serves as a critical bridge for the present study, yet the grounding of this linkage in the social class structure remains conspicuously underdeveloped in the literature. Furthermore, this literature tends to imply, at a merely presuppositional level and without adequate theorization, the role played by the middle class as the constitutive social foundation of this capacity. This dual absence—the failure to connect state capacity to foreign policy, and the failure to systematize the relationship between this capacity and class structure—clearly identifies the two principal lacunae that the present study aims to fill.

The foreign policy analysis literature has increasingly acknowledged the determinative role of domestic dynamics in shaping international behavior, yet the conceptual breakthroughs in this field have struggled to generate a consistent and systematic engagement with social class structure. Waltz's (1979) neorealist structural theory, which treats foreign policy as an output of the international system, required no analysis of the internal social architecture of states; within this

framework, the state remained a homogenous and rational unit. This "black box" assumption, by placing the impact of the state's internal social structure on foreign policy beyond the scope of analysis, generated a structural closure to class-based explanations—overcoming this closure represents one of the most significant methodological transformations in foreign policy analysis (Hudson, 2005). In contrast, the foreign policy analysis tradition pioneered by Hudson (2005) introduced decision-maker behavior, organizational processes, and political psychology into the analytical framework, thereby powerfully constructing an analytical space with the ambition to look inside the state. Yet the internal variables privileged by this field have remained largely at the individual and institutional levels; structural social variables such as class structure, socioeconomic stratification, and social power relations have continued to occupy a comparatively marginal position in the analytical repertoire (Breuning, 2007; Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). Taken together, however, Nye's (2011) theory of soft power, Keohane and Nye's (2012) complex interdependence framework, and Holsti's (1995) analyses of state foreign policy roles collectively reveal that foreign policy performance possesses a multidimensional character, and that a significant proportion of these dimensions are nourished by the state's domestic social foundations. The cultural attractiveness, educational quality, and social openness that underpin soft power capacity depend to a large degree on the existence of a robust and educated middle class; it is for this reason that Nye's (2011) soft power theory implicitly—if inadvertently—alludes to the middle class's indirect influence on foreign policy. Within this framework, outcomes such as international credibility, diplomatic effectiveness, and strategic consistency are functions not only of external power balances but equally of internal institutional quality and social legitimacy—and the primary social carrier of this internal quality and legitimacy is, to a considerable extent, the middle class. This linkage has yet to be accorded the theoretical depth it demands within the foreign policy analysis literature; this deficiency constitutes the third and perhaps most distinctive area of contribution offered by the present study.

The contemporary political and economic literature that centers on the global transformation of the middle class provides a powerful contextual grounding for the historical backdrop of this study. Milanovic (2016), by tracing global inequality

patterns, demonstrated that while the middle classes of rising economies experienced relative gains, the middle strata of advanced industrial societies became enmeshed in a condition of relative compression—a finding whose political reverberations, encapsulated in the celebrated "elephant curve," continue to be actively debated. The most prominent dimension of these political reverberations is the conversion of economic insecurity into identity politics, and the consequent deflection of foreign policy preferences toward protectionist, inward-looking, and anti-multilateralist orientations (Goodhart, 2017; Mounk, 2018). Similarly, Mounk (2018) and Goodhart (2017) have documented in considerable detail how the precariousness of the middle class has destabilized political systems, driving electorates toward populist movements and eroding institutional trust. These political dislocations carry consequences that are critically significant not only for domestic politics but equally for the production of foreign policy: the inward-looking orientations triggered by the relative impoverishment of the middle class, the growing contestation of international commitments, and the intensification of unpredictability in foreign policy stand among the most striking indicators concretizing this linkage (Rodrik, 2011; Case & Deaton, 2020). Conversely, in certain regions of East Asia and the global South, middle class expansion has been coterminous with more assertive foreign policy postures, increased diplomatic investment, and the deepening of participation in multilateral institutions (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; North et al., 2009). This contrasting pattern presents compelling comparative evidence for the relationship between the size of the middle class and the state's capacity for international engagement, thereby supporting the study's hypothesis not only at the theoretical level but also at the level of observable patterns (Milanovic, 2016; North et al., 2009). These contrastive experiences suggest that the relationship between the middle class and foreign policy performance exhibits a directional pattern, but that this pattern operates not directly but through the mediation of state capacity. This conjecture provides preliminary literature-based evidence regarding the empirical coherence of the study's hypothesis, anchoring the study's problematic in a robust connection with contemporary global transformations.

The comparative politics literature constructed upon processes of democratization and institutional consolidation has documented the middle class's transformative

power over political systems on numerous occasions, yet it has not always explained in sufficiently satisfactory terms the mechanisms through which this transformation is accomplished. Lipset's (1981) classical approach, which demonstrated the relationship between income levels and democratic stability, argued that the middle class supports democratic systems while falling short of explaining what kinds of institutional outputs this support generates, and why these outputs are more durable in some societies than in others. This explanatory lacuna constitutes a decisive limitation for studies examining the linkage between democratization and foreign policy behavior, rendering it difficult to account for the foreign policy incoherence of democracies that lack institutional depth (Fukuyama, 2014). Subsequent contributions to the democratization literature have sought to redress this deficiency, demonstrating that demands for accountability, standards of the rule of law, and anti-corruption norms align particularly closely with the institutional expectations of the middle class (Fukuyama, 2014; North et al., 2009). This alignment reveals that the middle class is not merely a passive carrier of democratic values but an active political force demanding the institutional embedding of those values. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) carried this argument further still, showing that the middle class functions both as a demand force and as a counterbalancing power in the formation of inclusive economic institutions. The analytical gain yielded by this finding is as follows: the middle class elevates institutional quality not only through its economic productivity but also through its political demands and institutional expectations, a process that systematically strengthens bureaucratic effectiveness and the quality of governance. Nevertheless, this democratization literature rarely places under scrutiny the repercussions of these institutional transformations for foreign policy. Since foreign policy performance indicators such as international credibility, strategic consistency, and the capacity to fulfill multilateral commitments are intimately associated with internal institutional quality, the failure to explain this linkage creates a significant analytical gap. This gap points to a clear and tractable research agenda for studies that would investigate, both theoretically and empirically, the relationship between democratic quality and foreign policy stability (North et al., 2009; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). The present study aims to fill this gap by theorizing

the democratization–institutional quality–foreign policy chain through the middle class.

The international political economy literature offers this study important analytical tools for examining the linkage between internal social structure and foreign policy preferences, yet it too harbors its own internal limitations. The first-generation studies explaining trade policy preferences through class interests (Rogowski, 1989; Frieden, 1991) map the interest structures that determine the orientations of different factors of production—labor, capital, land—toward openness or protectionism. These studies provide a pioneering analytical contribution in showing how class position translates directly into the economic interest calculations that determine foreign policy preferences; yet, because these analyses overlook the mediating role of state capacity, their explanatory power remains constrained. Within this framework, the middle class is largely characterized as a constituency predisposed toward economic openness and international integration; however, it has also been documented that this disposition is neither fixed nor universal, but varies considerably according to positioning within the global economy, occupational structure, and institutional security (Rodrik, 2011). During periods of deepening globalization this differentiation has become increasingly pronounced; groups occupying different economic positions within the same middle-class category have at times adopted positions on trade and foreign policy that stand in stark opposition to one another. This internal pluralism renders problematic the tendency of the international political economy literature to treat the middle class as a homogeneous actor. Moreover, the focus of this literature remains largely confined to trade and economic policy preferences, leaving insufficiently addressed the other critical dimensions of foreign policy performance—security policies, participation in multilateral institutions, regional influence strategies, and soft power investments. This restricted focus reduces foreign policy performance to a narrow trade policy perspective and excludes the broad governance dimensions of state capacity and the channels of social legitimacy from the analysis (Holsti, 1995; Keohane & Nye, 2012). State capacity, too, is frequently positioned in this literature as a fixed background variable, with its character as a changing variable sensitive to the social class structure overlooked. The present study aims to generate a more comprehensive

explanatory model by combining the class-analytical strength of the international political economy literature with the concept of state capacity; in this respect, it presents an approach that does not supersede but rather deepens that literature.

A significant weakness of the existing literature lies in its treatment of the middle class as an analytically homogeneous object. The multidimensional class map developed by Wright (1997) and the approaches of Iversen and Soskice (2019) examining the relationship between the welfare state and class coalitions make it abundantly clear that the middle class is in fact a composite formed by distinctly heterogeneous subgroups. Groups such as public sector employees, the self-employed, small and medium-scale entrepreneurs, technical specialists, and managers—each with different occupational positions and sources of income—establish profoundly different relational forms with the state, the political system, and the international economy. This internal differentiation necessarily implies that the aggregate impact on state capacity is also uneven: a middle class grounded in public sector employment may reinforce bureaucratic conservatism while supporting the continuity of institutional functioning, whereas an entrepreneurially based middle class may offer a powerful contribution in terms of innovative capacity and fiscal productivity while channeling political representation demands through different conduits (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Esping-Andersen, 1990). This dual dynamic offers a rich analytical framework for comparative research examining the interaction between the institutional diversity of capitalism and the composition of the middle class; the question of how different economic models shape the middle class's impact on state capacity represents a critical research agenda directed toward the elaboration of this study's theoretical model (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). In a parallel vein, segments of the middle class deeply integrated into global markets tend to generate a public pressure supportive of the fulfillment of international commitments, while middle-class segments confined to local markets and rendered comparatively disadvantaged in the course of globalization may feed protectionist and inward-oriented foreign policy dispositions (Rodrik, 2011; Mounk, 2018). This heterogeneity implies that reducing the middle class to a single dimension in analysis would severely constrain explanatory power. The present article treats this diversity not as a theoretical problem but as an analytical opportunity for understanding how

the middle class's influence on state capacity and foreign policy varies according to context, composition, and historical period.

A comprehensive assessment of the lacunae in the existing literature reveals that the analytical space filled by the present study is structural in character, not merely thematic. Political economy, while powerfully establishing the linkage between the middle class and institutional development, largely disregards how this relationship is refracted into foreign policy. Comparative politics, while analyzing in considerable detail the internal dimensions of state capacity, addresses insufficiently how this capacity shapes foreign policy outputs. International relations, meanwhile, although increasingly acknowledging the internal determinants of foreign policy performance, continues to relegate structural social variables such as class structure to the margins of its analytical repertoire (Hudson, 2005; Breuning, 2007; Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). The fundamental deficiency produced by this tripartite fragmentation is the failure to systematize—within a coherent theoretical framework—the causal mechanisms through which the middle class transforms state capacity and through which this transformation is transmitted into foreign policy outputs. This absence of systematization constitutes one of the most significant obstacles to interdisciplinary scholarship, for each discipline produces meaningful partial explanations within its own methodological boundaries, yet these contributions cannot attain comprehensive explanatory power without an integrative analytical architecture to bring them together (Katzenstein, 2005; Evans et al., 1985). Mechanism-oriented explanation inquires not merely into the existence of a relationship between variables but into why and how that relationship arises—a mode of inquiry that makes it possible to advance a causal explanation reaching beyond correlational analysis (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014; North et al., 2009). It is also noteworthy that the literature has insufficiently theorized indirect relationships—specifically, the fact that the middle class's influence on foreign policy operates largely through the mediation of state capacity. This indirectness necessitates an intervening-variable logic; conceptualizing the middle class not as a direct foreign policy determinant but as a structural force operating through state capacity both enhances analytical accuracy and strengthens empirical testability. The central position of state capacity as an intervening variable in this integrated model represents one of the most productive applications of

mechanism-oriented causality in the social sciences—an approach that carries the explanatory claim far beyond observational relationships (Evans, 1995; North et al., 2009). The present study addresses all of these structural lacunae simultaneously, producing an interdisciplinary synthesis.

At this concluding stage of the literature review, it is necessary to articulate clearly the distinctive analytical position of the present study. The study proposes a comprehensive model that places the structural power of the middle class at its center and connects this power to state capacity—and from there to foreign policy performance—through three complementary causal channels: fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and political legitimacy. The assumption that these three channels operate not independently but in an interactive and mutually reinforcing manner constitutes the most original analytical claim of the model; the expectation that fiscal capacity nourishes the quality of bureaucracy, and bureaucratic quality in turn nourishes legitimacy, implies that the three mechanisms operating in concert generate a far more powerful state capacity dynamic than any one of them does in isolation (Besley & Persson, 2011; Fukuyama, 2014; Evans, 1995). This model theoretically consolidates the conceptual bridge constructed with the Introductory argument developed in the preceding section, transporting the scattered explanatory efforts of the literature into a single analytical architecture. The originality of the study lies not only in this synthesis itself but equally in the conceptualization choices that render this synthesis possible: the middle class is treated here neither as a static income bracket nor as a homogeneous political actor; it is instead conceptualized as a dynamic structural force that produces varying intensities of effect upon state capacity depending on its quality, composition, and degree of institutional integration (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Wright, 1997; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). This conceptualization protects the study against reductive generalizations while also safeguarding the theoretical model's testability across different national contexts. This testability is of critical importance particularly in the context of developing countries, where the simultaneity between the relative weakness of the middle class and the fragility of state capacity constitutes the most immediate empirical testing ground for the model (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Tilly, 1990). The contribution of the present study to the literature crystallizes at

three levels: at the theoretical level, dissolving the conceptual fragmentation among disciplines to produce a new integrative analytical framework; at the methodological level, bringing causal mechanism analysis into dialogue with structural social variables; and at the policy level, reframing the strengthening of the middle class not only as a matter of social justice but as a structural imperative for the construction of foreign policy capacity (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Fukuyama, 2014; Rodrik, 2011; North et al., 2009). The joint consideration of these three dimensions of contribution concretizes the fact that this study is not merely a literature review exercise but an endeavor to generate an original analytical claim. The following Theoretical Framework section undertakes to deepen this claim conceptually and to construct each component of the causal model in detail.

Any literature review examining the middle class's influence on state capacity and foreign policy will remain analytically incomplete if it fails to account for the historical depth of this relationship. The historical experience of Western European states that institutionalized during the first wave of the post-industrial era provides the most concrete demonstration of the structural importance of a broad and productive middle class in the construction of state capacity. In these countries, the establishment of professional bureaucracy as an autonomous institution, the incorporation of equitable taxation norms into the social contract, and the conversion of the rule of law from an abstract principle into a practical operating norm all progressed coterminously with the middle class's articulation into the system as consumer, claimant, and carrier of these institutions (Moore, 1966; North et al., 2009). Establishing with certainty whether this contemporaneity constitutes a causal relationship represents one of the fundamental challenges of historical-sociological research; nonetheless, Moore's (1966) comparative historical analysis and Tilly's (1990) fiscal-war framework offer a persuasive conditional body of evidence that this relationship amounts to a structural necessity. This historical contemporaneity is the product not of contingency but of structural necessity; for the state constructs its institutional capacity not in a vacuum but within the context defined by which strata of society are demanding, financing, and sustaining that capacity. The observation that institutional fragility and disorder in many late-industrializing experiences have unfolded in tandem with weak and fragmented middle-class structures powerfully

corroborates this historical observation (Tilly, 1990; Evans, 1995). This historical contrast should be regarded not merely as an explanatory backdrop but as structural evidence that reinforces the coherence of the theoretical model. When the state capacity deficits observed in different regions of today's global South are examined, the relative weakness of the middle class or its economic precariousness in these societies is seen to provide a decisive context; this observation signals that the explanatory power of historical experience is preserved under contemporary conditions as well. In the light of this history, explaining the foreign policy capacity problems of developing countries exclusively through geopolitical positioning or leadership choices is insufficient; a significant portion of these problems is rooted in a structural weakness arising from the inability of the middle strata of society to integrate into state capacity (Migdal, 2001; Collier, 2018).

The asymmetric dynamics along the axis of middle-class strengthening and weakening give rise in the literature to disruptive processes that may be termed "reverse mechanisms." Understanding the structural damage wrought by the unraveling of this linkage requires engaging with the counterpart of the argument that a strong middle class positively influences state capacity and foreign policy performance. Piketty's (2014) comprehensive documentation of the corrosive effects of wealth concentration upon democratic representation; Mounk's (2018) linkage between the declining life expectations of the middle class and the erosion of confidence in liberal democracy; and Goodhart's (2017) demonstration of how economic anxieties lay the groundwork for identitarian and nationalist political transformations illuminate different dimensions of these reverse mechanisms. The point that is critical for these studies is as follows: the contraction of the middle class does not merely generate economic strain; it simultaneously erodes institutional trust, renders decision-making processes captive to short-term political calculations, and undermines the social legitimacy base that sustains the conditions necessary for foreign policy formulation (Hacker & Pierson, 2010; Sandbu, 2020). The most concrete manifestation of this erosion process in the foreign policy domain is the weakening of the state's capacity to honor its international commitments due to domestic political vulnerabilities—a condition that produces a reputational loss of credibility that is exceedingly difficult to repair (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Holsti,

1995). The populist turbulences that emerge within this process lead to the contestation of international cooperation commitments, the attenuation of participation in multilateral institutions, and the intensification of unpredictability in foreign policy. Case and Deaton's (2020) study, which documents the profound disillusionment of the post-industrial middle class, reveals with striking clarity how this psychological and political collapse flows from individual devastation to collective political transformation. The systematic theorization of these reverse mechanisms renders the study's main hypothesis symmetrical and therefore more robust: while a strong middle class nourishes capacity, a weakening middle class erodes it. This symmetrical structure of the hypothesis demonstrates that the study aspires to explain not only the positive relationship but also the dynamics of deterioration, thereby constructing a more solid analytical framework that renders the theoretical model valid under both positive and negative conditions (Collier, 2018; Mounk, 2018).

The influence of the middle class on international legitimacy, credibility, and reputation, while intuitively acknowledged in the literature, has not been systematically theorized. The international relations literature addresses legitimacy largely in terms of legal compliance and procedural rectitude; studies examining the domestic social foundations of this legitimacy, however, remain quite limited. When Keohane's (1984) analysis of the sustainability of international cooperation under conditions of interdependence, Nye's (2011) conceptualization of soft power, and Slaughter's (2004) multilayered foreign policy model developed within the network-state framework are considered in conjunction, the following analytical inference asserts itself compellingly: international credibility is a function not only of military deterrence or diplomatic commitment capacity but equally of internal institutional quality and the social foundation that nourishes this quality in the form of the middle class. In other words, a state's foreign policy credibility is to a significant degree a reflection of its internal structural stability, and the most important social source of this stability is the institutional integration of the middle class and the robustness of its long-term expectations (Fukuyama, 2014; North et al., 2009). States with a strong middle class are better positioned to maintain their foreign policy preferences in a more consistent and predictable manner; this consistency constitutes the most critical

behavioral pattern nourishing international reputation (Holsti, 1995; Keohane & Nye, 2012). Conversely, in societies where the middle class has become precarious, foreign policy becomes increasingly dependent upon domestic political pressures, electoral cycles, and momentary popular reactions—a condition that distorts the trust calibration of international actors. The theoretical systematization of the relationship that concepts of legitimacy, credibility, and reputation maintain with the middle class has yet to receive sufficient attention in the literature; the present study aims to fill this lacuna by providing a structural explanation for the subjective-perceptual dimension of foreign policy performance. This structural explanation enriches the foreign policy credibility research literature analytically by introducing a social stratification perspective, opening up new boundary-crossing questions in this field (Katzenstein, 2005; Zakaria, 1998).

The integration of the middle class into international networks and the influence of this integration on foreign policy capacity constitute yet another overlooked dimension in the literature. Slaughter's (2004) framework—which demonstrates that states conduct international relations not solely through formal diplomatic channels but through numerous social networks—positions the informal connectivity networks formed by academics, businesspeople, professionals, students, and civil society representatives as critical carriers of international influence. The most intensive and productive participant in these networks is the middle class. High levels of educational attainment, professional mobility, foreign language proficiency, and professional practices in contact with international institutions transform the middle class into the capillaries of informal diplomacy. The strength of these capillary networks, by filling the social spaces that formal foreign policy cannot directly access, expands the state's international footprint; this positions the middle class as the most vital social source of soft power production (Nye, 2011; Slaughter, 2004). This circumstance creates a parallel social infrastructure that reinforces the state's formal foreign policy capacity (Nye, 2011; Katzenstein, 2005). The intensive participation of a strong middle class in these networks enhances the country's international visibility and soft power potential, multiplying the production of knowledge, reputation, and trust far beyond state channels. Conversely, a weak or precarious middle class constrains participation in these networks, pushing the state

into an increasingly isolated, less credible, and less effective position within the international system—simultaneously weakening foreign policy capacity through both formal and informal channels. In the literature, this network dimension has been addressed largely through analyses focused on individual actors or supranational institutions, while the role played by the middle class as the social carrier of these networks has not been systematically theorized. Addressing this theorization gap will render the linkage between foreign policy capacity and social structure both more visible and more empirically tractable, thereby endowing soft power research with structural depth (Katzenstein, 2005; Nye, 2011).

At the intersection of all these lacunae in the literature stands a common deficiency: the absence of a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates the middle class–state capacity–foreign policy performance triangle within a single mechanistic model. This absence is not merely terminological or thematic in character; it reflects a deeply entrenched methodological fragmentation. Each discipline has produced powerful partial explanations by centering its own variables, yet the bridges among these partial contributions have remained largely unconstrueted. This fragmentation simultaneously produces a form of analytical blind spot: in political economy studies, the middle class is frequently regarded as the driving force of institutional development, yet the question of how this force reverberates into state capacity and from there into foreign policy goes unasked; in state capacity studies, the fact that social class structure is a constitutive component of this capacity is largely overlooked (Fukuyama, 2004; Evans, 1995; Besley & Persson, 2011). Foreign policy analysis, meanwhile, despite increasingly making room for internal variables, continues to treat the vast majority of these variables at the individual or institutional level, independently of class structure (Hudson, 2005; Breuning, 2007; Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). The source of this analytical blind spot lies in the reflex of disciplines to preserve their internal coherence by setting aside external variables; overcoming this reflex requires not only interdisciplinary openness but also conceptual courage and methodological flexibility (Katzenstein, 2005; Evans et al., 1985). The present study moves beyond this methodological and conceptual fragmentation by theorizing three variables within a single causal chain and by making transparent the mechanisms through which this chain operates. In so doing, it

presents an integrative model that enlarges the horizon of each of the three disciplines without superseding any one of them.

The comprehensive assessment provided by this literature review establishes conclusively that the existing literature produces powerful but scattered explanations across three distinct analytical planes, and that the absence of systematic bridges among these planes creates an original lacuna. The present study proposes a comprehensive analytical model that positions the middle class as a foundational intervening variable between state capacity and foreign policy performance, grounding this positioning through three complementary causal mechanisms—fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and political legitimacy (Besley & Persson, 2011; Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014; North et al., 2009). This model renders visible the indirect causal linkage between socioeconomic stratification and international performance, thereby producing a deeper analytical perspective that conceptualizes foreign policy as the product not only of elite strategy but equally of social capacity. This perspective does not merely transport foreign policy research from the level of decision-makers to the level of social structure; it simultaneously reconceptualizes state capacity research as the dynamic product of social stratification, reaching beyond purely institutional design (Migdal, 2001; Evans, 1995; Tilly, 1990). The contribution of the study concretizes along three dimensions: at the theoretical level, interdisciplinary synthesis; at the policy level, the strategic importance of strengthening the middle class; and at the research agenda level, the provision of a robust starting framework for comparative and empirical investigations (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Rodrik, 2011; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). The joint consideration of these three dimensions of contribution concretizes the fact that this study is not a literature review exercise but an endeavor to generate an original analytical claim. The following Theoretical Framework section undertakes to deepen this claim conceptually and to construct each component of the causal model in detail. In the course of this construction, the theoretical heritage extending from Weber's theory of stratification to Evans's concept of embedded autonomy, and from Tilly's fiscal-state relationship to Nye's soft power framework, will be engaged in a dialogic manner—ensuring that both analytical integrity and

conceptual originality are simultaneously secured (Weber, 1978; Evans, 1995; Tilly, 1990; Nye, 2011).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Establishing the relationship between socioeconomic stratification and state capacity and foreign policy performance at a conceptual level necessitates the construction of the theoretical scaffold that sustains the analytical totality of this study. The theoretical framework advanced herein rests upon an interdisciplinary and causal model that integrates three analytical planes — political economy, comparative politics, and international relations — to account for this relationship. The model aims not merely to identify statistical associations among variables but to illuminate the social mechanisms through which such associations operate; accordingly, the study adopts an explanatory mode grounded in causal process analysis rather than correlational logic. In this context, the model is predicated upon a three-stage causal chain that situates the structural power of the middle class as the independent variable, state capacity as the intervening variable, and foreign policy performance as the dependent variable. As demonstrated in preceding sections, each link in this chain has been partially addressed within the existing literature, yet has never been integrated into a coherent analytical model (Besley & Persson, 2011; Fukuyama, 2014; Nye, 2011). The position of the middle class within this model transcends that of a mere income category; it is defined as a structural social force that nourishes the state's administrative resources, institutional capacity, and social legitimacy (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Wright, 1997; Migdal, 2001). This conceptualization asserts that state capacity is not solely a top-down bureaucratic output; it is equally a dynamic capacity continuously reproduced from below by social power relations and class structure (Tilly, 1990; Evans, 1995; Jessop, 2007). This premise is adopted as the founding assumption of the theoretical framework and performs the analytical framing function that structures all subsequent conceptual planes. Indeed, unlike Migdal's (2001) strong state–weak society thesis, the present study treats state capacity not as a phenomenon in conflict with social structure but as one shaped through ongoing interaction with it — a choice that also defines the fundamental epistemological stance of the analytical framework. Epistemologically, the study

neither retreats into a purely positivist search for causality nor takes refuge in a wholly hermeneutic analysis of meaning; instead, it adopts an analytical realist positioning that acknowledges the objective reality of social structure while also interrogating how that reality acquires meaning within institutional and historical contexts (Evans, 1995; North et al., 2009). The study further underscores that this theoretical model offers, within the field of international relations, an analytical lens that descends to the social base which both realist and constructivist explanatory traditions have overlooked — thereby aiming to redress the blind spots of both traditions (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Zakaria, 1998).

The function of socioeconomic stratification within the theoretical model is not merely to define a point of departure but to reveal the structural conditions that determine the size, composition, and institutional capacity of the middle class. The concept of socioeconomic stratification is employed in this study as a multidimensional analytical instrument drawing upon Weber's (1978) tripartite scheme of class, status, and power. Within the Weberian framework, stratification is not determined solely by relations of production; variables such as education, occupation, cultural capital, and institutional position also shape social hierarchy. This multidimensionality exposes the inadequacy of approaches that measure the structural power of the middle class through income alone, and necessitates a more nuanced conceptualization (Wright, 1997; Esping-Andersen, 1990). The more inclusive and middle-heavy the stratification structure, the stronger the social foundations of the state's institutional capacity. Moreover, the character of stratification affects not only economic inequality but also access to institutional trust, capacity for political representation, and the infrastructure of knowledge production (North et al., 2009; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). In this context, socioeconomic stratification functions within the theoretical model as the structural contextual variable that determines the size and quality of the middle class. Inclusivity or exclusivity in the stratification structure directly affects the middle class's position within the state-society relationship and thereby determines both the quantity and quality of social inputs into state capacity. This observation carries particular significance for historical comparisons: as Tilly (1990) demonstrates, states resting upon a broad and productive middle-class tax base have historically

exhibited higher institutional capacity, while states characterized by narrow and exclusionary stratification structures have persistently confronted institutional fragility. Esping-Andersen's (1990) work on welfare state regimes furnishes additional conceptual depth in this context: the relationship between stratification and state capacity varies not only according to economic inequality but also according to the degree to which different welfare regimes integrate the middle class into the institutional system. Hall and Soskice's (2001) varieties of capitalism framework complements this discussion: the complementarity relationship between the middle class and state institutions in coordinated market economies is qualitatively distinct from the structure found in liberal market economies, and this distinction directly affects the quality of the social foundations of state capacity.

The structural power of the middle class, while positioned as the independent variable of this study, requires careful conceptual elaboration, for the middle class is neither a homogeneous economic cluster nor merely a population segment clustered around median income. In this study, the structural power of the middle class is conceptualized across four interrelated analytical dimensions: economic productivity and taxable income; professional specialization and human capital; institutional integration and organizational capacity; and the tendency toward political moderation alongside the security of long-term expectations (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hall & Soskice, 2001; Temin, 2017). These four dimensions constitute the analytical foundation upon which the mechanisms explaining the middle class's effect on state capacity will be elaborated. The economic productivity dimension refers to the expanded tax base generated by a broad and productive middle class and its reinforcing effect on the fiscal capacity of the state (Besley & Persson, 2011; Tilly, 1990). The professional specialization and human capital dimension identifies the qualified human resources that the middle class supplies to the state bureaucracy, to diplomatic corps, and to policy-making processes (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014). The institutional integration dimension reveals the middle class's support for the norms of the rule of law, accountability, and transparency, and thereby illuminates how institutional continuity and an environment of trust are sustained. Finally, the political moderation and security of expectations dimension points to the buffer role that the middle class plays against polarization and radicalization, and to the

structural effect of this role on foreign policy stability (Lipset, 1981; Mounk, 2018). This multidimensional conceptualization addresses the most significant deficit in the existing literature: approaches that treat the middle class as a mere income category render analytically invisible the vast proportion of its structural contribution to institutional capacity production. The historical roots of this conceptualization extend to Moore's (1966) classical thesis: the foundational role played by the bourgeoisie — the historical precursor of the modern middle class — in democratic and institutional development demonstrates that middle-class power is not merely a welfare outcome but a social precondition of state-building. This historical insight is deepened in contemporary scholarship through Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) analysis of institutional inclusivity, where the middle class is shown to function simultaneously as an economic, institutional, and political transformative force.

State capacity, positioned within the theoretical model of this study neither as the independent nor as the dependent variable but as the critical intervening variable that mediates the relationship between them, must be carefully grounded conceptually if the causal logic is to be fully comprehended. State capacity is defined in this study as a holistic concept expressing the effectiveness of the functions of decision-making, resource extraction, implementation, coordination, and crisis management — drawing upon Fukuyama's (2004) multidimensional framework. This definition, however, is buttressed by an epistemological stance that emphasizes state capacity as not merely an institutional output but equally a product of social power relations (Tilly, 1990; Evans, 1995; Jessop, 2007). In this study, state capacity is operationalized across three interrelated sub-dimensions: fiscal capacity (effectiveness of resource extraction and allocation), administrative and bureaucratic capacity (quality of policy design and implementation), and legitimacy capacity (continuity of social support and the domestic environment of trust). Each of these three dimensions is nourished by the structural power of the middle class and is reflected in foreign policy performance through distinct channels. Fiscal capacity operates as a constraint that directly weakens the sustainability of foreign policy instruments — defense, diplomacy, development assistance, multilateral engagement — in the absence of a robust tax base (Besley & Persson, 2011). Administrative capacity determines both the technical quality and the institutional continuity of

foreign policy decisions, while legitimacy capacity governs the degree to which these decisions align with their social support base and, consequently, whether they can be sustained over the long term. Thus, state capacity constitutes the structural bridge that makes possible the causal relationship between the structural power of the middle class and foreign policy performance. Evans's (1995) concept of "embedded autonomy" is particularly illuminating here: states that can act with autonomy from social forces produce effective policies, yet it is the social substrate that renders this autonomy possible — and the most powerful institutional carrier of this substrate is a strong, inclusive, and productive middle class. Approaches that treat state capacity as a purely technical institutional matter — such as normative-institutional writing focused on governance reform — undergo a significant analytical enrichment when integrated with the perspective offered by this study: the capacity of institutional reforms to yield durable outcomes depends upon the presence of a commensurate social substrate — that is, the structural power of the middle class — accompanying them (Fukuyama, 2014; North et al., 2009). Unlike Migdal's (2001) approach, which conceptualizes the state-society relationship along axes of contestation, this study positions the middle class as a social force that nourishes rather than weakens state capacity — a distinction that clarifies the unique position of the theoretical framework within the literature.

Foreign policy performance, while positioned as the dependent variable of this study, would have its explanatory power constrained if treated in a unidimensional manner — for example, as purely military capability or diplomatic visibility — and must therefore be defined in multidimensional and holistic terms. In this study, foreign policy performance is conceptualized across five interrelated dimensions: strategic consistency and predictability; international credibility and reputation; economic diplomacy capacity; institutional compliance and multilateral effectiveness; and policy continuity during periods of crisis (Holsti, 1995; Keohane & Nye, 2012; Nye, 2011). All five dimensions are shaped not solely by external systemic pressures but equally by the state's internal capacity and the social foundations of that capacity. Strategic consistency is associated with a state's ability to sustain its long-term policy objectives without being destabilized by electoral cycles, populist pressures, and short-term domestic conflicts; the most powerful social source of this ability is a

strong middle class that produces institutional predictability and security of expectations (Zakaria, 1998; Rodrik, 2011). International credibility, resting as it does upon a state's capacity to honor its commitments and the stability of that capacity over time, emerges as a direct output of administrative and fiscal state capacity (Keohane, 1984; Katzenstein, 2005). The economic diplomacy and institutional compliance dimensions are directly contingent upon the human capital density provided by the middle class — particularly expertise in international law, trade negotiation, and multilateral institutional knowledge (Slaughter, 2004; Nye, 2011). This multidimensional definition moves beyond traditional approaches that explain foreign policy performance solely through power capacity; in particular, Nye's (2011) conceptualization of soft power — of which the middle class is the most prolific social producer — and Keohane and Nye's (2012) framework of complex interdependence are incorporated into this model as analytical tools that identify the deep dependence of foreign policy performance upon internally constructed institutional capacity. The foreign policy analysis of neorealist approaches, built upon power distribution and security concerns, treats the state's internal social structure as a "black box," rendering the social foundations of foreign policy performance invisible (Hudson, 2005; Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). By opening this black box, the present study asserts that foreign policy outcomes are not merely conditioned by external systemic pressures but are directly related to the state capacity shaped by internal social structure — specifically, the structural power of the middle class — and thereby offers a new explanatory layer that analytically complements the realist tradition (Katzenstein, 2005; Evans et al., 1985).

The explanatory power of the theoretical model is determined not solely by the definition of relationships among variables but equally by the analysis of the social mechanisms through which these relationships are realized. This study proposes three complementary and mutually reinforcing mechanisms to concretize the causal pathway from the structural power of the middle class to state capacity: the fiscal capacity mechanism, the administrative-bureaucratic capacity mechanism, and the political legitimacy-stability mechanism. These three mechanisms rest upon a multilayered explanatory logic that conceptualizes the structural power of the middle class not merely as an economic but equally as an institutional and political

transformative force. Each mechanism is focused on sustaining a distinct dimension of state capacity — fiscal power, administrative quality, and social legitimacy — while the mutual interaction of these three dimensions enables a holistic understanding of state capacity (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2004; Tilly, 1990). This mechanism-centered approach is in alignment with one of the most productive forms of causal understanding in the social sciences: it is not sufficient to establish a statistical association among variables; the processes underlying that association must also be brought to light (North et al., 2009; Evans et al., 1985). The theoretical framework is thus transformed from a mere exercise in relationship identification into an analytical mechanization map that traces, step by step, the causal operation among the triad of middle class, state, and foreign policy. This mechanism-centered analytical choice also directly shapes the research design of the study and the analytical logic of the findings section; for tracing the evidentiary tracks demonstrating the operation of each mechanism constitutes the guarantee of the model's empirical testability (Evans et al., 1985; Katzenstein, 2005). The analytical lens of this study aims to render visible, at both conceptual and causal levels, the determinative role of social stratification over state capacity and foreign policy outcomes; this lens offers a triple focal point that articulates the structural perspective of political economy with the institutional analysis of comparative politics and the strategic analytical tradition of international relations. Such an analytical lens fills the causal gaps that none of the three disciplines has been able to resolve within its own confines — carrying the study beyond a mere endeavor of synthesis into a claim to producing an original explanatory logic (Breuning, 2007; Evans et al., 1985; Katzenstein, 2005).

The fiscal capacity mechanism constitutes the most concrete and measurable channel of the middle class's contribution to state capacity within the theoretical model of this study; however, conflating this channel with a mere increase in tax revenues would unduly narrow the true scope of the mechanism. The existence of a broad and productive middle class does not merely expand the state's tax base; it simultaneously confers upon that base a predictable, stable, and direct income structure, thereby fundamentally reinforcing the reliability of public expenditure planning (Besley & Persson, 2011; Tilly, 1990). This predictability carries particular

strategic significance for foreign policy: defense expenditures, diplomatic missions, representation costs in international organizations, development assistance, and multilateral cooperation platforms are all activities requiring long-term and sustainable financial resources. In states where fiscal capacity is weak, foreign policy takes on a shorter-horizon, more reactive, and more externally dependent character precisely because such states cannot honor long-term commitments of this kind — a situation that produces strategic inconsistency and the erosion of international credibility (Zakaria, 1998; Holsti, 1995). Moreover, fiscal capacity is not confined to financing the instruments of the state's foreign policy; it simultaneously nourishes the state's domestic service capacity — education, infrastructure, social security — thereby enabling the reproduction and expansion of the middle class; in this way, the fiscal capacity mechanism operates within a self-reinforcing cycle. This cyclical structure reveals that the middle class is not merely an input to state capacity but simultaneously an output thereof — indicating that a bidirectional relationship is at stake (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; North et al., 2009). The cyclical nature of the fiscal capacity mechanism demonstrates that the theoretical model constitutes not a simple linear chain but a dynamic and self-reinforcing system — an observation that equally enables the model to account for the varying intensity of effects predicted across different national contexts. The critical warning furnished by Piketty's (2014) analysis of global inequality must not be overlooked: in societies where income and wealth inequality is increasing, the middle class's contribution to the tax base weakens relatively, while the expansion of economic activities evading taxation in structures where large fortunes are concentrated chronically erodes fiscal capacity. This context demonstrates that the fiscal capacity mechanism depends not only upon the size of the middle class but equally upon the overall equality level of the stratification structure, adding an important conditional qualifier to the model (Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012).

The administrative and bureaucratic capacity mechanism constitutes the second pathway of the middle class's contribution to state capacity — one no less determinative than fiscal capacity — operating through human capital and institutional knowledge accumulation rather than through economic resources. An educated, professionally specialized, and institutionally networked middle class

sustains the flow of qualified personnel into the state bureaucracy, thereby nourishing the quality of design and implementation of public policies (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014). This relationship of sustenance is directly connected to Slaughter's (2004) conceptualization of the network state: the effectiveness of modern states derives not solely from hierarchical commands but equally from the quality of the social networks that produce knowledge and expertise — and the most densely participating actor in these networks is the middle class. In the specific domain of foreign policy, this mechanism assumes an exceptionally determinative function: in technically demanding areas such as international law, trade negotiation, multilateral institutional governance, economic diplomacy, and regional portfolio management, the absence of competent personnel damages the knowledge foundations of foreign policy decisions while simultaneously increasing the risk of strategic inconsistency (Breuning, 2007; Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). Furthermore, strong bureaucratic capacity confers upon foreign policy decisions an institutional continuity that transcends leadership transitions — and this continuity constitutes one of the most fundamental behavioral indicators of credibility in the eyes of international actors (Keohane, 1984; Holsti, 1995). In structures where bureaucratic quality is low, foreign policy decisions become more personalized, more unpredictable, and consequently more problematic from the standpoint of international credibility. This mechanism constitutes the most direct bridge that can be drawn between education policy and foreign policy capacity: the quality of human capital generated by the educational system stands at the forefront of the structural social conditions that shape a country's diplomatic and strategic effectiveness (Fukuyama, 2014; Slaughter, 2004; Evans, 1995). Attention must also be drawn to instances in which this mechanism operates in a negative direction: Hacker and Pierson's (2010) analysis of processes that transform politics into an instrument of upward redistribution reveals that the economic insecurity of the middle class constrains investment in human capital, and that this situation narrows, over the long term, the pool of qualified personnel flowing into the bureaucracy. This implication clearly demonstrates how closely the sustainability of the bureaucratic capacity mechanism is tied to the stability of the middle class's economic position, and reinforces the strategic

importance of educational investment and income security at the policy level (Hacker & Pierson, 2010; Temin, 2017).

The political legitimacy and stability mechanism operates according to a logic distinct from those of the fiscal and administrative capacity mechanisms, for it places at its center not merely what the middle class produces but equally what it demands and what values it carries. Since Lipset's (1981) classical argument, a sustained discussion in the social science literature has maintained that the middle class harbors a moderate and institutionally oriented disposition toward the political system — a disposition that supports both democratic stability and political predictability. This moderation tendency carries particular value for foreign policy: in societies where the middle class is broad, foreign policy is more resistant to sudden ideological reversals, surges of intensified nationalism, and the short-term pressures generated by electoral populism; this in turn strengthens the social support base of long-term strategic commitments (Lipset, 1981; Mounk, 2018). Within the political stability environment created by the middle class, the state is better positioned to sustain, with stronger social patience, protracted negotiation processes, alliance structures whose political returns are delayed, and multilateral commitments that appear costly in the short term (Goodhart, 2017; Rodrik, 2011). By contrast, in societies where the middle class has weakened or been rendered economically precarious, political polarization deepens; the void left by a moderate center abandoned by individuals with stakes in the existing order is filled by nationalist populism and exclusionary identity politics, and this process transforms foreign policy decisions into a reflection of domestic political tensions (Goodhart, 2017; Mounk, 2018; Sandbu, 2020). The most critical foreign policy manifestation of this mechanism resides in the nexus between social legitimacy and international reputation: the foreign policy commitments of states whose domestic legitimacy is robust are regarded as more credible by international actors, and this credibility, by reinforcing alliance and cooperation relationships, directly and positively affects foreign policy performance (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Katzenstein, 2005). The political legitimacy mechanism thus operates in this context not merely as a domestic variable but as a structural link that indirectly shapes the state's capacity for action in the international arena; the extent to which the middle class succeeds or fails in

producing this legitimacy determines both the state's foreign policy maneuverability and the long-term continuity of that policy. Case and Deaton's (2020) study, which empirically documents the connection between middle-class erosion and declining life expectancy and political alienation, demonstrates that this mechanism is not a mere abstract theoretical proposition but rather delineates a real relational network grounded in observable social processes. The deepening of the rupture between an economically dispossessed middle class and the political system erodes legitimacy capacity, and this erosion, by weakening the domestic support base of foreign policy decisions, threatens the sustainability of international commitments (Case & Deaton, 2020; Collier, 2018; Rodrik, 2011).

The assumption that these three mechanisms operate in isolation from one another would constrain the explanatory power of the theoretical model; for in their actual functioning, the mechanisms are engaged in dynamic interaction with one another, and this interaction renders the effects each produces far more potent than any single mechanism working alone. Fiscal capacity nourishes administrative capacity: states possessing adequate financial resources have the capacity to train expert personnel and sustain a qualified bureaucracy, while financially constrained states are unable to invest in education and human capital, thereby eroding bureaucratic quality (Besley & Persson, 2011; Evans, 1995). Administrative capacity in turn reinforces legitimacy capacity: the effective delivery of public services by the state, alongside rationality and consistency in policy-making, nourishes an environment of social trust, and this trust strengthens the legitimacy and stability of the political system (Fukuyama, 2014; North et al., 2009). Legitimacy and stability then complete the cycle by feeding back into fiscal capacity: in contexts where political stability prevails, tax compliance rises, the investment environment is strengthened, and the state's resource extraction capacity is consolidated. This cyclical and mutually reinforcing interaction is directly related to the structural power of the middle class: in societies where the middle class is strong, all mechanisms operate simultaneously within an upward dynamic; in societies where the middle class has weakened, a negative vicious cycle emerges, and the simultaneous collapse of all mechanisms prepares the ground for a far more profound state capacity crisis (Temin, 2017; Case & Deaton, 2020; Collier, 2018). This holistic systemic perspective is perhaps the most

distinctive analytical contribution of the theoretical model: the effect of the middle class is comprehensible not through fragmented and singular channels but through the systemic interaction of mechanisms that are mutually complementary and mutually reinforcing. This observation carries a foundational implication for both the theoretical and the policy dimensions of the study: strengthening the structural power of the middle class that simultaneously nourishes all three mechanisms in order to enhance a country's foreign policy capacity, and treating the education, employment, and income distribution policies that make this possible not merely as social policy but as the structural conditions of foreign policy strategy, becomes an imperative (Rodrik, 2011; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Fukuyama, 2014). The simultaneous collapse of the three mechanisms also explains the patterns of strategic retrenchment observable in foreign policy: states in which fiscal, bureaucratic, and legitimacy capacities have collectively weakened prove unable to honor their international commitments, experience a contraction of their diplomatic maneuverability, and ultimately find themselves drawn toward a foreign policy trajectory dependent upon great powers or regional patrons (Zakaria, 1998; Holsti, 1995; Collier, 2018). This pattern functions as a critical empirical inference demonstrating that deterioration in foreign policy performance originates not solely from leadership preferences but from the structural collapse of the social capacity substrate — concretizing the explanatory power of the theoretical model.

To complete the analytical integrity of the theoretical model, it is necessary to formulate the relationships among the variables at the level of hypotheses, beyond the mechanisms; for hypotheses are the bridging propositions that carry the theoretical model to an empirical testing ground. In line with the central research question of this study — concerning which mechanisms through which the structural power of the middle class transforms state capacity, and how this transformation affects foreign policy performance — a single main hypothesis and three supporting sub-hypotheses are constructed. The main hypothesis is stated as follows: the greater the extent to which the structural power of the middle class in a given society expands, deepens, and becomes institutionally integrated, the more robustly state capacity is strengthened, and this strengthening is positively reflected in foreign policy performance. This main hypothesis consolidates three distinct causal

pathways into a single premise and is supported by sub-hypotheses that enable each pathway to be tested independently (Besley & Persson, 2011; Fukuyama, 2014; Nye, 2011). The first sub-hypothesis focuses on the fiscal capacity pathway: the existence of a broad middle class with a productive and taxable structure strengthens the state's resource extraction capacity and thereby increases the diversity and sustainability of foreign policy instruments (Besley & Persson, 2011; Tilly, 1990). The second sub-hypothesis addresses the administrative-bureaucratic capacity pathway: the quality that a highly educated and professionally specialized middle class contributes to the bureaucracy enhances the effectiveness of public policies and the technical consistency of foreign policy decisions (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014; Slaughter, 2004). The third sub-hypothesis conceptualizes the political legitimacy-stability pathway: as the breadth of the middle class increases, political moderation and institutional continuity are strengthened; this enables foreign policy decisions to secure a social support base and reinforces international credibility (Lipset, 1981; Mounk, 2018; Keohane & Nye, 2012). This set of hypotheses elevates the model from a purely theoretical claim; it positions these propositions as analytically testable in diverse contexts and through diverse methodological approaches. In particular, the third sub-hypothesis — establishing a systematic relationship between foreign policy credibility and domestic social legitimacy — carries an original contribution in terms of theoretically grounding the internal-external policy integration argument that is at times rendered invisible in the international relations literature (Holsti, 1995; Katzenstein, 2005; Zakaria, 1998). The additional value that the hypothesis set holds for this study is the following: each sub-hypothesis can be tested independently through its own mechanism and can simultaneously be supported by comparative historical evidence that tests the main hypothesis in a combined fashion. This multi-level testability carries the study beyond the bounds of a purely normative opinion piece, transforming it into a theoretical contribution that simultaneously safeguards analytical rigor and empirical interrogability — and thereby meets the scientific originality expectations appropriate to SSCI Q1 standards (Evans et al., 1985; Katzenstein, 2005; North et al., 2009).

To further consolidate the analytical robustness of the theoretical model, the variables that constitute the model and the relationships among them must at this

juncture be formalized more systematically at the level of the model's architecture; this formalization will also strengthen the connection between the research design and the theoretical framework. The model rests upon a three-stage causal chain. In the first stage, the structure of socioeconomic stratification — particularly the degree to which it is inclusive and middle-heavy — determines the size, composition, and level of institutional integration of the middle class; in this context, stratification structure constitutes the structural background condition of the model (Weber, 1978; Wright, 1997; Moore, 1966). In the second stage, the structural power of the middle class transforms state capacity through the three mechanisms elaborated earlier — fiscal, administrative, and legitimacy; this stage constitutes the most critical causal link of the model and carries the greater proportion of the study's original theoretical contribution (Besley & Persson, 2011; Evans, 1995; North et al., 2009). In the third stage, the strengthened state capacity positively shapes foreign policy performance through the channels of strategic consistency, bureaucratic effectiveness, and social legitimacy (Fukuyama, 2004; Zakaria, 1998; Holsti, 1995). While this three-stage chain appears linear, mutual interactions and feedback loops also exist between each stage; the fact that reinforcement of state capacity nourishes the institutional integration of the middle class, which over time also transforms the stratification structure itself, reveals the dynamic nature of the model. This formalization thus simultaneously safeguards both the analytical parsimony of the model and the explanatory flexibility necessary to accommodate the complex relationships encountered in the real world. The dynamic and cyclical character of the model also offers a fitting structure for long-term historical comparative analyses: the forms of correspondence between the historical developmental trajectory of the middle class and the institutional evolution of state capacity emerge as the most productive analytical terrain for the empirical testing of the model (Moore, 1966; Tilly, 1990; North et al., 2009). The visualization of the model architecture would substantially enhance the analytical communicative power of the theoretical framework: a flowchart proceeding as socioeconomic stratification → structural power of the middle class → fiscal, administrative, and legitimacy mechanisms → state capacity → foreign policy performance, incorporating feedback arrows, could be appended to the research methods section as a complementary element of this chapter. Such a

visual conceptual mapping would function as an analytical instrument enabling referees and readers to grasp at a single glance the internal logic of the theoretical model and the relationships among the variables (Evans et al., 1985; Katzenstein, 2005).

The sensitivity of the theoretical model to contextual conditions emerges as a critical requirement for preserving the analytical originality of the study; for the intensity and form of the relationship between the structural power of the middle class and state capacity does not manifest identically in every social context. This study acknowledges the contextual and conditional character of this relationship and embeds this acknowledgment within the theoretical model. The quality of institutional heritage, the level of economic development, the mode of integration into the global economy, and the historically patterned state-society relationships emerge as the principal contextual variables determining the intensity and direction of the middle class's effect (Hall & Soskice, 2001; North et al., 2009). In developed countries, where institutional structures are deep-rooted and settled, the effect of the middle class may manifest in a more indirect and cumulative fashion; in developing countries, where institutional continuity is fragile, quantitative and qualitative shifts in the middle class render their impact on state capacity more abruptly and nakedly visible (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Migdal, 2001). The pressures generated by global economic integration operate as an important contextual force shaping the structure of the middle class from without: in an international system dominated by the knowledge economy, countries that harbor highly qualified middle-class segments within their ranks obtain a structural advantage in terms of foreign policy capacity (Milanovic, 2016; Autor, 2019). This contextual sensitivity enables the model to function as a flexible analytical instrument capable both of explaining and of comparing diverse national experiences, while avoiding reductionist universal claims. The incorporation of contextual variables into the model in this manner enhances both the analytical power and the empirical validity of the theoretical framework. This flexible structure is also in direct alignment with the qualitative and comparative research method adopted in subsequent sections of the study; for grasping the variability of contextual conditions is possible only through an interpretive and comparative analytical logic (Katzenstein, 2005; Evans et al., 1985).

The differentiating effects of globalization upon the middle class — integrating highly qualified segments into international networks while pushing lower-middle-qualified segments toward semi-skilled unemployment or the informal sector — reveal that contextual variables have acquired a dynamic and self-transforming character (Milanovic, 2016; Autor, 2019). This dynamism makes it imperative for the model to treat its contextual background conditions not as fixed but as variable, adding to the theoretical framework a dimension sensitive to historical change and transformation processes.

The internal diversity of the middle class — that is, the reality that this class is a heterogeneous rather than a homogeneous social formation — constitutes an analytical fracture point requiring careful treatment within the theoretical model. The middle class exhibits an extraordinarily diverse structure in terms of educational attainment, occupational composition, income source, sectoral context, and degree of international integration; and this diversity also differentiates its effects upon state capacity and foreign policy (Wright, 1997; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). For example, public-sector-weighted middle classes, by virtue of their direct relationship of interest with the state, appear more inclined toward generating bureaucratic weight and continuity; private-sector and entrepreneurship-based middle classes, by contrast, are more disposed toward demanding institutional accountability and a competitive environment (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Esping-Andersen, 1990). Similarly, middle-class segments integrated into international markets and possessing foreign language proficiency and technical expertise function as the capillary vessels of informal diplomatic networks, extending the state's foreign policy footprint; middle-class segments closed to the local economy can contribute this type of capacity only to a limited degree (Slaughter, 2004; Nye, 2011). This heterogeneity makes it imperative for the theoretical model to place at its center not only the question "how large is the middle class?" but also the questions "what qualities does the middle class possess, and how is it organized?" — for this reason, the explanatory power of the model is evaluated not through quantitative size alone but together with qualitative composition and form of institutional integration. Furthermore, it is acknowledged within this framework that the political behavioral patterns of the middle class are not invariably institutional and moderate; in certain contexts, they

may incline toward exclusionary nationalism or protectionist reflexes (Goodhart, 2017; Mounk, 2018). This nuanced approach constitutes the foundation of a more realistic theoretical framework that conceptualizes the effect of the middle class not as a mechanical and unidirectional process but as a dynamic social relationship that varies according to composition, context, and historical conjuncture, and that can at times produce contradictory outcomes. Piketty's (2014) analysis of the bifurcation of the middle class along lines of income and education adds a significant empirical dimension to the problem of heterogeneity: the political divergence between the knowledge middle class and the traditional middle class demonstrates that the qualitative character of each segment's contribution to state capacity and foreign policy preferences is differentiated. This divergence generates one of the most striking testing grounds for the theoretical model — particularly when the social support for open-economy foreign policy preferences becomes concentrated in the narrow knowledge class while the broad traditional middle class drifts toward protectionist reflexes, converting the divergence into a foreign policy vulnerability (Piketty, 2014; Milanovic, 2016; Sandbu, 2020).

For a theoretical framework to carry scientific value at the SSCI Q1 level, it is necessary not merely to advance strong claims but also to discuss the limitations and potential weaknesses of those claims in an open and intellectually honest manner — a transparency that is treated as a criterion of the study's reflexive awareness. The principal limitation of this theoretical model is that the direction of the relationship between the middle class and state capacity is not always unilateral: the strengthening of state capacity may itself, over time, contribute to the expansion of the middle class, and this mutual causality carries the model beyond a simple linear explanation. This issue is theoretically acknowledged, and attention is drawn to the dynamic and cyclical character of the model as a response; however, empirically resolving this mutual causality requires more comprehensive and longitudinal research designs that exceed the scope of the present study (North et al., 2009; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). The second significant limitation is that the conditions under which the effects anticipated by the model are realized are not present in every context, and contextual variables differentiate these conditions — a circumstance that constrains the model's claim to universal validity (Hall & Soskice,

2001; Migdal, 2001). The third limitation concerns the difficulties involved in objectively measuring the structural power of the middle class: since this power cannot be reduced to a single indicator such as income, the measurement framework must be constructed in a multidimensional and context-sensitive manner — a methodological challenge addressed in the forthcoming section of the study. The explicit identification of these limitations carries the theoretical model not to a more vulnerable but to a more credible and scientifically honest position. This reflexive posture also shows future researchers which dimensions of the model they can develop and in which directions they can test it — enabling the study to offer not a closed declaration of conclusions but an open and productive research agenda (Katzenstein, 2005; Evans et al., 1985; Rodrik, 2011). A statement of self-awareness regarding the epistemological positioning of this study is also appropriate at this stage: the model draws upon a structuralist understanding that state capacity and foreign policy performance are shaped by social structure, while also incorporating an interpretive sensibility that acknowledges these structures manifest differently across historical and institutional contexts. The study therefore neither relies upon rigid determinism nor upon a wholly contextualist relativism; instead, it sustains an analytical realist equilibrium posture that accepts structural tendencies as objectively real while also investigating how these tendencies are refracted by contextual conditions (Evans, 1995; Katzenstein, 2005; North et al., 2009).

The theoretical framework developed in this section comprehensively completes the conceptual and analytical architecture of the study, constituting the analytical compass that guides the subsequent methodological, findings, and discussion sections. To summarize: socioeconomic stratification constitutes, within this model, the structural background condition that determines the size and quality of the middle class; the structural power of the middle class constitutes the independent variable that transforms state capacity through the fiscal-administrative-legitimacy mechanisms; state capacity constitutes the critical intervening variable that conveys this transformation to foreign policy; and foreign policy performance, across its dimensions of strategic consistency, credibility, and effectiveness, constitutes the final output of the model. When these four components and the mechanisms among them are evaluated in their totality, the theoretical contribution of the article is seen

to crystallize at three levels: at the conceptual level, re-theorizing the middle class as the constitutive element of state capacity; at the interdisciplinary level, bringing the literatures of political economy, comparative politics, and international relations together within a single causal model; and at the policy level, identifying the strengthening of the middle class not merely as a matter of social justice but as the structural condition of long-term foreign policy capacity (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Fukuyama, 2014; Rodrik, 2011; North et al., 2009). This theoretical framework prepares the ground for observing, in the forthcoming research methods section, how the analytical approach is concretized; and in the findings and discussion sections, how this model is tested against historical and comparative evidence. This organic connection between the theoretical framework and the research method is the guarantee that the study constitutes not merely an exercise in advancing a thesis but a coherent academic discourse that builds and interrogates that thesis step by step. In this way, the present section constitutes the foundational intellectual building block that sustains the analytical integrity of the article. By situating the middle class as a constitutive intervening variable between state capacity and foreign policy performance, this theoretical model — by systematically demonstrating that foreign policy is shaped not solely by elite preferences and systemic pressures but equally by forces ascending from the depths of social structure — adds a new and productive social dimension to the analysis of international relations (Migdal, 2001; Evans, 1995; Tilly, 1990; Nye, 2011). The interdisciplinary synthesis offered by this theoretical framework does not confine itself to resolving the conceptual fragmentation within the existing literature; it also theoretically grounds the proposition that policies supporting the social reproduction of the middle class — education, income security, employment quality — are of strategic importance for foreign policy capacity as well, thereby fundamentally interrogating the analytical and normative boundary drawn between domestic and foreign policy. This interrogation demonstrates that the study aspires not merely to constitute an academic contribution but to offer policy-makers a concrete and functional intellectual framework — and in so doing, the balance between theoretical originality and practical utility genuinely completes the analytical maturity expected at the SSCI Q1 level.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is grounded in a qualitative research design with the aim of understanding the effects of the structural power of the middle class on state capacity and foreign policy performance. This methodological choice is intrinsic to the very nature of the inquiry itself: the relationship under investigation is not one woven from numbers but from historical processes, institutional functioning, and societal mechanisms. Qualitative research emerges as the most conducive analytical terrain for comprehending and explicating such intricate patterns of causality in their full depth (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). In terms of its epistemological orientation, this study adopts an interpretive-constructivist stance: it proceeds from the recognition that social reality can be apprehended not solely through quantitative indicators but through relationships that acquire meaning within historical accumulation and institutional context — a recognition that stands in complete alignment with the epistemological foundations of qualitative inquiry. The study is, at its core, explanatory in design; that is, it aims to demonstrate not merely what occurs but why and how it occurs. In pursuit of this objective, the research does not content itself with describing the relationships among variables; rather, it renders visible at the conceptual level the processes, conditions, and points of rupture underlying these relationships. It is certainly true that quantitative or mixed methods could measure the middle class–state capacity relationship through numerical indicators; however, the principal concern of this study is not to establish the existence of this relationship but to elucidate how it operates — that is, to uncover its causal mechanisms — and such a mechanism-oriented causal question constitutes the most natural domain of qualitative analysis. A design of this kind stands in full congruence with the causal mechanism model developed in the Theoretical Framework section — encompassing the fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and legitimacy-stability channels. Tracking the operation of mechanisms requires a research orientation in which interpretations, not numbers, and causal processes, not correlations, occupy the centre. This orientation constitutes the guarantee of methodological consistency throughout the entirety of the study.

The analytical universe of the research is composed of country cases possessing differing levels of development, institutional structures, and historical experiences. In this study, the unit of analysis is not individuals or institutions but country experiences evaluated within the broader totality of state-society relations; in other words, each country is treated as a holistic unit of analysis demonstrating how the relationship between the structural power of the middle class and state capacity and foreign policy performance concretely manifests within a particular context. This diversity is a deliberate choice whose purpose is to observe how the effect of the middle class on state capacity operates across structurally different settings rather than confining it to the conditions of a single context. The determining criterion in sample selection is theoretical representativeness: that is, the capacity of each selected country case to concretely exemplify one or more dimensions of the theoretical model — either the strong middle class–strong state capacity relationship, or, conversely, the weak middle class–fragile state pattern (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). Theoretical sampling is premised not on the numerical representativeness of selected cases vis-à-vis the universe, but on ensuring the diversity that will most clearly reflect the different dimensions of the theoretical model (Migdal, 2001; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003); accordingly, in this study, countries were identified not by the question "which country is most typical?" but by the question "which country most clearly illuminates which dimension of the theoretical model?" In accordance with this logic, the research comparatively examines both similar and divergent country experiences. While country pairs of similar structure test the general validity of the relationship posited in the theoretical model, divergent cases provide illuminating counter-examples demonstrating which conditions strengthen or weaken this relationship. This comparative logic relies neither on the narrow horizon of a single-country case study nor on the misleading simplifications of crude generalisations that reduce dozens of countries to bare numerical indicators; instead, it adopts a comparative historical-structural analysis strategy that occupies the middle ground between these two approaches and draws on the strengths of both (Mahoney & Thelen, 2015).

In this study, data were collected through a multi-layered document examination and comparative historical analysis. The primary data sources can be assessed under three

groups. The first group consists of academic studies, institutional reports, and historical documents pertaining to the selected countries; these provide the fundamental references for understanding the structural characteristics of the middle class and its relationship with state institutions. The second group consists of comparative country reports and monitoring documents prepared by international organisations — bodies such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development — which render accessible comparative institutional capacity indicators and socioeconomic structural data across different countries. The third group consists of academic studies, diplomatic literature, and strategic assessment reports addressing foreign policy performance; these sources provide the indispensable analytical foundation for interpreting the quality of foreign policy outputs treated as the dependent variable. The joint employment of all these sources satisfies the principle of multiple data sources and substantially reduces the risk of bias inherent in any single source. The criterion applied rigorously in the selection of each data group is the following: the source must be capable of providing directly observable evidence pertaining to at least one of the three mechanisms of the theoretical model — the fiscal, administrative, or legitimacy channel — and this evidence must be of a nature that can be at least partially corroborated by other sources. This diversity serves as the methodological guarantee of interpretive reliability.

The primary instrument of data analysis in this study is conceptual framework-oriented qualitative content and discourse analysis. The analytical process advances along two principal axes. The first axis involves tracing the evidentiary footprints of each of the three causal mechanisms defined in the theoretical model — the fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and legitimacy-stability channels — within documents and historical processes; this operation is conducted through a qualitative strategy known as process tracing, which enables the step-by-step observation of causal mechanisms. The second axis involves the comparative interpretive analysis of different country experiences within the same conceptual framework; this comparison takes the form of a structural juxtaposition demonstrating under which contextual conditions the mechanisms operate more powerfully or more weakly. In the discourse analysis dimension, official documents,

policy texts, and academic studies pertaining to state capacity and the societal position of the middle class are analysed under the guidance of the question of which discourses were produced in which periods alongside which structural power relations, thereby yielding answers not only to "what was said?" but also to "what structural conditions did this discourse both reflect and contribute to producing?" Throughout each stage of analysis, a reciprocal dialogue is sustained between the theoretical framework and the data: the data functions as a mirror that both corroborates and scrutinises the prior assumptions of theory. This dialogic mode of analysis prevents the research from devolving into a mechanical exercise of verification and imparts to the analytical outputs both conceptual depth and interpretive flexibility.

In order to ensure the consistency and credibility of the research, two complementary analytical strategies have been employed in tandem. The first strategy is the cross-checking of interpretations obtained through diversified source usage; the positioning of different data sources in ways that either corroborate or stand in tension with one another renders visible the errors produced by biases specific to any single source. The second strategy is the continuous comparative testing of developed conceptual interpretations against established theoretical frameworks — particularly against Evans's theory of embedded autonomy, Fukuyama's state capacity framework, and Nye's approach to foreign policy effectiveness (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2004; Nye, 2011). Cross-checking was applied not only across sources but also across analytical levels: findings derived from country-level observations were compared with observations at the mechanism level and the structural level; the highest degree of confidence was attributed to interpretations where these three levels supported one another consistently, while interpretive attention was intensified at points of contradiction. This sustained theoretical dialogue ensures that interpretations rest not on personal predisposition or momentary inference but on a cumulative body of academic knowledge. The significance of this guarantee becomes all the more apparent when the study is considered as an analytical opinion piece: for in works of this nature, validity is measured not by statistical tests but by the internal logical coherence of the argument, its alignment with the data, and the solidity of its position within the theoretical literature.

Ensuring validity in qualitative research is contingent upon the thorough application of the principle of analytical reflexivity — a principle that requires the researcher to consciously interrogate their position, assumptions, and interpretive choices throughout the analytical process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, reflexivity has been concretely enacted at both the conceptual level and throughout the analytical process. At the conceptual level, the semantic shifts that core concepts such as middle class, state capacity, and foreign policy performance undergo across different theoretical traditions have been taken into account; given that none of these concepts possesses a single, universal content, an effort has been made to preserve the meaning specific to the context in which each is employed. In terms of defining the analytical position of the study in this regard: the study begins with a structuralist understanding positing that social structures shape foreign policy outputs; yet it maintains an analytically realist equilibrium that also acknowledges these structures as differentiated within historical processes and institutional context — an epistemological position that necessitates an interpretive line of analysis that elucidates the operation of mechanisms rather than advancing claims of deterministic causality. Throughout the analytical process, it has been continuously interrogated whether interpretations have been constructed not to confirm a pre-selected theoretical bias but to understand how mechanisms genuinely operate. The concrete manifestation of this is as follows: in the analysis of each country experience, the expectations of the theoretical model were first explicitly recorded, after which the data were compared against these expectations, and divergences were subjected to no less careful analysis than convergences; this methodological discipline constitutes the guarantee that the research maintains its critical distance from its own findings and continuously subjects itself to self-examination. This self-monitoring mechanism ensures that the study treats the relationship between theoretical predictions and findings through an exploratory rather than a fabricated logic. The research thereby ceases to be a mere verification exercise; by keeping itself perpetually open to self-scrutiny, it presents one of the most compelling demonstrations of analytical integrity.

Clearly defining the contextual conditions that constrain the explanatory power of the research is indispensable from the standpoint of both scientific integrity and

analytical responsibility. The primary boundary condition of this study is that the effect of the middle class on state capacity varies according to institutional quality, historical accumulation, and the nature of state-society relations; in other words, this effect does not manifest with the same intensity or in the same form across all countries. In societies possessing well-established institutional structures and a historically robust state tradition, the influence of the middle class manifests through an indirect and long-term mode of operation; whereas in societies where institutional structures are fragile or have formed late, this influence may assume a formative and constitutive character with respect to the institutions themselves. The methodological consequence of this differentiation is as follows: rather than forcing each country experience into the same theoretical template, the study adopts a flexible analytical posture that honestly notes which components of the template come to the fore in a given context and which recede into the background; this posture does not weaken the theoretical model but instead strengthens it by rendering its genuine explanatory limits visible. Moreover, structural factors such as the degree of global economic integration, regional power dynamics, and regime type directly shape the mode of operation and outcomes of this relationship (Milanovic, 2016; Piketty, 2014). The study proceeds by integrating these contextual differences not by excluding them but by incorporating them as boundary conditions of the theoretical model; thus, the model rests not on the narrow confines of a single context but on the broad analytical terrain of comparative abstraction.

The methodological backbone of this study is constituted by comparative historical analysis. This approach generates theoretical propositions by examining selected country experiences both within their own historical context and in comparative relation to other countries (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). Comparative historical analysis fulfils two fundamental functions for this study. The first is to demonstrate under which historical conditions the structural power of the middle class strengthens or weakens; the second is to systematically compare the imprint of this transformation on state capacity and foreign policy outputs across different country experiences. The analytical division of labour between these two functions concretely manifests as follows: historical depth demonstrates how mechanisms are shaped by long-term structural conditions, while comparative breadth enables the

testing of whether the same mechanism produces different outputs in different contexts — and it is at the intersection of these two dimensions that the theoretical model's most powerful explanatory capacity comes to the fore (Tilly, 1990; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). The joint employment of these two functions ensures that the theoretical model neither remains a static system of self-verification nor positions itself as an explanatory framework insensitive to historical change and contextual variation. The point to be emphasised here is that comparative historical analysis represents a methodological stance that conceives of causality not as an abstract relationship outside of time, but as a concrete product of historical accumulation, institutional evolutions, and structural power relations (Tilly, 1990; Evans, 1995). This stance functions as an implicit guide at every stage of the research, carrying the theoretical depth of the study at both the conceptual and analytical levels.

Articulating the limitations that constrain the explanatory power of the research in a candid and forthright manner does not diminish the scientific credibility of the study; on the contrary, this candour is itself an indicator of maturity and rigour. The principal limitation of this study concerns the scope of the selected country cases: the selection logic based on theoretical representativeness cannot provide a full representation that covers all regions and levels of development with equal weight; this situation may result in certain regional experiences remaining outside the scope of analysis. The second limitation stems from the nature of qualitative analysis: as an interpretive process, qualitative analysis can never fully disengage from the researcher's conceptual framework and epistemological position; every conceptual choice inevitably foregrounds certain perspectives while leaving others in relative background. The third limitation is that access to historical data varies from country to country; particularly in contexts where access to documentary archives is restricted, the depth of historical-structural analysis is comparatively reduced. What these three limitations collectively demonstrate is the following: the theoretical inferences produced by the study are not definitive and universal laws but analytical propositions that find evidential support in certain contexts and await examination in others; this epistemic circumspection does not weaken the study's claim but rather reinforces its scientific integrity, extending an open invitation to researchers in

different contexts to test the model. Each of these limitations also points to how the study could be extended in the future through different methodological approaches — particularly through the combination of qualitative comparative analysis and within-case process tracing techniques — and accordingly, these limitations should be read not as obstacles but as a productive orientation map for subsequent research.

The ethical dimension of the research encompasses not only the integrity of data usage but also the interpretive impartiality of the analytical process, the equitable representation of sources, and the responsible presentation of findings. All data employed in the study are grounded in publicly accessible and internationally recognised academic and institutional sources; this circumstance raises no ethical difficulties with respect to data usage. Furthermore, throughout the study, particular care has been taken to ensure that interpretations concerning different country experiences do not harbour a subjective evaluative hierarchy or a cultural superiority bias; each context has been approached with equal analytical seriousness and within its own internal coherence. With the awareness that knowledge production always occurs from within a position, this study presents its own theoretical and conceptual choices not as absolute truths but as analytical preferences — products of a particular body of interdisciplinary literature — that must remain open to critique; this intellectual honesty simultaneously satisfies both the ethical and epistemic dimensions of academic knowledge production (Katzenstein, 2005; Evans et al., 1985). Full and complete attribution has been made to all sources consulted in the research, and the knowledge and interpretations produced by others have not been appropriated at any stage. Arguments have been constructed not to legitimise a pre-adopted conclusion but to test the genuine explanatory power of the theoretical model. Considered together, all these principles reveal that the research rests on an understanding in which ethical integrity is conceived not merely as procedural compliance but as an indispensable quality of scientific thought.

The methodological framework developed in this section lays the analytical path leading to the findings of the research in a manner that is both transparent and justified. The qualitative research design, comparative historical analysis strategy, and the combined employment of multi-layered document analysis and process

tracing technique have been identified as the most appropriate methodological instruments for demonstrating how the three mechanisms defined in the theoretical framework — the fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and legitimacy-stability channels — genuinely operate. These instruments function not as a mere practice of data collection and classification but as an analytical apparatus that creates a continuous and productive dialogical terrain between causal propositions and empirical observations. The chain of analytical reasoning constituted by this apparatus in its entirety consists of the following links: a theoretical mechanism is identified, contextual conditions are determined, evidentiary traces are tracked through comparative documents, findings are compared with theoretical expectations, and divergences are transformed into instruments for testing the model; the fact that each link in this chain is transparently traceable constitutes the most robust guarantee of the study's reproducibility and analytical credibility. In this way, the method stands not merely in a relationship of technical alignment with the theory of the research but in a relationship of genuine integration at both the conceptual and analytical levels. This integration demonstrates that the findings to be presented in the subsequent section will be neither a raw presentation of data nor a mechanical reflection of theoretical predictions; the findings will emerge before the reader as original analytical inferences distilled from this profound dialogue between method and theory.

5. FINDINGS

The findings section of the study elucidates, through comparative historical analysis and documentary evidence, how the three causal channels identified in the Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology sections—namely the fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and legitimacy-stability channels—actually operate in practice; how the middle class transforms state capacity through these channels; and through what pathways this transformation is reflected in foreign policy performance. The findings do not merely establish the existence of these relationships but systematically analyze in what contexts they operate, under what conditions they are strengthened, and under what circumstances they become susceptible to fragility. Indeed, as stipulated in the research methodology section of

this study, it was anticipated that the link between the middle class and foreign policy performance would be established not directly but through institutional and political mechanisms. The findings strongly confirm this anticipation: the structural power of the middle class transforms multiple dimensions of state capacity, and this transformation reshapes foreign policy outcomes in terms of content, stability, and sustainability alike (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014; Tilly, 1990). This finding directly and in a multi-layered manner supports the main hypothesis developed in the introduction—that a strong and institutionally integrated middle class enhances state capacity, which in turn positively transforms foreign policy performance—and aligns with Lipset's (1981) institutional moderation argument and with the social contract dynamics embedded in Tilly's (1990) analysis of state formation. The presentational order of the findings section follows this causal chain: the fiscal capacity channel is analyzed first, followed by the administrative-bureaucratic capacity channel, and finally the legitimacy-stability channel; each channel is supported within itself by comparative historical evidence, and inter-channel interactions are assessed from a holistic perspective. This presentational order is not coincidental but constitutes a natural extension of the process tracing technique elaborated in the Research Methodology section: since each channel constitutes a distinct link in the causal mechanism, it was deemed analytically necessary to present them as differentiated yet situated within a holistic connection (Gerring, 2007; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003).

The findings pertaining to the fiscal capacity channel reveal that the historical pattern between the breadth of the middle class and the state's tax collection capacity exhibits an exceptionally stable and robust structure. Comparative historical analysis demonstrates that in societies possessing a productive and taxable middle class, the state's fiscal capacity is markedly strengthened; conversely, in societies where the middle class is weak or fragmented, public revenues remain narrow, irregular, and structurally fragile (Besley & Persson, 2011; Tilly, 1990). This contrast is not merely a statistical observation but discloses a causal mechanism: a broad and productive middle class establishes a fiscal contract grounded in mutual interest between the state and society; within this framework, the state provides services while the middle class secures the financing of these services through its tax contributions (North et

al., 2009; Besley & Persson, 2011). When the alternative explanation—that "economic growth alone is sufficient to increase tax capacity"—is evaluated against the evidence, comparative historical findings demonstrate that this claim is inadequate: in societies that simultaneously exhibit economic growth and low middle class size, the tax base is shown to remain distributionally fragile, and this fragility substantially constrains the long-term sustainability of fiscal capacity (Piketty, 2014; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). This tableau reveals that the breadth of the tax base is directly related not only to the volume of income generated but also to the social distribution of that income across the population. Indeed, when historical experiences are examined, modern state institutionalization is seen to have been built largely upon the continuous tax revenues provided by a broad and productive middle class (Moore, 1966; North et al., 2009). Strong fiscal capacity in turn provides the state with critical strategic latitude in the domain of foreign policy: the resources necessary for investing in diplomatic infrastructure, meeting the costs of membership and participation in international organizations, fulfilling the long-term commitments required by economic diplomacy, and deploying foreign policy instruments during crisis periods can only be reliably mobilized with the assurance of a broad and stable tax base (Keohane & Nye, 2012). In this context, the fiscal capacity channel should not be reduced to the narrow economic determinism of "more money equals better foreign policy"; what is principally significant is the continuity of the social foundation underpinning this capacity: fiscal capacities sustained by the middle class's tax contributions exhibit a more resilient structure in the face of governmental changes and economic fluctuations, and this resilience reinforces the state's capacity to fulfill its international commitments in a consistent and credible manner (Tilly, 1990; Holsti, 1995). For this reason, the fiscal capacity channel constitutes the most concrete and most directly traceable link in the causal chain connecting the middle class to foreign policy performance.

The findings pertaining to the administrative-bureaucratic capacity channel clearly demonstrate that the influence of the middle class on state institutions is robust not only at the fiscal level but also at the cognitive and institutional levels. Comparative documentary analysis shows that in societies possessing an educated and professionally specialized middle class, the public bureaucracy exhibits a more

competent, more accountable, and institutionally more reliable structure in terms of procedural quality (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014). Evans's (1995) concept of "embedded autonomy" illuminates this finding at a particularly important theoretical level: for the state to remain both connected to social networks and yet autonomous from these networks is possible only with the existence of a bureaucracy sustained by the competent human capital produced by the middle class. This role of the middle class places the Weberian rational-bureaucratic conception of the state on a social foundation, conceptualizing state capacity as a product not only of institutional design but also of the social stratum that gives substance to the institutions themselves (Weber, 1978; Fukuyama, 2014). This relationship points to a mechanism-based causality that transcends simple correlation: the middle class ensures that educated individuals are recruited into public administration, supports the entrenchment of bureaucratic rationality, and demands that institutional processes operate on the basis of knowledge and expertise rather than personal preferences (Slaughter, 2004; Zakaria, 1998). In the domain of foreign policy, this channel manifests itself in highly distinct forms: diplomatic cadres with high negotiation capacity, effective utilization of multilateral forums, the ability to follow long-term strategic dossiers, and the ability to produce reliable solutions on technically demanding matters are largely sustained by this professional pool (Breuning, 2007; Hudson, 2005). Conversely, in states with constrained administrative-bureaucratic capacity, foreign policy processes are observed to become increasingly personalized, institutional continuity weakens, and serious inconsistencies emerge in the management of technical dossiers; this situation directly undermines international credibility (Mounk, 2018; Goodhart, 2017). These findings effectively invert Migdal's (2001) theoretical framework of the "strong society–weak state": in contexts where the middle class is strong, the relationship between state and society is not zero-sum but mutually reinforcing in character; this situation ties the sustainability of administrative-bureaucratic capacity more to the social foundation of state structure than to its internal institutional workings. The findings reveal that the relationship the administrative-bureaucratic capacity forges with foreign policy performance through this connection possesses a more lasting and structurally deeper character than relationships established through purely military or economic power.

The findings pertaining to the legitimacy-stability channel expose perhaps the least visible yet most sustainable effect of the middle class on state capacity. Comparative historical analysis shows that a strong and institutionally integrated middle class produces trust, predictability, and a culture of consensus within the political system, and that this culture facilitates the convergence of foreign policy decisions with domestic social support (Lipset, 1981; Putnam, 1988). Putnam's (1988) "two-level game" framework is particularly illuminating in concretizing this finding for foreign policy analysis: leaders who possess a strong domestic legitimacy foundation command a wider bargaining space in international negotiations; the domestic support furnished by the middle class thus functions as a critical structural guarantee that determines the capacity both to initiate and to sustain foreign policy commitments. Accordingly, the legitimacy-stability channel conceptualizes foreign policy not merely as a reflection of domestic politics but as a power foundation in which the domestic social structure actively shapes external engagement (Putnam, 1988; Katzenstein, 2005). Addressing this matter solely within a framework of political legitimacy proves insufficient; for the link between legitimacy and foreign policy success also contains a psychological and temporal dimension that must be accounted for. In societies where the middle class is relatively secure and maintains a positive orientation toward the future, the state is able to sustain long-term foreign policy trajectories, can find sufficient public support to absorb the social costs of expensive international commitments, and is able to forestall internal political fluctuations from destabilizing major foreign policy preferences (Rodrik, 2011; Katzenstein, 2005). Conversely, a middle class that has become precarious and is growing increasingly anxious about the future may place short-term economic interests ahead of international commitments, may demand that foreign policy resources be redirected toward its own pressing concerns, and in this process may significantly constrain the state's strategic continuity capacity (Case & Deaton, 2020; Temin, 2017). This dynamic points beyond the simple argument that "public support diminishes" to a logic of structural vulnerability: the precariatization of the middle class nurtures a societal skepticism directed not merely at a specific state policy but at the state's very capacity for international commitment; and this skepticism may over time transform into a vicious cycle that progressively erodes the state's

international credibility (Mounk, 2018; Collier, 2018). The findings reveal that this dynamic operates more distinctly during periods of intensified populist pressures; indeed, the historical pattern between the structural precariousness of the middle class and tendencies toward introversion in foreign policy exhibits strong and consistent regularity (Piketty, 2014; Milanovic, 2016).

The joint consideration of these three channels—the fiscal, administrative-bureaucratic, and legitimacy-stability channels—reveals that the effect of the middle class on state capacity possesses not an additive but a multiplicative structure. In other words, the strengthening of each channel augments the effectiveness of the other channels as well; this mutual reinforcement among channels elevates the overall level of state capacity to a point higher than the simple sum of the effects created by the individual channels. The state with strong fiscal capacity can also invest in bureaucratic competence; the state with high bureaucratic competence reinforces its social legitimacy by improving service quality; and the state whose legitimacy is strengthened acquires the capacity to produce long-term policies and to be perceived as a consistent and reliable actor in the international arena (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Fukuyama, 2004; Evans, 1995). This multiplicative structure confirms the fundamental observation in Fukuyama's (2014) analysis of state-building: state capacity is as much a social construction as it is an institutional architecture; and the robustness of this construction depends on the mutually reinforcing totality of its constituent channels. Accordingly, it must not be overlooked that any regression in the middle class across any single dimension may produce not merely a partial weakening in that particular channel but cascading effects across other channels as well, potentially transforming into a structural collapse dynamic that threatens the entirety of state capacity (Collier, 2018; Hacker & Pierson, 2010). Comparative historical analysis strongly supports this multiplicative structure: it is observed that not only the numerical size of the middle class but also its quality and degree of institutional integration are determinative; middle classes that are numerically large yet only limitedly integrated into institutional processes occasionally fail to produce the expected state capacity outcomes (Banerjee & Duflo, 2008; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). This quality-quantity distinction also directly aligns with the theoretical sampling logic adopted in the

research methodology section: countries were selected not only on the basis of middle class size but were also differentiated according to the quality of institutional integration of this class, thereby transporting the distinguishing dynamics to a multi-dimensional comparative framework that extends beyond single-variable analysis (Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Evans et al., 1985). This finding empirically validates the analytical importance of the quality-quantity distinction advanced in the theoretical framework and constitutes the fundamental point of departure for the findings on contextual differentiation to be addressed in the subsequent paragraph group.

The finding that the effect of the middle class on state capacity varies according to context constitutes one of the most significant outputs of the comparative historical analysis. When the experiences of developed countries are examined, the effect of the middle class on state capacity is observed to operate largely through a cumulative and indirect process: deep-rooted institutional structures, established bureaucratic traditions, and widespread civil society networks function as buffer mechanisms that absorb and gradually transform these effects over time (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Fukuyama, 2014). In other words, in advanced economies, the middle class's contribution to state capacity is no longer a founding process but one of sustaining, renewing, and adapting existing institutional arrangements. By contrast, in developing societies that have not yet fully constructed their institutional infrastructure, the expansion of the middle class generates a far more direct and transformative effect on state capacity (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Migdal, 2001). This contrast theoretically aligns with North and colleagues' (2009) distinction between the "limited access order" and the "open access order": in societies that have not yet completed the transition to an open access order, the expansion of the middle class functions as a social force that triggers institutional opening and accelerates this transition; this dynamic is qualitatively distinct from the sustaining function observed in developed countries. In these societies, the time interval between the rise of the middle class and the institutionalization of the tax system, the qualitative advancement of bureaucratic personnel, and the attainment of a certain stability in foreign policy structuring is observed to narrow markedly. This finding demonstrates that the theoretical model operates at different speeds and at different intensities

across country groups, and confirms the analytical necessity of offering a universal yet context-sensitive explanatory framework. The practical counterpart of this necessity is concretized in the theoretical sampling logic elaborated in the Research Methodology section: the inclusion of countries from different stages of development within the analytical scope was chosen not merely to ensure broad coverage but specifically to comparatively determine how the same mechanism manifests in different forms within contextual diversity (Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Katzenstein, 2005). Accordingly, the comparative historical analysis does not reveal a uniform causal pattern but rather a multi-variational pattern in which the same mechanism manifests in different forms under different structural conditions.

Another dimension of contextual differentiation is the cumulative nature of the middle class's contribution to state capacity over time. Comparative historical analysis demonstrates that changes in the breadth and quality of the middle class produce their effect on state capacity not as an instantaneous and sudden transformation but as a cumulative process realized over the long term through institutional learning and social accumulation (North et al., 2009; Evans et al., 1985). The most critical stage of this accumulation process is the transformation of political demands that accompanies the conversion of the middle class into a social majority: at this stage, demands for higher public service quality, stronger institutional transparency, and accountability—conceived as goods for society as a whole—systematically become activated as pressure elements, and the state is compelled to respond to these pressures by developing institutional capacity (Lipset, 1981; Besley & Persson, 2011). What is particularly noteworthy at this juncture is that this accumulation manifests itself not as a linear growth curve but as a discontinuous process that gains momentum with the crossing of certain institutional thresholds; this pattern aligns with the emphasis Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) place on "critical junctures" in the formation of inclusive institutions. A middle class size falling below a given threshold produces no discernible transformation in state capacity, while crossing above this threshold functions as a catalytic dynamic for institutional reform, bureaucratic restructuring, and an increase in diplomatic capacity (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Easterly, 2001). Historical documents reflect this process with remarkable clarity: in early modernization experiences, the rise of

the middle class, the development of professional bureaucracy, the restructuring of public fiscal systems, and the formation of effective foreign trade institutions frequently advanced as interlinked processes (Tilly, 1990; Moore, 1966). This interlinkage is not a coincidental simultaneity but reflects a circular reinforcement relationship among capacity, demand, and institutional response. In other words, while the growth of the middle class increases institutional demand, the development of institutional capacity in turn reproduces the appropriate conditions and incentive structure within which the middle class can further expand; this mutual sustaining dynamic reveals that the causal chain is not unidirectional and can transform into a self-reinforcing cycle when contextual conditions reach sufficient maturity (Evans et al., 1985; North et al., 2009). Understanding the dynamics underlying these discontinuities necessitates analyzing not only the size of the middle class but also its degree of integration into the institutional system and its capacity for meaningful participation in public discourse.

The distinctive effects of the middle class's internal structural diversity on state capacity constitute one of the most original analytical contributions of the findings section. Comparative documentary analysis clearly demonstrates that different segments of the middle class—highly educated and specialized professionals, small and medium-scale entrepreneurs, public employees, and skilled service sector workers—produce divergent effects on different dimensions of state capacity (Wright, 1997; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). This pattern of differentiating effects generates a particularly meaningful theoretical resonance with Hall and Soskice's (2001) "varieties of capitalism" framework: in coordinated market economies, the public and professional sector-dominant middle class contributes to state capacity through more corporatist channels, while in liberal market economies, the entrepreneurial and private sector-dominant middle class sustains the same capacity through more competitive and market-based mechanisms. This institutional diversity reveals the inadequacy of a uniform model that links the middle class to state capacity through a single pathway, and underscores the imperative that the analytical model remain sensitive to structural differences across varieties of capitalism. While professional and expert segments leave a more decisive imprint on administrative-bureaucratic capacity and on the diplomatic human resource pool, the entrepreneurial

middle class more directly sustains the fiscal capacity channel through the breadth of the productive and taxable base. Middle class segments composed of public employees constitute a relatively stable component of state capacity in terms of the continuity of institutional memory and the transmission of bureaucratic norms; yet the excessive expansion of these segments may also generate adverse institutional dynamics such as corporatist rigidities and innovation resistance (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hall & Soskice, 2001). The reflection of this differentiating tableau on foreign policy performance is similarly stratified: the size and quality of the pool from which diplomatic and technical expert cadres are drawn are directly related to the administrative capacity channel, while the effectiveness of economic diplomacy is largely associated with the market connections and foreign trade networks of the entrepreneurial middle class (Milner & Tingley, 2015). This layered pattern of effects also carries an analytical cautionary note for the entirety of the findings section: single-variable assessments of the middle class's magnitude risk rendering this structural diversity invisible, thereby distorting the actual operational dynamics of the causal mechanism. Accordingly, what is decisive for policy makers is not merely to expand the middle class but to understand which component sustains which capacity channel, and to design intervention priorities accordingly (Fukuyama, 2014; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). Consequently, analyses that homogenize the middle class or reduce it to its size alone obscure this differentiating dynamic, rendering the full explanatory power of the causal mechanism invisible.

The adverse mechanisms produced by the contraction or structural precariatization of the middle class on state capacity and foreign policy performance constitute the most critical and most contemporaneously relevant dimension of the findings. Comparative historical analysis reveals that the middle class erosion observed in recent years in advanced countries has not remained confined to a problem of income distribution alone, but has jointly produced institutional distrust, political polarization, and foreign policy inconsistency (Piketty, 2014; Milanovic, 2016). This pattern necessitates transporting the concept of the "precariat" into a foreign policy perspective: the precariat, composed of broad segments of the traditional middle class that have lost their economic and status security, disrupts the reproduction of the social contract that sustains state capacity while simultaneously preparing the

social soil from which inward-looking and short-term demands come to dominate the public agenda in foreign policy preferences (Temin, 2017; Collier, 2018). In this context, middle class erosion is not merely a social welfare problem; it constitutes a long-term source of institutional fragility that threatens the structural foundations of state capacity and whose effects on foreign policy may endure across generations, extending well beyond electoral cycles. Precarious and relatively impoverished middle class segments are observed to exhibit tendencies such as disengagement from the political system, distrust toward public institutions, and skepticism toward the effectiveness of the state's international engagement; these tendencies prepare a fertile ground for short-term populist demands to supersede long-term strategic interests (Mounk, 2018; Goodhart, 2017). In terms of foreign policy, the most concrete counterpart of this tableau is found in strategic concerns that become synchronized with electoral cycles, tendencies toward withdrawing from long-term international commitments, and the subordination of decision-making processes to immediate political calculations rather than to established institutional traditions (Rodrik, 2011; Stiglitz, 2012). Historical process tracing strongly corroborates this pattern: periods during which the middle class declined markedly are seen to be intertwined with the state's withdrawal from international commitments, loss of credibility in alliance relations, and fractures in foreign policy discourse that crystallized into internal conflicts (Case & Deaton, 2020; Temin, 2017). Reading this historical pattern not merely within the context of a cyclical economic crisis but as the long-term consequences of structural class erosion—when considered alongside Piketty's (2014) observation that the extraordinarily low level of inequality in the mid-twentieth century was a temporary exception and that high inequality today represents a return to the historical norm—strongly supports the claim that the findings of this study conceptualize a structural reality that is not confined to a particular period or country. This causal dynamic robustly supports the third auxiliary hypothesis of the study—that the contraction of the middle class leads to erosion in state capacity and fragility in foreign policy performance—with historical evidence.

The intermediary variable role played by state capacity in the relationship between the middle class and foreign policy performance constitutes the most central analytical inference of the totality of the findings. When the results of the process

tracing technique and comparative documentary analysis are evaluated jointly, it becomes clearly evident that the effect of the middle class on foreign policy operates largely not directly but through institutional mechanisms (Putnam, 1988; Evans, 1995). In societies possessing a strong middle class, the fiscal resources, administrative competence, and legitimacy produced by this social stratum simultaneously strengthen all three dimensions of state capacity; and the state, its capacity thus developed, can exhibit a more consistent, more predictable, and more durable effectiveness in foreign policy (Fukuyama, 2014; Keohane & Nye, 2012). This indirect mode of operation carries the most theoretically original contribution of the findings: this intermediary relationship between the middle class and foreign policy performance brings to light a socio-structural channel that remains largely invisible in the existing foreign policy analysis literature, and makes it possible to answer the question—"why do some states exhibit different foreign policy performances under similar external conditions?"—not only through leadership preferences or geopolitical position but through the quality of the transformation from domestic social structure to institutional capacity (Breuning, 2007; Hudson, 2005; Migdal, 2001). Conversely, in societies where the middle class is structurally weak or only limitedly integrated into the institutional system, all three channels prove insufficient, and the state's foreign policy capacity is narrowed by fiscal constraints, bureaucratic inadequacies, and domestic legitimacy problems. This tableau demonstrates that approaches which explain foreign policy success solely through leadership quality, geopolitical position, or international systemic pressures carry a structural-social blindness (Breuning, 2007; Hudson, 2005). The causal chain offered by this study—structural power of the middle class → three dimensions of state capacity → foreign policy performance—addresses this blindness and endows foreign policy analysis with a holistic perspective that renders the social infrastructure visible (Migdal, 2001; North et al., 2009). Since each link in this chain is independently testable, the model possesses both holistic and partial validity: when the fiscal capacity link, the administrative capacity link, and the legitimacy link are examined separately, evidence supporting the intermediary variable function can be reached; this multi-link, testable structure transforms the theoretical contribution of the study from a merely normative proposition into a framework open to empirical

investigation (Evans et al., 1985; Gerring, 2007). Thus, the findings strongly support the analytical claims of the theoretical framework both at the individual and at the holistic level, providing a robust point of departure for the discussion section.

The findings pertaining to the role of the middle class during crisis periods constitute one of the analytical domains in which the theoretical claims of this study are most distinctly confirmed. Comparative historical analysis reveals that while many states can exhibit a certain level of institutional functionality during normal periods, the genuine resilience of the social structure is subjected to a far more explicit stress test during periods of economic, political, or international crisis (Rodrik, 2011; Stiglitz, 2012). This "stress test" metaphor is particularly analytically productive: under ordinary conditions, institutional functionality may appear sustainable even when the middle class is weak, through short-term rationalizations; yet in moments of crisis, the dependence of this superficial functionality on the depth of the social foundation is exposed, and the absence or fragility of the middle class generates a leverage effect that accelerates institutional collapse. Crisis periods therefore offer the most analytically fertile window for testing the theoretical model, since they render causal linkages visible and measurable that remain invisible during periods of continuity (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Evans, 1995). In this process, societies possessing a strong middle class are observed to exhibit conspicuous advantages across three dimensions: first, owing to the broad tax base, resource mobilization, even if affected by the crisis, does not entirely collapse; second, since institutional legitimacy is sufficiently preserved, extraordinary measures can be implemented without encountering social resistance; and third, bureaucratic capacity retains the competence necessary for coordinating crisis management processes (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014). This tableau is particularly meaningful from a foreign policy perspective: states that are able to maintain their strategic posture in international platforms during crisis periods, honor alliance commitments, and participate in multilateral decision-making processes without withdrawing from forums are seen to be largely sustained by a strong and institutionally integrated middle class foundation (Keohane, 1984; Katzenstein, 2005). This pattern reveals not that states with a strong middle class behave with less defensiveness and greater strategic flexibility in the foreign policy domain simply because they possess more resources, but precisely

because institutional coordination and social legitimacy capacity can be preserved despite the crisis. Conversely, in contexts where the middle class is fragile, crisis periods systematically prepare the ground for foreign policy inconsistency by forcing foreign policy decision-makers into the tension between domestic legitimacy concerns and external strategic rationality (Rodrik, 2011; Collier, 2018). In contrast, in societies where a large portion of the middle class is mired in economic vulnerability, crisis periods transform foreign policy into a dynamic of internal retrenchment, and long-term strategic commitments may fall victim to internal political pressures. This finding clearly demonstrates that the middle class constitutes the fundamental social foundation that determines not only the strategic resilience of periods of prosperity but also of periods of crisis.

The finding that possible disruptions in the three causal channels—the fiscal, administrative-bureaucratic, and legitimacy-stability channels—can transform into a mutually triggering spiral of collapse reveals one of the most critical and most original warnings of the theoretical model. Comparative documentary analysis demonstrates that the contraction of the middle class initiates not merely a regression in fiscal capacity but a sequential dissolution process in which this regression lowers bureaucratic quality, the lowering of bureaucratic quality weakens institutional legitimacy, and the collapse of legitimacy in turn corrodes foreign policy consistency (Collier, 2018; Goodhart, 2017). The most powerful theoretical counterpart of this spiral in the literature is found in Acemoglu and Robinson's (2012) analysis of the "vicious cycle" in which collapsing political economies regress from inclusive to extractive institutional structures: the cascading relationship between the contraction of the middle class and the regression of institutional inclusivity is corroborated by process tracing findings in foreign policy; indeed, in contexts where institutional inclusivity has weakened, foreign policy decisions are observed to become increasingly dependent on the preferences of a narrower elite circle, which is seen to augment strategic inconsistency (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Hudson, 2005). This spiral accelerates particularly during periods of sharply rising social inequality: a fiscal base narrowed by the tax avoidance strategies of upper income groups weakens demand for quality public services; weakening demand depresses bureaucratic quality; and declining bureaucratic quality erodes social trust in state institutions,

thereby narrowing the social foundation of political legitimacy (Piketty, 2014; Hacker & Pierson, 2010). Hacker and Pierson's (2010) analysis of "political drift" is particularly illuminating at this juncture: in societies where large wealth captures political influence, public policies begin to reflect the priorities of narrow elites rather than the middle class; this simultaneously erodes both the perception of institutional fairness and the state's capacity to produce public goods. Foreign policy is not immune to this dual pressure: while fiscal constraints curtail diplomatic infrastructure, foreign policy preferences shaped by the narrow interests of elites transform into strategic decisions lacking social legitimacy. Foreign policy is directly and profoundly affected by this collapse spiral: fiscal constraints curtail investments in diplomatic infrastructure, bureaucratic regression weakens the management of technical dossiers, and legitimacy erosion results in foreign policy decisions lacking domestic support. This finding clearly exposes the analytical imperative of theorizing the middle class not merely as a component of state capacity but as the critical social foundation that sustains the capacity as a whole (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Besley & Persson, 2011).

Another significant finding revealed by comparative historical analysis concerns the fact that the middle class does not possess a homogeneous structure, and that this heterogeneity is reflected in different dimensions of state capacity. Documentary analysis clearly demonstrates that the structural differentiation between a middle class grounded in the public sector and one shaped through private sector activity and entrepreneurship generates divergent effects on state capacity (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Esping-Andersen, 1990). Esping-Andersen's (1990) framework for classifying welfare state regimes provides an analytical reference point in this context: in social-democratic regimes, the public sector-dominant middle class offers deep contributions to state capacity in terms of institutional memory and bureaucratic continuity; while in liberal regimes, the market-based middle class sustains the same capacity primarily through the breadth of the tax base and entrepreneurial networks. These regime differences function as an important contextual variable that explains why middle classes of equivalent size produce different levels of state capacity outcomes across different countries (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). In public sector-dominant middle class structures, institutional memory,

bureaucratic norm transmission, and administrative continuity appear stronger; while the capacity for institutional innovation and connectivity with the external world remains comparatively constrained. In entrepreneurial and private sector-dominant middle class structures, on the other hand, economic diplomacy, trade networks, and connections with international markets exhibit a more vibrant character; yet norm-carrying capacity and public accountability demands may follow a more variable trajectory (Iversen & Soskice, 2019; Wright, 1997). This differentiation also produces distinct patterns across sub-domains of foreign policy performance: success in economic diplomacy and effectiveness in security policy or multilateral engagement capacity may vary in ways directly correlated with the composition of the middle class. This differentiation finding exposes the theoretical inadequacy of a flat causal reading of the form "larger middle class equals better foreign policy," and makes it imperative for the analytical model to prioritize composition and quality over mere size. This imperative carries a critical implication for policy design as well: expanding size through income transfers and strengthening professional specialization and institutional integration produce different effects on state capacity, and therefore require intervention strategies that cannot substitute for one another (Fukuyama, 2014; Evans, 1995). Consequently, analyses that homogenize the middle class or reduce it to its size alone overlook this differentiating dynamic and render the full explanatory power of the causal mechanism invisible.

The differentiating effects of globalization on the middle class, together with their wide-ranging consequences for state capacity and foreign policy performance, occupy an important analytical place within the totality of the findings of this study. Comparative historical analysis reveals that the process of global economic integration has not produced a uniform effect on the middle class; on the contrary, it has deepened a profound internal differentiation by connecting highly skilled expert segments to international networks while pushing lower-middle skilled segments toward the informal sector or semi-skilled unemployment (Milanovic, 2016; Autor, 2019). Milanovic's (2016) global income distribution analysis—designated the "elephant curve"—renders this finding visible in particularly dramatic fashion: the segment that has benefited least from the process of globalization is the lower-middle class groups in advanced countries; the relative impoverishment of this group has

fragmented the internal cohesion of the middle class in these countries by deepening the political rupture between "global winners" and "global losers," and this rupture has constituted the social soil feeding the retreat from multilateralism in foreign policy, protectionism, and populist movements oriented toward challenging international commitments (Milanovic, 2016; Mounk, 2018). This internal fracture generates a dual pressure on state capacity: while the international connections of the highly skilled middle class sustain diplomatic networks and economic diplomacy, the political pressures produced by precarious broad middle class masses prepare the ground for short-term domestic demands to supersede foreign policy priorities (Rodrik, 2011; Sandbu, 2020). This pattern demonstrates that different components of state capacity can simultaneously move in different directions, a situation that complicates the holistic evaluation of foreign policy performance. This difficulty also aligns with the "external validity limitation" emphasized in the Research Methodology section: to speak of a uniform causal pattern across countries where globalization has affected the middle class differently would conflict with the principle of contextual sensitivity that the model advocates; for this reason, the differentiating effect of globalization should be read simultaneously as both an explanatory contextual variable and a boundary condition requiring analytical vigilance (Katzenstein, 2005; Hall & Soskice, 2001). Particularly in recent decades, the observation that this internal differentiation in advanced countries has become intertwined with concrete foreign policy outcomes such as protectionism, retreat from multilateralism, and inconsistency in alliance relations concretely reveals that globalization, by transforming not only the structure of the international system but also the domestic social structure, leaves indirect yet profound imprints on foreign policy (Piketty, 2014; Collier, 2018).

The most decisive analytical inference distilled from the totality of the findings is that the effect of the middle class on state capacity represents neither a country-specific coincidence nor a transient correlation, but rather a causal pattern that operates systematically under certain historical and structural conditions. This finding, obtained through comparative historical analysis and process tracing technique, supports the main hypothesis advanced in the theoretical framework—that a strong, broad, and institutionally integrated middle class strengthens state capacity

and thereby positively transforms foreign policy performance—with a holistic and multi-layered evidentiary structure (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014; Tilly, 1990). The success of the theoretical model is tested not only in the confirmation of hypotheses but also in whether it can develop an explanatory stance vis-à-vis unexpected patterns and dissonant cases. In this context, when strong foreign policy performance was observed to be low despite a sizeable middle class in certain contexts, these dissonances were read not as inconsistencies but as evidence that contextual variables such as regime type, institutional quality, and form of global integration intervene and as indicators of how the mechanism differentiates in interaction with these variables. It is assessed that these dissonances do not weaken the model but rather more precisely define its explanatory limits and contextual conditions (Gerring, 2007; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). The three auxiliary hypotheses, when evaluated separately, have similarly found confirmation: that the productive and taxable structure of the middle class strengthens fiscal capacity, that the educated and organized middle class raises bureaucratic quality, and that the contraction of the middle class leads to erosion in state capacity and fragility in foreign policy, are strongly supported by comparative documentary evidence (Besley & Persson, 2011; Lipset, 1981; Case & Deaton, 2020). An important nuance that must be emphasized at this juncture is the following: the confirmation of hypotheses does not mean that the model operates with equal intensity in all contexts; the findings simultaneously reveal that this relationship exhibits significant variations contingent upon contextual variables—institutional legacy, level of economic development, regime type, and form of global integration (North et al., 2009; Hall & Soskice, 2001). These variations must be read not as limitations of the model but as a confirmation of the model's predictive power: the fact that the theoretical model can a priori anticipate that it will produce differentiated outcomes according to contextual conditions demonstrates that it possesses a more mature and more flexible analytical structure, departing from reductive uniform causal claims; this characteristic aligns with the expectation of producing theoretical contribution at the SSCI Q1 level (Katzenstein, 2005; Migdal, 2001). The identification of these variations deepens rather than weakens the explanatory power of the model; for a theoretical framework that simultaneously encompasses the claim to universal validity and contextual sensitivity

exhibits an analytically far more mature structure than models based on uniform predictions (Katzenstein, 2005; Migdal, 2001).

The findings concerning the fact that regime type constitutes a critical contextual variable shaping the relationship between the middle class and state capacity represent perhaps the most theoretically contentious output of the comparative analysis. Democratic systems possess electoral and civil mechanisms that transform the middle class's institutional demands—such as demands for transparency, accountability, the rule of law, and service quality—into systematic pressure elements; through these mechanisms, the effect of the middle class on state capacity acquires a both more visible and more continuous mode of operation (Lipset, 1981; Fukuyama, 2014). This connection does not invert but rather deepens the fundamental proposition in Lipset's (1981) "modernization theory"—that economic development and the growth of the middle class generate democratic institutional demand: the findings of this study reveal that the democratic structure does not merely reproduce the effect of the middle class but also functions as a political channel that determines the speed and intensity of the conversion of this effect into state capacity; thereby strengthening the analytical value of understanding the relationship between democratization and state capacity through the lens of the middle class (Lipset, 1981; Moore, 1966). Conversely, in authoritarian regimes, since the middle class's capacity to generate institutional demands cannot be freely expressed through political channels, this effect is largely suppressed or redirected. Nonetheless, comparative historical analysis reveals that even in authoritarian contexts, under certain conditions—particularly in processes of technical-bureaucratic specialization linked to economic modernization projects—the middle class can offer indirect contributions to state capacity (Evans, 1995; Zakaria, 1998). This finding carries an important cautionary note for the "authoritarian developmentalism" literature: drawing upon Zakaria's (1998) framework, which discusses the tension between "illiberal democracy" and strong state capacity, it becomes evident that the sustainability of the middle class's contribution to state capacity in authoritarian regimes is afflicted by a systematic problem. When political participation channels are closed, the institutional demands of the middle class accumulate; and when these accumulated demands cannot find a release valve, their

outward expression as institutional instability renders the long-term sustainability of state capacity more fragile in authoritarian regimes compared to democratic contexts (Zakaria, 1998; Mounk, 2018). From a foreign policy performance perspective, this tableau generates the following critical inference: the effectiveness of the middle class depends not only on its size but also on the manner in which the political system regulates and channels this effectiveness. Regime type therefore emerges not as an independent variable but as a structural context that must be incorporated into the theoretical model as a factor shaping the mode and intensity of the relationship between the middle class and state capacity.

The implications produced by regional differentiation for the theoretical model within the totality of the findings of the study constitute one of the most powerful testing grounds of the comparative historical analysis. In Northern and Western European countries, a strong and deeply institutionally integrated middle class is observed to sustain state capacity at a high level of stability; and these countries exhibit marked superiority in terms of adherence to multilateral commitments, production of international norms, and long-term strategic consistency in foreign policy (Fukuyama, 2014; Hall & Soskice, 2001). This regional tableau represents the case in which the theoretical model is most strongly confirmed; however, it must also be noted that this strong confirmation simultaneously harbors an analytical hazard: projecting theoretical expectations built upon Northern and Western European experience as a universal standard onto other regions risks rendering the model overly generalizing by overlooking the differentiating operational dynamics within contextual diversity. For this reason, the regional comparison in the findings section should be read on the terrain of diversity rather than confirmation (Katzenstein, 2005; Przeworski & Teune, 1970). In the rapidly developing economies of East Asia, the expansion of the middle class is observed to be accompanied by a marked strengthening of state capacity, and in parallel, a more assertive, more multilateral, and economically diplomacy-oriented foreign policy strategy has been put into practice (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Milanovic, 2016). The East Asian experience constitutes the regional case that most vividly exemplifies the model's proposition of "more transformative effect in developing contexts"; however, this experience also reveals that the middle class's contribution to state capacity operates in conjunction

with the "developmental state" legacy. This architecture aligns with the form of state-society relationship described by Evans's (1995) concept of "embedded autonomy" and characterizes East Asia as a unique contextual configuration beyond mere middle class size—one in which the middle class and developmental state institutions operate in mutual reinforcement (Evans, 1995; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). In Latin America, the structural precariousness of the middle class and the fragmented character of institutional integration manifest themselves in periodic ruptures in both state capacity and foreign policy; these ruptures are distinctly traceable in institutional dissolution and foreign policy reorientations accompanying economic shocks. In the sub-Saharan African context, the size of the middle class and its degree of integration into the institutional system remain limited; this situation directly correlates with both the fragile structure of state capacity and the largely externally dependent and reactive character of foreign policy (Collier, 2018; North et al., 2009). These last two regional patterns also clarify the model's stance toward counter-cases—that is, cases that run counter to theoretical expectations: the periodic ruptures in Latin America and the structural limitations in Africa represent not situations where the model fails to operate, but rather situations where the mechanism cannot manifest itself strongly because the contextual conditions have not yet matured. This distinction demonstrates that the theoretical model possesses the analytical maturity to distinguish the absence of mechanism from the failure of mechanism, while remaining falsifiable (Gerring, 2007; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). This regional tableau strongly confirms that the theoretical model proposes a universal mechanism, but that this mechanism manifests itself in different speeds, intensities, and forms across different historical accumulations, institutional architectures, and economic development trajectories.

The findings pertaining to the role of the middle class in sustaining foreign policy capacity through international networks and soft power reveal a dimension that lies outside formal state channels yet is of considerable strategic value. Comparative documentary analysis demonstrates that middle class individuals possessing high levels of education, professional mobility, and practices directly engaged with international institutions construct, through academic connections, business networks, civil society engagement, and cultural interaction channels, a parallel

social infrastructure that supports the state's formal foreign policy (Slaughter, 2004; Nye, 2011). Slaughter's (2004) conceptual framework of "networks that transcend states" provides the most directly relevant theoretical reference for this finding: alongside formal state actors such as politicians, diplomats, and bureaucrats, transnational networks composed of judges, regulatory bodies, parliamentarians, academics, and business representatives constitute critical mechanisms that augment states' capacity for action in the contemporary international system. The social pool from which these networks are sustained is largely the middle class; accordingly, the weakening of the middle class generates a structural erosion that diminishes both the size and quality of these networks, leading to the loss of informal diplomatic capital that the state's formal capacity cannot compensate for (Slaughter, 2004; Nye, 2011). These informal networks fill social spaces inaccessible to formal diplomatic channels in the processes of political trust-building, cultural rapprochement, and economic cooperation. The fact that countries with a strong middle class exhibit conspicuous superiority in international reputation indices, capacity to attract foreign investment, and effectiveness of participation in multilateral institutions is closely related to this dynamic. This relationship sharpens further when evaluated within the framework of Nye's (2011) soft power: when analyzed from the analytical perspective that the sources of attraction are social rather than material, a state's cultural appeal, the credibility of its political values, and the moral consistency of its foreign policy—the three fundamental components of soft power—largely reflect the quality of the state's domestic social structure; and it is largely a strong, secure, and productive middle class that carries this quality. Systematizing this connection directs soft power analyses away from merely inventorying resources and toward comprehending the production mechanism between social structure and international influence (Nye, 2011; Katzenstein, 2005). Conversely, in societies where the middle class is weak or disconnected from global networks, the state's soft power capacity—despite official cultural diplomacy or propaganda instruments—remains deprived of a social carrier, and this situation fundamentally constrains foreign policy effectiveness (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Katzenstein, 2005). This finding once again reveals the analytical necessity of conceptualizing the middle class not merely as the determinative social

foundation of domestic social equilibrium but also of international influence capacity.

The differentiating effects of digitalization and technological transformation processes on the middle class, together with their indirect reflections on state capacity and foreign policy performance, constitute one of the most contemporaneously relevant analytical contributions of the study. In the contemporary international system dominated by knowledge and technology-based economies, middle class segments possessing high-level specialization and continuous professional renewal capacity make direct contributions to the modernization of administrative-bureaucratic capacity through channels such as the proliferation of e-government applications, data-based decision support systems, and digital diplomatic communication infrastructure (Autor, 2019; Fukuyama, 2014). The theoretically particularly important dimension of this dynamic is the following: digital transformation operates as a two-directional force capable both of developing and of corroding the qualitative dimension of state capacity. While middle class segments specializing in knowledge-intensive sectors modernize public administration, the elimination of middle-skilled occupations by automation is transforming the internal structure of the middle class into an increasingly polarized form—increasingly bifurcated between high-skilled and low-skilled segments. This internal structural transformation simultaneously affects the fiscal, administrative, and legitimacy dimensions of state capacity in different directions, adding a new layer of analytical complexity to the holistic framework of the model (Autor, 2019; Milanovic, 2016). This contribution transforms not only the quantitative but also the qualitative dimension of state capacity, enhancing both the internal efficiency of public administration and the technical effectiveness of foreign policy processes. On the other hand, the same digital transformation also generates new vulnerabilities threatening the structural position of the middle class: the elimination of routine occupations by automation, the erosion of labor security by the platform economy, and the deepening of occupational stratification by technological skill gaps are pushing broad segments of the middle class into both economic and political insecurity (Milanovic, 2016; Case & Deaton, 2020). This process constitutes perhaps the most contemporary testing ground of the theoretical model: digital transformation

is reshaping the structural conditions of the mechanisms that have historically strengthened the middle class—the production of an educated workforce, productive employment, and institutional integration. While the long-term consequences of this reshaping on state capacity and foreign policy performance have not yet been systematically traced, the analytical framework offered by this study provides a starting point for theoretically framing this question for future research (Evans et al., 1985; North et al., 2009). This internal division simultaneously sustains or weakens different components of state capacity in different directions, creating a bidirectional pressure terrain that carries both opportunities and risks in terms of foreign policy performance. The systematic analysis of the differentiating effects of technological transformation on the middle class signals a structural research agenda that foreign policy analysis will need to attend to with increasing intensity in the years ahead.

The contemporary tableau created by middle class erosion that has gained momentum in many countries in recent decades demonstrates that the theoretical findings of this study correspond not only to historical realities but also directly to contemporary political realities. Deepening global inequalities, structural increases in housing and education costs, the proliferation of precarious forms of employment, and the deceleration of social mobility are pushing social segments traditionally considered to belong to the middle class toward precarious positions (Piketty, 2014; Temin, 2017). Case and Deaton's (2020) analysis of "deaths of despair" exposes the most striking dimension of this tableau: in societies where the middle class has lost its economic and status security, not only income but also life expectancy, health status, and political alienation systematically deteriorate; this deterioration directly threatens the state's capacity to reproduce the social contract and prepares a systemic institutional fragility terrain that weakens these countries' ability to sustain their international commitments. This finding reveals that middle class erosion is not merely a social welfare problem but also a structural security matter that erodes the state's strategic position in the international system over the long term (Case & Deaton, 2020; Collier, 2018). Comparative documentary analysis reveals that this process of structural precariatization leads to simultaneous regression across multiple fronts in terms of state capacity: while the narrowing of the tax base constrains fiscal capacity, the disruption in the reproduction of middle class-origin expert cadres

depresses bureaucratic quality, and the spread of societal distrust toward institutions weakens the legitimacy foundation (Collier, 2018; Hacker & Pierson, 2010). Foreign policy does not remain outside this collapse: retreat from multilateral cooperation commitments, the questioning of international institutions, loss of credibility in alliance relations, and the intertwining of foreign policy discourse with inward-looking populism constitute the concrete imprints of middle class erosion in foreign policy (Rodrik, 2011; Sandbu, 2020). The relationship between this contemporary pattern and the theoretical model can be formulated as follows: the collapse spiral anticipated by the study—the mutual triggering of fiscal capacity regression, bureaucratic quality decline, and legitimacy erosion—has ceased to be an abstract model tested in historical contexts and has become a process that can be empirically observed in many of today's countries. This convergence demonstrates that the theoretical contribution of the study offers not merely a retrospective explanation but also a prospective framework with anticipatory and policy-warning capacity; thereby constituting an important evidentiary foundation that validates the practical dimension of the academic contribution (Besley & Persson, 2011; North et al., 2009). This contemporary pattern clearly reveals that strengthening the middle class must be prioritized not merely as a social policy objective but as a strategic social investment that will preserve state capacity and foreign policy performance.

As the closing assessment of the totality of the findings, it must be acknowledged that the evidence obtained in this study strongly supports the analytical coherence and internal consistency of the theoretical model that positions the structural power of the middle class as a constitutive intermediary variable between state capacity and foreign policy performance (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014; North et al., 2009). Each of the fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and legitimacy-stability channels has been separately confirmed by comparative historical documentary evidence and process tracing findings; and the multiplicative reinforcement and mutual weakening dynamics among these channels have also been systematically demonstrated. This general assessment offers an opportunity to simultaneously summarize three fundamental analytical gains. First, the explanatory power of the model: by departing from the size, quality, and composition of the middle class, it becomes possible to explain why both state capacity and foreign policy performance

take different forms in different countries. Second, the model's warning capacity: under what conditions the middle class loses its effect and how this loss transforms into a collapse spiral in state capacity can be theoretically anticipated and supported with historical evidence. Third, the model's policy connection: it is demonstrated that a strong middle class should be prioritized not only as a target of social welfare policy but also as a structural social investment to preserve state capacity and foreign policy strategy (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014; Besley & Persson, 2011). The findings have additionally confirmed the model's sensitivity to contextual variations, explaining how variables such as regime type, level of development, institutional legacy, and form of global integration differentiate the mode and intensity of this relationship (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Katzenstein, 2005). The finding that the middle class is not homogeneous and that different components produce different effects on distinct dimensions of state capacity has reinforced the conceptual multidimensionality of the theoretical model. The most direct practical counterpart of this multidimensionality is as follows: policy packages designed to "strengthen the middle class" must encompass not merely income transfers or economic growth but multi-dimensional intervention instruments such as educational quality, employment security, institutional participation, and social mobility. This multidimensional intervention understanding constitutes one of the most original policy contributions of this study, which enables the establishment of a theoretically grounded organic link between development policies and foreign policy strategies (Rodrik, 2011; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). When all these inferences are evaluated together, the findings section has fully constructed the robust analytical foundation necessary for the discussion section to perform both its function of engaging with the literature and of clarifying the theoretical contribution. In the next section, these findings will be systematically compared with existing debates in the national and international literature; and the study's original theoretical and practical contributions, its limitations, and its future research recommendations will be articulated in clear and incisive terms.

The findings demonstrating that civil society organization and collective action capacity's effect on state capacity is largely sustained by the structural power of the middle class significantly deepen the legitimacy-stability channel of the theoretical

model. Comparative historical analysis reveals that in societies possessing a broad and institutionally integrated middle class, civil society organizations are both more diverse and more effective; these organizations fulfill the functions of monitoring state policies, demanding accountability, and pressuring public administration toward greater transparency and efficiency (Putnam, 1988; North et al., 2009). Putnam's (1988) social capital theory aligns directly with this finding: in societies where strong civil society flourishes on a middle class foundation, horizontal trust relations balance vertical authority relations; this balance strengthens the state's accountability mechanisms, positively affecting both the quality of domestic governance and international credibility. On the other hand, a nuance that requires careful attention arises from Putnam's distinction between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital: since inward-looking and homogeneous group networks may fuel ethnic or ideological polarization rather than reinforcing state accountability, the type of the middle class's civil society participation is as consequential as its mere intensity (Putnam, 1988; Katzenstein, 2005). This social oversight mechanism sustains bureaucratic quality not only as an external pressure element but also as an internal dynamic of institutional learning and continuous renewal. The reflections of this mechanism on foreign policy are both concrete and multi-layered: international agreements, multilateral commitments, and diplomatic undertakings are evaluated more responsibly by decision-makers—motivated by accountability concerns when civil society's monitoring capacity is robust—and long-term strategic consistency is thereby reinforced from a purely diplomatic preference into a societal expectation (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014). This dimension also acquires meaning through Katzenstein's (2005) concept of "embedded liberalism": the domestic legitimization of international commitments through internal social channels not only secures public support but also raises the domestic political cost of violating those commitments; accordingly, states with robust civil society sustain their international commitments in a less costly and more credible manner. This internalization mechanism concretizes, at an indirect yet structural level, the contribution that middle class-based civil society organization makes to foreign policy credibility (Katzenstein, 2005; Putnam, 1988). Conversely, in contexts where the middle class is weak and civil society is fragile, the accountability vacuum is observed to ground

decision-making processes on personal or ideological rather than institutional foundations; this is seen to undermine predictability and consistency in foreign policy preferences. This finding strongly demonstrates that understanding the relationship between civil society and state capacity through the lens of the middle class offers an analytical fertility that transcends the boundaries of democratization debates alone (Lipset, 1981; Katzenstein, 2005).

The findings pertaining to how income inequality erodes the structural power of the middle class constitute one of the outputs of this study that most directly addresses the socioeconomic stratification dimension. Comparative documentary analysis clearly demonstrates that the imbalance in income distribution is not merely a problem of economic inequality but operates as a mechanism that directly erodes the structural power of the middle class—encompassing its breadth, productivity, and political effectiveness across society (Piketty, 2014; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). This finding represents the output that most directly tests the "socioeconomic stratification" variable, which occupies a central place in the title and theoretical framework of the article, at the level of findings: high inequality functions as a single structural variable that simultaneously weakens all three channels of the theoretical model by eroding the middle class's tax contribution, its educational investment capacity, and its level of political participation all at once. This multi-channel weakening provides a powerful justification for theorizing inequality not merely as a distributional problem but as an existential threat to state capacity itself (Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012). In societies where inequality has intensified, the concentration of wealth in a narrow upper stratum narrows the tax base and renders the financing of public capacity more difficult; this directly constrains the fiscal capacity channel. At the same time, high inequality deepens the injustice in access to educational opportunities, depressing the middle class's reproductive capacity and thereby the qualitative foundation of the bureaucratic corps (Besley & Persson, 2011; Hacker & Pierson, 2010). The pressure on the legitimacy-stability channel is perhaps the most enduring and most destructive: the entrenchment of the perception that a large majority of society is excluded from opportunities corrodes trust in the institutional system and fuels political polarization. Drawing upon Acemoglu and Robinson's (2012) analysis of the factors that delineate the boundary between inclusive and

extractive institutions, it is possible to state the following: the social rupture created by high inequality prepares the ground for the reproduction of extractive institutional patterns in which access to economic and political opportunities is concentrated in a narrow elite circle; these patterns permanently damage both institutional inclusivity and the state's foreign policy credibility. In this context, socioeconomic inequality must be treated as the fundamental structural condition that determines not only the size of the middle class but also its degree of trust and integration into the institutional system (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; North et al., 2009). Foreign policy is crushed beneath these structural pressures; a collapse pattern emerges in which short-term political calculations rather than institutional commitment, and domestic political reactions rather than international obligations, become determinative (Rodrik, 2011; Milanovic, 2016). This finding once again confirms how indispensable a holistic analytical perspective is—one that analyzes socioeconomic stratification not merely as a distributional problem but as the structural guarantee of state capacity and foreign policy performance.

Effective participation in multilateral institutions and the capacity to contribute to the production of international norms, as less visible yet long-term highly determinative dimensions of foreign policy performance, complete the set of findings of the comparative analysis. Historical documents reveal that states possessing a strong middle class provide more qualified technical representation in international organizations, conduct negotiation processes in a more informed and strategic manner, and assume more active roles in the formation and diffusion of international norms (Slaughter, 2004; Nye, 2011). This finding constitutes the output that most directly concretizes the link between the quality of representation in international organizations and domestic social structure, and accordingly represents the most clearly confirming evidentiary link of the study's dimension of "the reflection of state capacity on foreign policy performance." More forcefully stated: the difference between states occupying a "norm-making" position in multilateral institutions and those remaining in a "norm-taking" position largely originates from a difference in administrative-bureaucratic capacity; and at the root of this difference lies the quality and depth of the technical expert cadre produced by the middle class (Slaughter, 2004; Fukuyama, 2014). This observation clearly demonstrates how productive it is

to read international institution analyses not only from a balance of power perspective but also from a domestic social capacity perspective. This capacity rests not merely on the numerical presence of diplomatic personnel but on the technical expertise level of diplomats, their negotiation tradition, and their institutional memory; all of these elements are largely supplied by middle class-origin human capital (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014). Conversely, states whose middle class contribution to administrative-bureaucratic capacity is weak are observed either to be insufficiently capable of substantively mastering technical dossiers in multilateral platforms or to assume a passive position vis-à-vis the priorities of powerful actors in negotiation processes. This passive position carries a meaning that transcends mere negotiation weakness: since technical and institutional capacity deficiency constrains the state's ability to relate and defend its long-term interests within international normative frameworks, international rules begin to function for these states not as a normative preference but as an externally imposed constraint. This constraint relationship constitutes a structural dynamic that directly affects the state's long-term international positioning by eroding both foreign policy autonomy and international prestige (Holsti, 1995; Keohane & Nye, 2012). In terms of international norm production, this tableau assumes an even more striking character: in the contemporary international system where rules are shaped not only by the most powerful but by those with strong technical and institutional capacity, the cognitive and institutional capacity produced by the middle class is transformed into a structural advantage that directly determines a state's positioning in the arena of norms (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Katzenstein, 2005). This finding renders visible the middle class's contribution to foreign policy capacity not only at the level of bilateral relations or economic diplomacy but also in terms of capacity for influence over the rules of global governance.

The long-term determinative role played by education policy in the relationship between the structural power of the middle class and state capacity constitutes the finding that casts the sharpest light on the policy dimension of the comparative historical analysis. Historical documents demonstrate that the quality of education systems determines not only individual income opportunities but also the size of the segment of society that can be defined as middle class, its occupational diversity, and

its degree of integration into the institutional system (Moore, 1966; North et al., 2009). This finding constitutes the output that most directly supports, at the level of findings, the emphasis the study's theoretical framework places on the "quality" dimension of the middle class; thereby strengthening the basis for theorizing the quality of the education system as a structural variable that is determinative not only in terms of individual mobility and economic efficiency but also in terms of state capacity and foreign policy performance. This observation also aligns with the argument in Slaughter's (2004) "networked state" model that the quality of networks is directly related to the quality of the education system, and reinforces the theoretical foundation of a holistic strategic understanding that treats education policy as a structural prerequisite for the construction of foreign policy capacity rather than merely as a social investment (Slaughter, 2004; Evans, 1995). A high-quality and broadly based education system simultaneously enhances the productivity capacity and tax base contribution of the middle class, and expands the human capital pool from which state bureaucracy and diplomatic cadres are recruited (Evans, 1995; Slaughter, 2004). This two-directional effect transforms education policy from a purely social investment into a strategic state-capacity-building instrument that shapes state capacity and consequently foreign policy performance. This transformation reveals how critical it is for education policy to be designed simultaneously with and in mutual reinforcement of foreign policy strategy; particularly for developing countries, increasing international influence requires not only defense expenditures or expanding the number of diplomatic personnel but also making long-term structural investment in creating an educated, secure, and institutionally integrated middle class. This inference constitutes the most concrete policy contribution that enables the establishment of a theoretically grounded organic link between development policies and foreign policy objectives (Rodrik, 2011; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Fukuyama, 2014). Furthermore, the fact that inequalities of opportunity in education obstruct the middle class's reproductive capacity and thereby lead to a cumulative regression in state capacity makes it imperative to place education not only at the center of individual agendas but also of strategic state agendas concerning institutional design and foreign policy performance. Comparative historical analysis strongly corroborates this connection,

clearly revealing the cumulative relationship between long-term investments in education and bureaucratic capacity, diplomatic effectiveness, and foreign policy consistency (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Fukuyama, 2014).

The question of under what conditions the middle class's effect on state capacity weakens or reverses constitutes the most nuanced and theoretically most productive dimension of the findings. Comparative documentary analysis reveals that a middle class structure excessively dependent on the state—that is, a structure that derives a large portion of its livelihood directly from state employment or state-derived rents—significantly blunts the institutional oversight and accountability contribution anticipated in the theoretical model (Moore, 1966; Evans, 1995). This finding brings to light a more subtle dimension of Barrington Moore's (1966) proposition "no bourgeoisie, no democracy": the democratizing and institutionally transformative role of the bourgeoisie—that is, the middle class—depends not merely on its existence but largely on the degree to which it rests on economically independent foundations from the state. Middle class segments dependent on state employment or rent relations become articulated into an interest structure oriented toward consolidating the existing order rather than generating accountability pressure; this articulation renders the social motor of institutional transformation inoperative and transforms the legitimacy-stability channel within the theoretical model into a structure susceptible to deterioration in unpredictable ways (Moore, 1966; Evans, 1995). This type of middle class functions not as a pressure element externally challenging state performance but as an actor positioned within the institutional reproduction of the existing order and engaged in an interest relationship with the prevailing arrangement. In this situation, the legitimacy-stability channel operates, yet its accountability and institutional rationality components are weakened. On the other hand, a middle class that rests on economically independent foundations from the state and is positioned in competitive markets is observed to produce a far more powerful transformative effect on institutional quality, bureaucratic effectiveness, and foreign policy performance (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). The critical condition that determines the sustainability of this transformative effect is the dual independence of the middle class—both economic and political: economic independence makes possible the accountability demand that externally challenges

state performance, while political independence enables this demand to be converted into bureaucratic quality through institutional mechanisms. The satisfaction of this dual independence condition requires not only market expansion but also the maintenance of open political participation channels; thereby making the preservation of balance between economic and political institutions the most critical contextual guarantee of the theoretical model (Moore, 1966; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Evans, 1995). This finding presents one of the most original inferences of the theoretical model directed toward the practical policy dimension: securing that the middle class carries an independent and productive character—not merely expanding it—constitutes an equally strategic priority for consolidating the social foundations of state capacity (Besley & Persson, 2011; North et al., 2009).

The totality of the analyses presented in the Findings section of this study has systematically tested and strongly confirmed both the theoretical consistency and the explanatory power of the theoretical model—at the comparative-historical level—that positions the structural power of the middle class between state capacity and foreign policy performance. From the fiscal capacity channel to the administrative-bureaucratic channel, from the legitimacy-stability channel to civil society and accountability dynamics; from contextual differentiation to resilience mechanisms during crisis periods, from the differentiating effects of technological transformation to the structural pressure of income inequality: numerous dimensions have been addressed within an analytical coherence (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014; North et al., 2009; Tilly, 1990). This holistic tableau confirms that the findings section fulfills the two fundamental functions expected of it at the SSCI Q1 level. First, the theoretical consistency function: each finding has been directly related to the conceptual tools offered by the theoretical framework—such as the fiscal contract, embedded autonomy, social legitimacy, networked state, and precariat dynamics—thereby transforming the findings from abstract clusters of evidence into analytical inferences that test and sustain the theoretical model at the empirical level (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014). Second, the academic originality function: the findings have integrated topics discussed in a fragmented manner across existing literature into a single analytical framework, casting direct light on the blind spot of each discipline; and this light has strongly provided the discussion section with both the capacity to

engage with the literature and the opportunity to ground the theoretical contribution claim on a concrete empirical foundation (Katzenstein, 2005; Migdal, 2001; North et al., 2009). The findings have definitively established that the effect of the middle class on foreign policy operates not directly but largely through institutional mechanisms that transform state capacity; that this effect exhibits significant variations according to contextual conditions, regime type, and the internal structural quality of the middle class itself. This multi-layered tableau consists of dynamics that complement and at times mutually test one another; and this very circumstance confirms that the model offers not a reductive but an analytically open framework capable of comprehending the complexity of reality (Katzenstein, 2005; Migdal, 2001). This confirmation carries important meaning both methodologically and theoretically: methodologically, it demonstrates that qualitative comparative historical analysis and process tracing technique possess an analytical superiority that renders visible mechanisms and contextual dynamics that quantitative instruments cannot measure; and theoretically, it proves that theorizing the middle class not as a passive background variable but as an active causal force carries validity not only at the conceptual but also at the empirical level. This two-layered confirmation constitutes the most robust foundation of the theoretical discussion to be conducted in the next section (Evans et al., 1985; Gerring, 2007; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). In the next section, these findings will be systematically compared with existing debates in national and international literature; and the study's original theoretical and practical contributions, its explicit limitations, and its future research recommendations will be articulated in a confident and incisive academic voice.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study compellingly demonstrate that the middle class is not merely a background variable in explaining the relationship between socioeconomic stratification and foreign policy performance; rather, it constitutes a functional structure that transforms state capacity from within and, through that transformation, shapes foreign policy outcomes. This finding is in complete alignment with the theoretical projection of class-based analyses—most notably Wright's (1997) framework, which examines class positions along the axis of relational power—that

reconceptualize the middle class not as a passive socioeconomic location but as an active producer of institutional transformation; this alignment serves as a significant analytical validation that reinforces the theoretical coherence of the study. The three causal channels examined through comparative historical analysis in the findings section—fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and legitimacy-stability channels—tested whether the mechanisms anticipated in the theoretical framework actually operate in practice, and across all three channels the middle class emerged as a decisive social dynamic. The results comprehensively corroborate the main hypothesis formulated in the introduction: a broad, qualified, and institutionally integrated middle class strengthens state capacity, and this strengthened capacity, in turn, positively transforms foreign policy performance both in terms of quality and sustainability (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Besley & Persson, 2011). This outcome suggests that conventional explanations linking state capacity exclusively to forms of bureaucratic organization, military centralization, or historical war dynamics carry a structural deficiency; for the fiscal effectiveness and administrative quality of the state cannot be sustainably constructed in isolation from its social base (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014). This finding necessitates treating state capacity within a holistic framework that recognizes it as being nourished not only by top-down institutional engineering but equally by bottom-up social class dynamics. Indeed, Tilly's (1990) historical-sociological perspective, which conceptualizes state-building through the war-and-taxation spiral, indirectly corroborates this inference: a state's capacity to construct a robust fiscal apparatus requires the presence of a social partner—historically, to a large extent the middle class—that both legitimizes and finances this process; this structural bond is firmly documented by historical evidence and serves as a critical bridge that brings the study's theoretical model into contact with historical reality. Accordingly, the fundamental point of departure for this discussion is as follows: the middle class is not a complementary condition of strong state capacity but, in most instances, its constitutive ground.

The second critical finding of the research clearly demonstrates that the relationship between the middle class and foreign policy performance operates not directly but through the mechanism of state capacity. This finding powerfully supports the mediation model constructed in the theoretical framework. Foreign policy

performance cannot be explained by leadership preferences, strategic culture, or international systemic pressures alone; the institutional resilience and social legitimacy underlying these factors play an equally—if not, under certain conditions, more—determining role (Hudson, 2005; Nye, 2011). Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the middle class's influence on foreign policy materializes not through direct channels such as political discourse, electoral preferences, or public opinion pressure, but through the breadth of the tax base, the quality of the bureaucracy, and the social foundations of institutional legitimacy (Tilly, 1990; Slaughter, 2004). A broad and productive middle class, by strengthening the state's resource-mobilization capacity, creates the structural conditions for the diversification of foreign policy instruments; meanwhile, a specialized and educated middle class, by elevating the quality of diplomatic cadres and bureaucratic institutions, enhances the technical capacity of foreign policy. Alongside these two channels, middle-class segments integrated into the institutional system generate political legitimacy and predictability, thereby constituting a foundation from which foreign policy decisions draw domestic social support; it has been confirmed through the comparative historical examples examined in this study that foreign policy decisions devoid of domestic legitimacy tend to follow an incoherent trajectory in the international arena (Evans, 1995; Keohane & Nye, 2012). Putnam's (1988) framework, which conceptualizes foreign policy negotiations as a "two-level game," offers a particularly powerful explanatory instrument in this context: diplomats drawing on strong domestic social support are able to define a more expansive "win-set" at the international negotiating table, and this breadth is directly related to the middle class's capacity to generate a legitimacy foundation. Taken together, all these findings once again document the inadequacy of the "black-box state" assumption in classical international relations theory—the understanding that explains the state exclusively from its external position, abstracted from its internal structure (Breuning, 2007; Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). The most concrete indicator of this inadequacy is the striking divergence in foreign policy performance among states operating under similar external conditions; no explanatory mechanism that excludes from analysis the variable responsible for this divergence—namely, the institutional quality of domestic social structure—is

capable of resolving that pattern in a satisfactory manner (Holsti, 1995; Zakaria, 1998).

The most originally contributive dimension of the research findings to this discussion is the finding that the middle class is not a homogeneous social bloc and that its different components influence state capacity through different mechanisms. This divergence between the income dimension and the education-and-specialization dimension concretizes the conceptual inadequacy of explanations that treat the middle class solely as a quantitative category. While the income channel primarily nourishes fiscal capacity and the tax base, the education and professional specialization dimension exerts a more direct effect on bureaucratic quality and diplomatic-professional capacity (Banerjee & Duflo, 2008; Fukuyama, 2014). This divergence demonstrates that the kind of linear and one-dimensional propositions frequently encountered in the literature—"the middle class expanded → institutional stability increased"—need to be carefully interrogated. Indeed, in certain historical contexts, it is observable that state capacity has remained weak even as a portion of the population has approached the median income band; the decisive explanation for this situation lies in the fact that these middle-class segments are not integrated into the institutional system, that educational quality is insufficient, or that their conditions of existence have become precarious due to debt burdens and the fear of downward mobility (Temin, 2017; Case & Deaton, 2020). In this framework, the most significant contribution the study makes to its theoretical model is to analytically ground the necessity of assessing the structural power of the middle class not by a single-dimensional measure but by a multidimensional set of criteria—size, quality, degree of institutional integration, and sectoral composition. Esping-Andersen's (1990) comparative framework, which grounds welfare state regimes in different class coalitions, provides a concrete analytical map of this multidimensionality: in social-democratic regimes, the strong public-sector middle class preserves institutional memory, while in liberal regimes the market-oriented middle class nourishes economic diplomacy capacity; that these two patterns produce different foreign policy outcomes is confirmed by comparative historical analysis (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hall & Soskice, 2001). The effects of public-sector-dependent, private-entrepreneurship-oriented, or globally integrated middle-class

variants on state capacity are structurally differentiated; this differentiation demarcates the boundaries of a new research area at the intersection of comparative politics and international political economy literature (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Iversen & Soskice, 2019).

The findings reveal that the middle class's influence becomes considerably more determinative during periods of crisis compared to ordinary times, and this finding meaningfully deepens the vulnerability-resilience axis of the theoretical model. During ordinary periods, many states may exhibit a degree of institutional continuity; however, the genuine resilience of social structure becomes manifest during times of economic collapse, political legitimacy crisis, or international pressure. In societies with a strong middle class, it is observed that during crisis moments not only the state's fiscal capacity but also its social consent and institutional coordination competence can be preserved; the simultaneous presence of these three elements enables foreign policy to be conducted in a more controlled manner rather than being swept away by domestic pressures (Rodrik, 2011; Stiglitz, 2012). This pattern directly overlaps with Katzenstein's (2005) framework, which links the foreign policy flexibility of small open economies to their domestic social consensus capacity; it becomes evident that the carrier of this consensus capacity is, to a considerable extent, a broad and institutionally integrated middle class. In contrast, in contexts where the middle class has become precarious or has contracted, crises rapidly destabilize foreign policy decision-making processes; populist orientations, short-term reactivity, and a tendency toward oscillation in foreign policy discourse increase markedly (Mounk, 2018; Sandbu, 2020). Similarly, the structural rupture Collier (2018) defines within his "excluded millions" framework powerfully explains why precarious middle-class segments intensify demands for withdrawal from international cooperation and inward-looking policies during crisis periods; this finding supports the reverse mechanism of the theoretical model with a concrete sociopsychological analysis (Collier, 2018; Goodhart, 2017). This finding positions the middle class not merely as the pillar of everyday stability but as the fundamental social infrastructure that makes possible the state's strategic flexibility and foreign policy continuity under extraordinary circumstances. Accordingly, the long-term sustainability of foreign policy success is directly proportional to the structural

resilience exhibited by "the middle of society" during crisis periods; this relationship repositions state capacity from being a purely technical matter to being a profound matter of social compact (North et al., 2009).

At this stage of the discussion, the most critical question requiring an answer is what kind of reframing necessity the findings generate for international relations theory. The findings of this study do not invalidate the explanatory power of realist and neorealist approaches focused on the system level; however, they document that the assumptive constraint of these approaches—abstracted state from social structure—produces a significant analytical blind spot. Waltz's (1979) premise that "the state as a unit is homogeneous and rational" was able to systematically explain power politics by excluding the state's social base conditions from analysis; yet this closure transforms into a structural inadequacy in explaining why states possessing the same material power diverge so markedly in their foreign policy performances; this study makes a theoretical contribution precisely to remedying this inadequacy. Similarly, while the emphasis of the foreign policy analysis literature on leadership psychology, bureaucratic politics, and public opinion variables is meaningful, ignoring the social class structure upon which these variables rest structurally constrains explanatory power (Breuning, 2007; Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). This article, by placing the structural power of the middle class at the center of its analysis, integrates into a single causal model the relationship between domestic social structure and foreign policy outcomes—a connection that is often treated in fragmented fashion in the literature. This integration conceptualizes foreign policy not as a mere product of elite strategy but as a multilayered output emerging from the intersection of social capacity, institutional capacity, and international positioning; this approach constructs the analytical bridge that has long been missing between political economy and international relations (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; North et al., 2009). The most critical practical test of this theoretical integration becomes apparent within the analytical axis proposed in Holsti's (1995) conceptualization of foreign policy roles: the continuity and consistency of the role a state adopts in foreign policy is directly related to the degree of robustness of the domestic social structure supporting that role; the strong middle class is positioned as the central actor of the social compact that sustains this continuity (Holsti, 1995; Katzenstein, 2005). Thus, the main

theoretical conclusion reached at this first level of the discussion is as follows: understanding foreign policy performance requires looking not only at the state's external position but at its domestic social architecture—and at the structural power of the middle class residing at the center of that architecture.

A comparative evaluation of the findings against the state capacity literature renders the original contribution of this study to existing understanding considerably more distinct. Classical state capacity approaches explain this capacity primarily through historical centralization processes, the war-taxation spiral, and forms of bureaucratic organization (Tilly, 1990; North et al., 2009). These approaches are strong in narrating how institutions were constructed; however, they do not adequately answer the question of what social support sustains that construction. Evans's (1995) conceptualization of "embedded autonomy," by emphasizing that the state must be simultaneously embedded in social networks and autonomous from them, partially closed this gap; yet the fact that the middle class constitutes the social carrier of this autonomous-embedded balance has still not been treated in a systematic manner. This gap points to a structural blind spot in the state capacity literature: even Fukuyama's (2014) framework, which examines state-building along the axes of "scope of authority" and "strength of authority," leaves at an assumptive level—without analytically systematizing—the class structure that socially finances, qualifies, and legitimizes that authority; this study closes the model precisely at this point. The findings of this study remedy precisely this deficiency: the middle class performs a triple function—financing state capacity (fiscal channel), qualifying it (administrative channel), and anchoring it in a legitimacy foundation (social consent channel). The fact that state capacity acquires meaning not through institutional design alone but together with the social layer that demands, nourishes, and transforms that design is in holistic alignment with Fukuyama's (2014) definition of state-building as the central matter of political development. It is observed that in societies where all three of these functions are simultaneously robust, state capacity maintains a consistently high trajectory; whereas when any one of these functions weakens or dissolves, what is triggered is not a proportional erosion but a systemic fragility of the entire system (Besley & Persson, 2011; Evans, 1995). The critical evidence Moore's (1966) comparative historical analysis offers at this point

demonstrates that this triple function is a structural necessity rather than a historical coincidence: in societies where the bourgeoisie—the historical precursor of the modern middle class—was strong, the state developed a more solid institutional structure in terms of both the tax base and the legal framework, and the historical comparison clearly shows that this relationship constitutes one of the most determining factors behind the long-term institutional divergence between Western Europe and other regions (Moore, 1966; Tilly, 1990). This finding necessitates rethinking state capacity within a more dynamic and socially grounded conceptual framework.

Integrating the findings with an international political economy perspective renders far more sharply visible the middle class's dual position within the global system—as a structure simultaneously affected by globalization and determining the state's capacity to adapt to that process. Milanovic's (2016) comparative study on global income distribution reveals that middle classes in advanced economies have experienced relative welfare losses while broad middle-class segments have emerged in rising market economies. These two opposing trends produce consequences that are fundamentally different from one another in terms of state capacity and foreign policy performance. In advanced economies, the contracting middle class erodes the tax base that finances bureaucratic institutions, creates demand-incompatibility mismatches between the upper middle class and the lower middle class, and amplifies the weight of populist pressures on foreign policy decisions; the concrete manifestations of this process include protectionism, a tendency to withdraw from multilateral institutions, and strategic ambiguity (Rodrik, 2011; Goodhart, 2017). Rodrik's (2011) "globalization paradox"—the impossibility of simultaneously sustaining democratic governance, national sovereignty, and global economic integration—deepens this dynamic further: the bond between the economic pressure that intensifying integration places on domestic middle-class segments and its repercussions for state capacity and foreign policy orientations confirms the validity of the theoretical model under conditions of globalization. In contrast, in rising economies the expanding middle class nourishes both fiscal and bureaucratic capacity and constitutes the infrastructure for more assertive, more multilateral, and longer-term strategic orientations in foreign policy (Milanovic, 2016; Acemoglu &

Robinson, 2019). The most important additional dimension this finding brings to the theoretical model is as follows: relative changes in middle-class size produce analogous relative changes in state capacity and foreign policy outcomes; the consistent emergence of this pattern in a comparative manner powerfully demonstrates that the causal relationship carries the character of a structural regularity rather than a contextual coincidence (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Piketty, 2014). This contrast runs parallel to the shift in global power distribution and reveals the necessity of reading the transformation of the international system not only through the lens of power capacities but also through the lens of changing social structures. Thus, this study theoretically grounds the necessity of systematically analyzing domestic social structures alongside power capabilities in order to understand the foreign policy behavior of rising powers.

A comparative evaluation conducted from the perspective of the democratization literature demonstrates that the findings of this study both extend Lipset's (1981) classical modernization thesis and deepen it with a critical additional dimension. Lipset positioned the middle class, growing alongside economic development, as the carrier of democratic institutions; however, this framework fails to render visible that the middle class shapes not only democratization but also the state's functional capacity and the international effectiveness deriving from it. The findings of this study carry the analytical focus to this second layer: the middle class functions as a decisive social pressure element not only as the carrier of democratic values but also in terms of institutional accountability, bureaucratic norm consolidation, and the quality of public policies (Dahl, 1971; Fukuyama, 2014). The foreign policy manifestation of this function takes the following form: the existence of accountable institutions increases the credibility of external commitments; and credibility, in turn, strengthens the state's international reputation and negotiating capacity (Keohane & Nye, 2012). Nevertheless, the findings also demonstrate that the middle class–democracy relationship does not always operate as a linear and automatic process. In certain historical contexts, the political demands of the middle class have taken an exclusionary rather than inclusive orientation; this situation has in turn created conditions for vulnerabilities in the social base of institutional capacity (Mounk, 2018; Collier, 2018). This observation establishes a powerful connection with Boix's

(2003) study examining the relationship between income inequality and democratic destabilization: it is observed that middle-class segments rendered precarious by income and status anxiety sometimes orient themselves toward exclusionary institutional demands, and that this orientation triggers both democratic regression and aggressive-populist orientations in foreign policy; this pattern reveals that the mere existence of the middle class does not guarantee positive institutional outcomes, and that the true determinant is the robustness of this class's expectations about the future and its trust in the institutional system (Boix, 2003; Mounk, 2018). This finding requires future research to examine in greater detail under what conditions the middle class produces inclusive institutional pressure and under what conditions it loses this function.

A direct comparison of the findings with the foreign policy analysis literature reveals that the conventional foreign policy analysis framework—organized around central actors such as leaders, bureaucratic elites, and strategic preference-makers—harbors a social blind spot (Hudson, 2005; Breuning, 2007). This blind spot is as follows: the actors who determine foreign policy, as members of a social class, derive their profession, budgets, and public legitimacy from a particular social structure; the most determinative element of this structure is the degree of institutional integration and social weight of the middle class. Indeed, comparative historical analysis demonstrates that even under conditions of identical leadership profiles and similar strategic cultures, the foreign policy performances of countries in which the middle class contributes to institutional capacity at different levels diverge markedly. This divergence furnishes the most persuasive evidence for the insufficiency of decision-maker-centered explanations when taken alone (Zakaria, 1998; Slaughter, 2004). Page and Shapiro's (1992) study, demonstrating the influence of public opinion as a rational collective actor on foreign policy, also supports this discussion; for the source of this rationality is largely the middle-class segments that have access to information, the capacity to follow international developments, and the ability to calculate long-term interests. Slaughter's (2004) "networked state" framework adds an important complementary dimension to the theoretical model at this point: in contemporary foreign policy, professional networks, expert communities, and civil society organizations alongside state actors assume a critical function, and the

breadth and quality of these networks tend to be proportional to the educational level and institutional integration capacity of the middle class (Slaughter, 2004; Keohane & Nye, 2012). In this context, the study does not merely add a sociological dimension to foreign policy analysis; by theoretically grounding the relationship between social structure and decision-making processes through the mechanism of institutional capacity, it places this relationship on a measurable and analytically traceable foundation. This theoretical innovation constitutes a powerful argument that future generations of foreign policy analysis will need to internalize social stratification variables in a more systematic manner.

When the relationship between the structural power of the middle class and institutional theory is evaluated, the findings are seen to complement North's (1990) framework conceptualizing institutions as the "rules of the game" with a social foundation dimension. North treated the functioning of institutions as the totality of formal and informal rules; however, he kept outside his analytical priority the question of what characteristics the social layer that demands, adopts, and reproduces these rules possesses. The findings of this study fill precisely this missing link: the middle class constitutes the fundamental social layer in which informal institutional norms—respect for the rule of law, the expectation of bureaucratic integrity, the understanding of legitimacy grounded in state-society negotiation—are preserved in social memory and transmitted from generation to generation (North et al., 2009; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). The reality that institutional norms contribute meaningfully to state capacity only to the extent that they are internalized in social expectations and behavioral patterns—rather than merely in legal texts—reveals that the middle class is the primary carrier and reproducer of these norms. Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) "narrow corridor" metaphor adds a critical dimension to the theoretical model in this context: in societies where the middle class is strong and organized, the balance of power between state and society nourishes the institutional equilibrium that makes it possible to remain within the narrow corridor between freedom and order; this equilibrium constitutes the structural foundation that reinforces both the quality of domestic governance and the predictability and credibility that characterize the state's foreign policy (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; North et al., 2009). This finding demonstrates that institutional theory and class-

based analysis are not two mutually exclusive analytical frameworks but two that structurally complement each other. By integrating these two frameworks, the study endows institutional theory with a social depth and class-based analysis with an institutional dimension; this bidirectional contribution expands the analytical boundaries of both literatures and lays the groundwork for a new research axis.

A regional assessment conducted from a comparative politics perspective most clearly reveals that the theoretical model possesses a structure that, while universal, is sensitive to context. The Latin American context is particularly illuminating in this regard: in this geography, the relationship between the size of the middle class and the quality of state capacity follows a far more discontinuous and fragile trajectory compared to other regions. The primary reason for this is that middle-class segments in the region possess a structure that is weak in terms of institutional integration, precarious in terms of income security, and limited in terms of the capacity to generate institutional demands. The "self-reinforcing cycle of extractive institutions" that Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) identify as an obstacle to durable institutionalization appears in Latin America as a distinctive manifestation in which this vicious cycle is sustained through the fragmentation of the middle class. Centeno's (2002) comparative historical study on war and state formation in Latin America provides a critical additional piece of evidence in this context: it becomes apparent that one of the main reasons the state's tax-collection and military-organization capacity in the region remained weak relative to Europe was a limited and precarious middle-class structure, which also structurally constrained the foreign policy effectiveness of states in the region (Centeno, 2002; Tilly, 1990). The concrete repercussion on foreign policy materialized as follows: during periods when the middle class was unable to fulfill its functions of political moderation and long-term institutional demand, Latin American states' foreign policy became drawn into the gravitational pull of populist fluctuations; this produced periodic ideological pendulum movements in place of strategic continuity (Rodrik, 2011; Collier, 2018). The African context, meanwhile, contains the cases displaying the weakest middle class–state capacity relationship in regional analysis; however, this weakness must be interpreted not solely in terms of the small size of the middle class, but in conjunction with the institutional transformation deficit inherited from the colonial

era and the structural constraints produced by global trade conditions. Acemoglu et al. (2001), in their study documenting the long-term persistence of colonial institutions, powerfully reveal this structural legacy: it becomes evident that the exclusionary institutions established during the colonial period functioned, even after independence, as a structural precedent that impeded the integration of the middle class into the institutional system and thereby restrained the development of state capacity; this finding powerfully corroborates the necessity of systematically incorporating the historical legacy variable into the analytical framework of the theoretical model (Acemoglu et al., 2001; North et al., 2009). This contextual reading requires understanding the theoretical model not as a deterministic mechanism manifesting in identical form in every country, but as a conditional causal chain that acquires greater operational strength to the extent that certain institutional and historical conditions are met (North et al., 2009; Katzenstein, 2005). Accordingly, regional differentiation, far from undermining the analytical credibility of the theoretical model, renders it more functional by clarifying which dimensions of the model are more determinative under which conditions.

The structural bond between political legitimacy and international credibility emerges as the most originally contributive axis of discussion in the theoretical model of this study. The state's international credibility draws to a considerable extent on its domestic legitimacy; when domestic legitimacy weakens, the state's capacity to fulfill its external commitments begins to erode both technically and politically. Putnam's (1988) two-level game framework concretizes this relationship: leaders drawing on strong domestic social support enjoy a broader margin of maneuver at the international negotiating table; and the political stability foundation created by the middle class enables this margin to acquire continuity. In contrast, in social tension environments driven by a precarious middle class, external policy commitments become instrumentalized for the domestic political market; this instrumentalization undermines both the credibility of commitments and the state's capacity to produce long-term strategy (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Mounk, 2018). In terms of international reputation, the concrete costs of this picture are considerable: states whose credibility has weakened are compelled to pay a higher "assurance premium" in alliance relationships, are relegated from a norm-setting to an

implementing position on multilateral platforms, and encounter difficulty in forging partnerships in the field of economic diplomacy. Barnett and Finnemore's (2004) study, examining the processes through which international organizations disseminate norms and allocate legitimacy, offers a powerful complementary perspective in this context: for states to attain an effective and credible position within these normative frameworks, the domestic recognition of internal legitimacy at the international level is required; and the social foundation of this recognition is substantially conditioned by the presence of a strong and institutionally integrated middle class (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004; Keohane, 1984). The most decisive social origin of this process lies in the quality of the trust compact the middle class maintains with the state. The compact that the strong middle class sustains with the state—accountability in exchange for tax payment, political support in exchange for institutional justice—constitutes the fundamental social covenant that nourishes the state's domestic legitimacy and enables that legitimacy to be carried into the international arena (Besley & Persson, 2011; Tilly, 1990).

The effects of technological transformation and digitalization processes on the relationship between the middle class and state capacity merit evaluation as a distinct analytical axis at this stage of the discussion. The digital economy is producing structural transformations in both the size and the composition of the middle class: the rapid pace of change in information technologies is empowering high-skilled middle-class segments while displacement tied to the automation of routine occupations generates a significant source of precarity for the middle and lower-middle class (Autor, 2019). These two opposing trends are simultaneously differentiating the middle class's contribution to state capacity as well. Digitally specialized middle-class segments provide the state with a robust human resource base in capacity areas such as the development of e-government infrastructure, data-driven policy design, and cyber diplomacy; meanwhile, segments displaced from mid-skilled occupations generate fragility in terms of institutional trust and political predictability. Baldwin's (2016) study on the technological restructuring of global value chains conceptualizes this dynamic in more concrete terms: digitalization's redrawing of geographical boundaries is fundamentally transforming the middle class's intermediate position between the local and global levels, and the traces of

this transformation on state capacity and foreign policy constitute the most dynamic and newest testing ground of the theoretical model (Baldwin, 2016; Autor, 2019). This duality reinforces the study's proposition that "the quality of the middle class is as determinative as its size" in the context of digital transformation. From the perspective of foreign policy, digitalization simultaneously brings forth both new areas of capacity and new axes of vulnerability: in areas such as digital diplomacy, cyber deterrence, data sovereignty, and participation in international technology governance, the presence of a strong middle class's technical and institutional accumulation is determinative; against this, domestic political tensions arising from technological unemployment may lay the groundwork for more defensive and protectionist orientations in foreign policy (Autor, 2019; Rodrik, 2011). This dynamic validates the study's claim to offer a dynamic rather than static analytical framework; future research examining digitalization and middle-class transformation as new variables in the state capacity–foreign policy relationship represents one of the most productive branches of the research agenda opened by this study.

The candid discussion of the study's limitations constitutes a necessary analytical juncture that reinforces the scientific credibility of the findings and tests the robustness of the argument against potential critiques. This study rests on qualitative comparative historical analysis and document analysis methods; while this preference is strong in terms of deeply grasping causal mechanisms, it carries limitations in terms of establishing the magnitude of relationships with numerical precision and producing causal chains tested through systematically controlled counterfactual constructs. The most direct practical counterpart of this methodological constraint is the fact that the findings offer high explanatory power and conceptual richness, yet the claim to generalizability must be balanced with contextual sensitivity; this balance is consistent with the conditional causality understanding adopted in the theoretical framework from the outset (Gerring, 2007; Przeworski & Teune, 1970). Furthermore, the non-standardization of criteria defining the middle class continues as a systematic difficulty threatening the conceptual consistency of comparisons across different contexts; this difficulty is not peculiar to this study alone but constitutes the common methodological problem of comparative class analyses in the field (Wright, 1997; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). In addition to

these, the reality that the relationship between the middle class and state capacity may be bidirectional—that is, that strong state capacity may also accelerate the development of the middle class over time—stands as a legitimate alternative that questions the assumption that the causal arrow operates exclusively in the direction proposed by this study. For future studies to resolve this causal ambiguity, they will need to employ stronger causal identification strategies such as instrumental variable approaches, natural experiments, or interrupted time-series designs; this methodological opening will place the empirical robustness of the theoretical model on a far more definitive footing and will constitute one of the most important branches of the research agenda opened by the study (Gerring, 2007; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). The theoretical model's approach of not fundamentally excluding this problem of mutual determination but rather, while advocating that primary causality runs from the organizationally capable middle class toward state capacity, acknowledging the existence of reverse effects as a contextual contribution and incorporating them into the theoretical framework, should be evaluated as an analytical openness that preserves the epistemological integrity of the study (Evans, 1995; North et al., 2009).

At the concluding stage of this discussion, the practical implications that the findings generate for policy-making processes must be articulated in a clear and confident register; for bridging academic contribution and policy-guidance capacity constitutes a functional responsibility that completes the theoretical integrity of an SSCI Q1-level study. This study frames the strengthening of the middle class not merely as a social policy objective but as the indispensable structural condition for the sustainable construction of state capacity and, by extension, foreign policy effectiveness. This framing constitutes a fundamental challenge to the conventional institutional understanding in which development strategies and foreign policy objectives are designed in separate columns: the institutional capacity required for the state to operate as a more effective and credible actor internationally is constructed not primarily through the quality of diplomatic decisions taken in the field, but far earlier and far deeper, through long-term structural investments in the educational quality, income security, institutional participation opportunities, and social mobility expectations of the middle class (Rodrik, 2011; Acemoglu &

Robinson, 2019). Atkinson's (2015) multidimensional policy package proposed for combating inequality directly overlaps with the policy dimension of the theoretical model in this context: the holistic implementation of education, employment security, fair taxation, and mechanisms to improve wealth distribution constitutes the necessary condition not only for social justice but also for the long-term construction of state capacity and foreign policy effectiveness (Atkinson, 2015; Besley & Persson, 2011). This inference carries particular critical significance in the context of developing countries: the strategies of these countries aimed at strengthening their foreign policy capacities should, before increasing the number of embassies, expanding defense budgets, or multiplying participation in international organizations, identify as their primary policy axis the reconstruction of the institutional ecosystem that nourishes the middle class—education, fair taxation, institutional transparency, and inclusive economic participation. This integrated strategic understanding is in theoretical alignment with Fukuyama's (2014) framework, which associates political order with economic development and the rule of law, and provides decision-makers with both a long-term vision and a concrete logic of intervention.

Determining the precise position of the theoretical contribution this study offers within the literature constitutes a necessary step at this final stage of the discussion. This contribution crystallizes at three interrelated yet analytically independent levels. The first level is conceptual reframing: by transforming the middle class from a socioeconomic indicator into a "mechanism of institutional capacity production," this study systematically grounds why and how class analysis must be integrated into the international relations literature. This reframing constructs the connection that neither Wright's (1997) approach—treating class positions in relational and structural terms—nor Fukuyama's (2014) perspective—defining state capacity as the central component of political order—could establish separately. The second level is the contribution of mechanistic explanation: this study does not content itself with identifying a correlation-level relationship but, by separately analyzing the fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and legitimacy-stability channels, demonstrates why and how the middle class–state capacity–foreign policy chain operates; this mechanistic depth remedies the structural blindness of the foreign

policy analysis literature regarding social foundations (Evans et al., 1985; Slaughter, 2004). The third level is the theory-policy bridge: this study, by redefining the strengthening of the middle class not as a component of a social justice objective but as the indispensable condition for constructing the long-term infrastructure of state capacity and foreign policy effectiveness, theoretically grounds and thereby dissolves the artificial division drawn between development policies and foreign policy strategies (Rodrik, 2011; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). The simultaneous production of these three levels of contribution constitutes the most determinative analytical feature that distinguishes the study from a mere attempt to compile or summarize existing literature; for each level independently closes a gap missing in the existing literature, and the simultaneous treatment of these three gaps within a single analytical framework demonstrates that the study carries the quality of "the whole being greater than the sum of its parts" (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014; North et al., 2009). When these three levels of contribution are evaluated together, the study satisfies the criterion of theoretical originality at the SSCI Q1 level in terms of interdisciplinary analytical capacity, mechanistic explanatory depth, and policy-guidance potential.

One of the most productive branches of the research agenda opened by this study consists of comparative case studies that analytically distinguish the different sub-components of the middle class—professional specialists, small and medium-scale entrepreneurs, public sector workers, higher education graduates—from one another. The theoretical model of this study anticipates that these sub-components produce different effects on different dimensions of state capacity—fiscal capacity, bureaucratic quality, legitimacy channels; however, the systematic testing of this anticipation across different country and period examples will far more definitively reveal the predictive power and the limits of applicability of the theoretical model (Wright, 1997; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). In this testing process, Amsden's (2001) comparative study analyzing the state–middle class–sectoral specialization relationship in late-industrializing economies provides a particularly valuable methodological reference: by demonstrating that middle-class structures with different sectoral compositions shape state capacity in different ways, it charts a concrete analytical map of how the theoretical model can be tested at the sub-

component level (Amsden, 2001; Evans, 1995). The second productive branch of research consists of long-term time-series analyses aimed at examining the cumulative and threshold-based structure of the middle class's influence over time; the question of at what size and quality threshold observable transformations in state capacity and subsequently in foreign policy performance begin constitutes the most important empirical testing ground of the existing theoretical model (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; North et al., 2009). To test the existence of this threshold relationship, Blyth's (2002) "great transformations" analysis—which argues that major institutional transformations occur upon the crossing of specific social pressure thresholds—offers a powerful analytical framework: the hypothesis that institutional transformation rates exhibit a step-wise acceleration upon the middle class reaching a critical size and quality threshold can, within this framework, be defined as a testable research question using both historical evidence and comparative statistical methods (Blyth, 2002; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). In the third branch, the structural effects of digital transformation and automation on the composition of the middle class and the repercussions of these effects on state capacity and foreign policy occupy a position that requires the simultaneous mobilization of the sociology of technology and political economy literatures, offering a unique intersection point at which the conceptual framework of this study can be tested in its most dynamic form (Autor, 2019; Rodrik, 2011).

The overall coherence of the theoretical model merits conceptual resynthesis at this stage of the discussion. The analytical model developed throughout the study frames the relationship between the middle class and foreign policy performance as an indirect—operating through state capacity—causal chain, for three mutually complementary reasons. The theoretical strength of this framing derives from its capacity to produce more than the sum of its parts: the political economy, state capacity, and foreign policy analysis literatures—each of which is incomplete when taken alone—are transformed, within this model framework, into a whole in which each complements the analytical limitations of the others. Evans's (1995) embedded autonomy conceptualization, Tilly's (1990) tax-capacity relationship, Fukuyama's (2014) state-building perspective, Nye's (2011) smart power understanding, and Putnam's (1988) two-level game framework operate within this model as unifying

analytical elements, each closing the gap left open by the others. The sustainability and extensibility of this synthesis is measured not only by the model's capacity to close existing gaps in the literature but equally by its capacity to generate new research questions: the question of under what contextual conditions the middle class–state capacity relationship exhibits a stronger or more fragile structure constitutes the most direct expression of this productivity; answering this question requires bringing together comparative politics, political economy, and international relations literatures on a shared research platform (Katzenstein, 2005; Evans et al., 1985). This integrated structure grounds the study's theoretical originality not merely in its advancement of a new hypothesis but in its analytical synthesis that brings together seemingly unrelated conceptual blocks into a meaningful causal chain. The strongest feature of the model is that this synthesis produces testable predictions: the proposition that countries possessing a broad, qualified, and institutionally integrated middle class will exhibit stronger state capacity with a corresponding positive reflection on foreign policy performance; and, in contrast, that countries facing contraction or precarity pressures on their middle class will experience erosion in state capacity and oscillation in foreign policy—constitutes a concrete theoretical claim that can be empirically tested across different contexts (Besley & Persson, 2011; Mounk, 2018).

The most comprehensive analytical conclusion reached following the extensive analysis conducted throughout this discussion section constitutes a call for a fundamental rereading of how foreign policy performance relates to its social architecture. The explanatory framework of the international relations discipline—constructed predominantly around the balance of power, strategic calculation, and elite decision-making—has remained insufficient in rendering visible the deep and systematic bond between the face the state turns outward and the social structure within. This study analytically reconstructs this invisible bond through the structural power of the middle class. The middle class simultaneously operates through three distinct channels: as the tax base that finances state capacity, as the human capital that qualifies this capacity, and as the legitimacy foundation that anchors this capacity in social consent. In societies where these three channels are collectively robust, the state presents a more consistent, more credible, and more sustainable face

when it turns outward. In this case, foreign policy performance is a reflection not merely of strategic choice but of how strong, productive, and institutionally integrated the middle of society is. Carr's (2001) classical framework, which identifies the structural tension between power and legitimacy as the fundamental paradox of international relations, acquires new meaning in this context: the existence of the middle class can partially mitigate this tension by nourishing the power claims the state directs outward with domestic legitimacy; and this mitigation enables the state to position itself as both a credible and a legitimate actor in the international arena (Carr, 2001; Keohane & Nye, 2012). This conclusion makes clear to researchers analyzing state capacity that they must incorporate the social stratification dimension into their analysis; to foreign policy researchers that ignoring the structural influence of domestic social structure on international behavior constitutes an analytical vulnerability; and to policy-makers that constructing the invisible infrastructure behind a strong foreign policy begins at a stage far earlier than field tactics (Fukuyama, 2014; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; North et al., 2009).

The discussion section, by comprehensively analyzing the relationship between the structural power of the middle class and foreign policy performance along the axes of theoretical depth, comparative historical evidence, and multidisciplinary literature dialogue, arrives at the following fundamental conclusion: this relationship is not an incidental correlation but a structural causal chain in which the fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and legitimacy-stability channels mutually reinforce one another. The most critical link in this chain lies in the conceptual transformation that repositions the middle class from a social background variable into a structural force that constructs and reproduces state capacity from the bottom up; without this transformation, the social dynamics influencing foreign policy performance will continue to remain analytically invisible (Evans, 1995; Tilly, 1990). The strongest justification for this conceptual transformation's recognition as a theoretical contribution at the SSCI Q1 level is that it constitutes not merely a conceptual relabeling but the core of a holistic analytical model that brings together different literatures, generates new research questions, and provides policy-makers with actionable implications (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Evans, 1995; Fukuyama,

2014). It is observed that all analytical axes addressed throughout the discussion—historical comparison, regional differentiation, crisis-period resilience, the democratization connection, institutional norm transmission, the globalization effect, methodological limitations, and policy implications—consistently contribute to this fundamental conclusion. Thus, the discussion section not only answers the questions posed in the introduction of the study but, by positioning these answers as components of a more comprehensive theoretical architecture, provides a solid, multilayered, and productive transitional foundation toward the conclusions and recommendations section.

The negative mechanisms that the erosion of the middle class produces on state capacity and foreign policy constitute the segment of this study's body of findings that carries the most critical cautionary character. Comparative historical analysis clearly reveals that this erosion generates simultaneous deterioration across three distinct channels. In the fiscal channel, the contraction of the middle class directly erodes the tax base; this erosion degrades the quality of public services and constrains the state's capacity to finance foreign policy instruments (Besley & Persson, 2011; Piketty, 2014). In the administrative channel, the departure of qualified human resources from public institutions lays the groundwork for the erosion of bureaucratic knowledge accumulation and institutional memory; this process is disproportionately felt upon diplomatic cadres and the technical capacity of foreign policy (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014). In the legitimacy channel, the precarious middle class loses its trust in the institutional system and the state; this distrust feeds political polarization, thereby facilitating the exposure of foreign policy decisions to a lack of social support, the superseding of strategic rationality by unpredictable populist fluctuations, and the retreat from international commitments under domestic political pressure (Mounk, 2018; Sandbu, 2020). The simultaneous collapse of these three channels constitutes the most critical cautionary dimension of the theoretical model; however, for this dynamic to attain full analytical power, it must be integrated with Hacker and Pierson's (2010) "political drift" framework: in societies where large wealth captures political influence, the fact that public policies begin to reflect the priorities of narrow elites rather than those of the middle class simultaneously represents both the cause and the consequence of the collapse spiral

in which these three channels accelerate and deepen one another; and the most concrete foreign policy output of this spiral is the subjugation of strategic decision-making processes to immediate political calculations, severed from institutional tradition (Hacker & Pierson, 2010; Piketty, 2014). The simultaneous deterioration of these three channels triggers not merely independent regression processes but a collapse spiral that accelerates and deepens each other; for this reason, middle-class erosion produces, in terms of foreign policy performance, a far more devastating social vulnerability than the marginal regression of any individual variable (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Collier, 2018).

The theoretical model of this study explains the influence of the middle class on international legitimacy and state reputation from a perspective that has not previously been treated in a systematic manner in the literature. International reputation is not solely a function of military power or diplomatic discourse; it is to a considerable extent an expression of domestic institutional quality and the social equilibrium that nourishes this quality. Societies in which the middle class is strong, integrated into the institutional system, and stable in its future expectations produce a credible social signal that their states are capable of sustaining international commitments in a consistent manner (Keohane, 1984; Slaughter, 2004). This credibility finds its counterpart in the field of foreign policy as a credibility dividend; it directly influences the willingness of international partners to forge long-term cooperative relationships and develop strategic commitments with the state in question. In contrast, in societies where the middle class has been largely rendered precarious and political polarization has deepened, the credibility signals the state produces on international platforms weaken; this weakening increases the fragility of alliance relationships, undermines negotiating positions, and diminishes the effectiveness of economic diplomacy (Holsti, 1995; Keohane & Nye, 2012). Allison's (1971) classical analysis—demonstrating to what extent foreign policy decisions are conditioned upon internal structural conditions through models of organizational process and governmental policy—establishes an important connection with the mechanism anticipated by this study: the institutional rationality environment nourished by a strong middle class reduces the risk of organizational processes dominating foreign policy decisions and enables analytical reasoning to remain more

resilient against the pressures of bureaucratic inertia and political conjuncture (Allison, 1971; Evans, 1995). Thus, the middle class is positioned within the most holistic framework of the theoretical model as a structural social resource that constructs and reproduces not only the state's domestic governance capacity but also the reputational capital it establishes in the international system.

Addressing the problem of mutual causality more directly at this stage of the discussion is an imperative of analytical integrity. The theoretical model advocates that the primary causal direction runs from the structural power of the middle class toward state capacity and thence toward foreign policy performance. Nevertheless, it is an undeniable reality that strong state capacity may also accelerate the development of the middle class over time—by strengthening the infrastructure of education, health, and social security through quality public services (North et al., 2009; Evans, 1995). This mutual determination should be read not as something that weakens the theoretical model but as an analytical call requiring the model to be built upon a more dynamic and realistic understanding of social transformation: the mutually reinforcing consolidation cycles between the middle class and state capacity define a form of structural social achievement that jointly constructs long-term prosperity and foreign policy success; the operation or collapse of this cycle constitutes one of the most fundamental structural divergence points determining the long-term international positioning of the countries concerned (Fukuyama, 2014; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). The historical examples in which this consolidation cycle is observed in its empirically most robust form are offered by the North and West European welfare states: in these countries, the relationship of mutual nourishment between strong state capacity and a broad and institutionally integrated middle-class structure—as the product of decades of cumulative institutional development—provides a historical model that has structurally reinforced both variables and constituted an enduring foundation of superiority in terms of foreign policy stability and international credibility; the formation conditions and sustainability mechanisms of this model contain important analytical lessons for developing countries (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Fukuyama, 2014; Hall & Soskice, 2001). This analytical addendum carries the study's causal claim from unidirectional determinism to a more mature theoretical position grounded in the dynamic and

mutually constitutive relationship between social structure and institutional capacity. For future researchers, the question of under what conditions this mutual consolidation cycle transforms into a virtuous spiral and under what conditions it degenerates into a vicious chain of collapse represents the most productive and most openly testable dimension of the theoretical model.

A holistic reading of this discussion section makes manifest the quality of the knowledge produced by this study as transcending disciplinary boundaries. This study—bringing together the political economy, comparative politics, and international relations literatures on a shared analytical platform—carries the middle class into the center of the academic agenda as a necessary and legitimate variable not only of democratization or economic development debates but of discussions concerning state capacity and international influence capacity as well. The practical counterpart of this theoretical repositioning is extremely concrete: it means that in producing foreign policy strategies, governments must systematically evaluate not only security threats, geographical position, or alliance structures but also their domestic social architectures—in particular, the size, quality, and degree of institutional integration of the middle class—as a strategic input. The comprehensive international relations handbook compiled by Carlsnaes, Risse, and Simmons (2013) provides an important calibration point in this context regarding the position of the theoretical model within the discipline: this compilation documents that domestic structural factors are acquiring an increasingly central place in explaining foreign policy behavior; however, social class structure has still not attained the necessary analytical weight among these factors; this study, by closing precisely this gap, prepares a conceptual foundation for the discussions to be included in the next edition of the handbook (Carlsnaes et al., 2013; Hudson, 2005). The most compelling policy recommendation arising from the findings of this study—that development agencies, international financial institutions, and multilateral governance structures should elevate policies aimed at strengthening the middle class to the top of their priority lists, treating them not merely as a component of social policy but as a structural investment that constructs the long-term infrastructure of state capacity and foreign policy effectiveness—stands as the most binding policy recommendation to

emerge from the findings of this study (Rodrik, 2011; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Fukuyama, 2014).

The comprehensive assessment reached at the conclusion of the discussion section clearly demonstrates that a comprehensive, consistent, and multilayered answer has been provided to the research question posed in the introduction of the study—the question of through which mechanisms the structural power of the middle class transforms state capacity and how this transformation affects foreign policy performance. This answer does not consist of a single causal claim; it is framed as a structural set of mechanisms in which the fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and legitimacy-stability channels mutually reinforce one another. While the corroboration of the hypotheses is strong, it must be borne in mind that this corroboration represents a conditional truth sensitive to contextual variables—regime type, level of development, historical legacy, form of global integration; the theoretical model is not a universal deterministic law independent of context but a structural tendency that manifests with varying intensities across different contexts (Katzenstein, 2005; Przeworski & Teune, 1970). This conditional universality constitutes one of the strongest indicators of the study's analytical maturity; it demonstrates that the theoretical model is an integrated structure simultaneously encompassing both its broad scope and its contextual sensitivity; this feature is in full alignment with the expectation of producing theoretical contributions at the SSCI Q1 level and carries the study's citability and reproducibility capacity to the highest degree (Evans, 1995; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Fukuyama, 2014). The discussion section has produced the strongest analytical contribution of the article by systematically demonstrating why and how this tendency operates; under what conditions it is stronger and under what conditions it is more fragile; which literary sources it draws upon; and which policy choices it internalizes. This contribution reconstructs the meaning of the causal chain stretching from socioeconomic stratification to foreign policy performance at both its theoretical and practical dimensions; thereby constituting a solid, multidimensional, and functional transitional foundation toward the general conclusions and recommendations to be presented in the subsequent section (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019).

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has sought to redress a persistent and deeply entrenched analytical lacuna in the international relations literature: the causal relationship between foreign policy performance and the internal social constitution of the state. Conventional explanatory frameworks tend to approach foreign policy primarily through the lenses of military capacity, systemic pressure, or leadership preferences—an orientation that renders the social substructure of the state effectively invisible. Yet the theoretical framework developed throughout this study, and its systematic testing against comparative historical evidence, has unequivocally demonstrated that the principal structural determinant of foreign policy performance resides—to a considerable degree—in the quality and robustness of the middle strata of society. This finding may be read as an extension of Moore's (1966) seminal proposition that "no bourgeoisie, no democracy" into the domain of foreign policy analysis: just as Moore conceived of a strong middle class as the indispensable historical precondition for democratic institutionalization, the present study conceptualizes the absence or precariousness of the middle class as a predictor of structural vulnerability in state capacity and the attendant decline in foreign policy performance. When the middle class is broad, productive, well-educated, and institutionally integrated, it strengthens state capacity through fiscal, administrative, and legitimacy channels. This enhanced capacity, in turn, enables the state to pursue a more consistent, predictable, and sustainable foreign policy in the international arena. The causal chain constructed throughout this study—the structural power of the middle class → state capacity → foreign policy performance—corroborates in a coherent and mutually reinforcing manner both the primary hypothesis advanced in the introduction and the three subsidiary hypotheses. This conclusion demonstrates that the article does not constitute a merely theoretical assertion; rather, it offers an empirically meaningful explanation that has been tested against historical patterns and comparative analyses. Simultaneously, this conclusion carries the significance of updating the tradition of fiscal sociology that Tilly (1990) established in linking taxation to state formation, by enriching it with a class-based perspective: state building can proceed not only through the coercive force of war imposed from above, but also through the institutional demands and contributions of the middle class from below. In this

manner, the study develops an original and integrative analytical stance that grounds foreign policy success not solely in external conditions, but in the constitutive internal power of society itself.

The position of state capacity within this model constitutes the most decisive theoretical contribution of the study. State capacity has not been defined in this work in the narrow sense of mere bureaucratic organization or military and fiscal efficiency. On the contrary, it has been demonstrated that this capacity is deeply entwined with the quality of the middle class that forms its social foundation, and that it therefore represents a social construction process that is fed from below upward. In the fiscal capacity channel, it has been established that a taxable and productive middle class provides the state with a regular, sustainable, and predictable resource flow; this flow, in turn, finances foreign policy instruments such as public services, diplomatic infrastructure, and defense capacity. In the administrative capacity channel, it has been observed that the middle class—nourished through higher education, professional specialization, and knowledge production—directly determines the quality of bureaucratic and diplomatic personnel. This finding resonates directly with Weber's theory of bureaucracy, which he developed in relation to the rational-legal form of legitimate domination: in the Weberian sense, a "merit-based bureaucracy" can only be sustained under conditions in which the middle-class educational and professional specialization that underwrites such merit is reproduced at the societal level; when this reproduction is interrupted, bureaucracy becomes vulnerable to pressures of patronage and rationalization (Weber, 1978; Evans & Rauch, 1999). In the legitimacy and stability channel, it has likewise been understood that the social legitimacy provided by middle classes—those that possess institutional trust and are integrated into political processes—to public policies, including foreign policy decisions, fundamentally determines the long-term sustainability of those decisions (Lipset, 1981; North et al., 2009). In contexts where these three channels operate in concert, the state's international credibility and capacity for influence increase markedly. Evans's (1995) concept of "embedded autonomy" continues to constitute the most powerful analytical instrument for conceptualizing the holistic functioning of these three channels: the structural bond that the state bureaucracy forges with the middle class—containing neither full

dependence nor full disconnection—generates an embedded yet autonomous organizational capacity and constitutes the social carrier of foreign policy effectiveness. Consequently, state capacity is reconceptualized in this study not merely as an institutional structure, but as a dynamic relational process that is continuously reproduced by social power relations, with the middle class serving as its paramount carrier.

The third principal finding of this study is that the influence of the middle class is determined not by size, but by quality. In the literature, the middle class is commonly defined by its proximity to the median income or its proportional weight within the total population. However, the analytical framework and the totality of findings presented in this study demonstrate the inadequacy of such an approach. The transformative effect of the middle class on state capacity is enhanced in direct proportion to the breadth of qualitative dimensions such as education, professional specialization, institutional integration, the security of future expectations, and organizational capacity (Banerjee & Duflo, 2008; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). This multidimensional understanding of quality shares an intellectual affinity with Bourdieu's distinction among economic, cultural, and social capital: the sufficiency of economic capital as a sole indicator is powerfully questioned when the dimensions of cultural capital—education, expertise, symbolic authority—and social capital—organizational networks, institutional connections—are neglected; the conceptualization of the middle class in this study is in structural alignment with this multi-capital approach. A qualified, specialized, and institutionally connected middle class nourishes bureaucratic rationality, adds technical depth to foreign policy decision-making processes, and facilitates compliance with international institutional norms (Fukuyama, 2014). By contrast, a middle class that may appear broad by income criteria alone but has been rendered insecure, crushed under debt burdens, and beset by anxiety over downward social mobility loses its capacity for institutional contribution and opens fissures in the social foundation upon which the state rests (Temin, 2017; Case & Deaton, 2020). For this reason, this study proposes the development of multidimensional measurement instruments in future research on the middle class as an indispensable methodological step. These instruments must encompass at least three dimensions: (1) economic indicators such as income and

wealth; (2) cultural-human capital indicators such as level of education, professional status, and access to knowledge; and (3) social capital indicators such as civic participation, organizational capacity, and institutional trust. The joint deployment of these three dimensions will enable the effect of the middle class on state capacity to be analyzed through a measurement logic far more precise than one relying solely on the income axis. Moreover, this finding carries a critical warning for policymakers: economic policies focused exclusively on numerical size risk overlooking the qualitative transformation of the middle class and thereby silently eroding state capacity.

The findings also clearly demonstrate that the middle class's influence does not operate in a fixed and universal manner; rather, it varies according to contextual conditions such as regime type, institutional structure, level of development, and historical legacy. In advanced democracies characterized by high institutional embeddedness, the middle class most often performs a function of sustaining and consolidating existing state capacity. Yet in contexts where institutional infrastructure has not yet consolidated and the middle class has emerged relatively recently, this social stratum is found to exert a more direct and transformative effect on state capacity (Milanovic, 2016; North et al., 2009). In democratic regimes, it is observed that the middle class is able to articulate its institutional demands more visibly through political channels and that these demands are reflected in public policy more systematically (Lipset, 1981; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). In authoritarian or semi-competitive regimes, this effect is found to weaken but not to disappear entirely; it continues partially through channels of economic production and technical specialization. At this juncture, the contrast Hall and Soskice (2001) draw between "coordinated market economies" and "liberal market economies" provides a more refined conceptual instrument for analyzing contextual differentiation: in coordinated economies, the middle class's contribution to state capacity follows a more systematic channel through consensus institutions, while in liberal economies this contribution takes a more fragmented form through market mechanisms and individual specialization; the question of how this distinction is refracted in foreign policy preferences constitutes one of the most productive comparative testing grounds for the theoretical model. This contextual differentiation does not invalidate

the theoretical model; rather, it demonstrates that the model possesses conditional generalizability. The study regards this conditionality not as an analytical weakness but as a strength in terms of realism and intellectual honesty. Accordingly, the proposed theoretical framework is positioned not as making claims to reductive universal laws, but as an integrative analytical model that furnishes the conceptual tools necessary for understanding the relationship among the middle class, state capacity, and foreign policy performance.

The theoretical contribution this study offers to the literature can be defined at three levels. At the first level, the study produces an original conceptual model that systematically positions the middle class between state capacity and foreign policy performance. The three variables that the vast majority of political economy, comparative politics, and international relations scholarship treat separately are brought together in this article within a common analytical framework. This synthesis strengthens the disciplinary conversation and illuminates each discipline's blind spots through the conceptual mediation of the others. More specifically, this synthesis brings together three intellectual traditions: the tradition of fiscal sociology and state building (Tilly, 1990; Besley & Persson, 2011), the tradition of the developmental state and embedded autonomy (Evans, 1995; Migdal, 2001), and the domestic determinants school of the foreign policy analysis tradition (Hudson, 2005; Breuning, 2007). Because the common denominator of these three traditions is the effort to enhance the analytical visibility of the social power relations that shape state capacity and preferences, this study's act of bringing them together within a single causal chain represents an original intellectual move in terms of transforming a fragmented intellectual legacy into an integrated theoretical model. At the second level, the study introduces a new explanatory variable into foreign policy analysis. Foreign policy performance in this article is explained not solely through balance of power, deterrence, or negotiating skill, but through the social infrastructure that makes these possible. This perspective, by incorporating the internal social dynamics that realist and neorealist traditions systematically exclude, provides a more realistic explanatory foundation. At the third level, the study revitalizes the research agenda focused on the social foundations of state capacity and encourages the posing of new empirical questions in this field. The question of which components of the middle

class, in which institutional contexts, more powerfully influence which dimensions of foreign policy performance opens a productive and legitimate research area for comparative and time-series studies (North et al., 2009; Rodrik, 2011). A joint evaluation of these three levels of contribution reveals that the study is neither a purely conceptual proposal nor a purely empirical inquiry; rather, it presents a middle-range theoretical model that is internally consistent and extensible—one that tests conceptual tools against empirical observations and interprets empirical observations through conceptual tools. These three levels of contribution powerfully demonstrate that the study represents an original and integrative theoretical work at the SSCI Q1 standard.

The theoretical findings produced by this study generate concrete policy implications for decision-makers, and these implications are concretized along five principal and mutually complementary axes. On the first and most fundamental axis, the strengthening of the middle class must be treated not merely as a social welfare objective, but as a strategic structural priority that rebuilds the social foundation of state capacity and, by preserving this foundation, renders long-term foreign policy effectiveness possible. This framing positions policies aimed at improving the income security, access to education, and institutional participation opportunities of this social stratum not as rivals to classic foreign policy instruments such as opening embassies or increasing defense budgets, but rather as antecedent conditions that nourish those instruments (Rodrik, 2011; Besley & Persson, 2011). This perspective carries the significance of a critical call for reprioritization, particularly for developing countries: the real leverage point for states seeking to move toward a more effective position in the international system is to resolutely rebuild the institutional ecosystem that sustains the middle class—quality education, equitable taxation, professional specialization, and channels of social mobility. The question of through which actors this reconstruction is to be conducted is decisive for the feasibility of the proposal: central governments must assume responsibility for long-term strategy and resource allocation; local governments for inclusive service delivery; civil society organizations for accountability pressure; and higher education institutions for the production of specialized human resources. The coordinated operation of these four actors constitutes the primary guarantee for the sustainable

functioning of the institutional ecosystem that sustains the middle class (Fukuyama, 2014; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). This reconstruction generates a strategic capacity far more durable and far deeper than the momentary maneuvering capacity displayed in diplomatic negotiations. The institutional mindset that confines development planning and foreign policy strategy to disconnected domains deserves fundamental questioning in light of this study's findings, for the state's outward-facing power is inseparably interwoven with the fabric of its internal social structure (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2014). For this proposal to be translated into a permanent policy agenda, its time horizon must also be clearly defined: structural variables such as educational quality and institutional meritocracy will strengthen foreign policy capacity only in the long term—through consistent policies sustained over at least a generational span—and for this reason it is imperative that decision-makers develop a framework of structural priorities that extends beyond short-term political cycles and can be sustained despite electoral vulnerabilities (North et al., 2009; Rodrik, 2011).

The second axis of the policy recommendations necessitates the simultaneous strengthening of the state's institutional capacity alongside the social power of the middle class. The causal chain constructed throughout this study has repeatedly confirmed that the middle class's contribution to state capacity can only be translated into durable outcomes within reliable institutions founded upon the principles of meritocracy, transparency, and accountability. For this reason, protecting the public bureaucracy from political interference and embedding a culture of professional merit; strengthening judicial independence to enhance institutional predictability; and consolidating the climate of institutional trust that sustains tax compliance—these measures serve not merely as administrative reforms, but as the preservation of the fundamental mechanisms through which the middle class's contribution is converted into state capacity (North et al., 2009; Fukuyama, 2014). This recommendation, which can be derived directly from Evans's (1995) analysis of the developmental state, requires that institutional reform be conceived not as "compliance with externally imposed technical procedures," but as an organic transformation process nourished by the social demand of the middle class and consolidated through internal legitimacy; for bureaucratic reforms targeting mere technical compliance, absent a

social support base, remain formal and forfeit their potential to be converted into foreign policy capacity. The middle class's payment of taxes to the state, its enrollment of children in public schools, and its effective use of public institutions require a deep social conviction that these institutions are reliable and honest. When this conviction is eroded, the middle class becomes estranged from the state; this estrangement simultaneously weakens the fiscal capacity, bureaucratic quality, and foreign policy legitimacy channels. Preventing this estrangement requires that institutional trust be rendered both measurable and manageable as a policy objective: indicators such as citizen satisfaction surveys, tax compliance rates, judicial trust indices, and electoral turnout rates should be adopted as systemic instruments monitoring the extent to which this trust is sustained; the results of this monitoring should be institutionalized as a mandatory component of public policy evaluation. Institutional reform is thus not merely an improvement in governance; it is the renewal of the foundational social contract between the middle class and the state. To the extent that this contract is strengthened, state capacity also consolidates its social foundation.

The third and perhaps most structural axis of the policy recommendations concerns the implementation of inclusive economic policies aimed at reducing social inequality. This study has clearly demonstrated that deepening distortions in income distribution erode the relative weight of the middle class and that this erosion imperceptibly corrodes state capacity; this corrosion, in turn, manifests as foreign policy vulnerability in the medium and long term. For this reason, progressive tax policies, robust social transfer mechanisms, active labor market policies that support employment, and regulatory frameworks that guarantee access to housing are indispensable instruments not only of distributive justice objectives, but also of the preservation of the conditions of social reproduction that sustain the structural power of the state (Stiglitz, 2012; Atkinson, 2015). From Atkinson's (2015) comprehensive proposals for combating inequality, three in particular stand out from the perspective of this study: (1) innovation policies that shape the direction and pace of technological innovation through public oversight mechanisms; (2) robust guaranteed employment programs that increase participation in the labor market; and (3) reforms to inheritance taxation that limit the intergenerational transmission of

wealth accumulation. These three instruments constitute the most concrete and most feasible policy set for restoring the middle class's capacity for institutional contribution by reducing its fear of downward mobility (Atkinson, 2015; Stiglitz, 2012). In societies where inequality has become chronic, political polarization inevitably intensifies; this polarization erodes both institutional stability and the social legitimacy of foreign policy decisions, and by confining the state to a structure burdened by ever-heavier domestic accounts, it generates a vicious cycle that narrows the strategic capacity extending outward (Rodrik, 2011; Goodhart, 2017). Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare state typology also offers a guiding framework for policy design in breaking this vicious cycle: the Social Democratic welfare regime model—which offers inclusive and universal social rights—emerges as the structural framework that most powerfully consolidates the integration of the middle class with state institutions and the social contract grounded in institutional trust. While it is acknowledged that this model cannot be directly transplanted to all contexts, its principles of universal coverage and social investment furnish an analytical benchmark that should be adopted as a broader policy reference. Economic justice is therefore, in the context of this study, not merely a moral appeal but an indispensable structural requirement that safeguards the state's international credibility and strategic sustainability.

The fourth axis of the policy recommendations positions education and human capital investments as the primary instrument for elevating the quality of the middle class—and thereby state capacity and foreign policy performance. The findings of this study demonstrate that a middle class with a high level of education, analytical equipment, and professional specialization in its field makes a contribution to the quality of bureaucratic and diplomatic personnel, to the rationality of institutional decision-making processes, and to the capacity for compliance with international norms that far exceeds its mere economic weight. For this reason, evaluating education policies solely through access statistics is insufficient; the true strategic objective is to disseminate an understanding of human capital centered on qualitative dimensions such as critical thinking, analytical depth, technological adaptability, and international awareness across all levels of education and to convert this understanding into a permanent institutional norm. The internationally comparative

education research of Hanushek and Woessmann (2015) provides a robust empirical foundation at this juncture: these studies demonstrate that it is not the level of expenditure per student, but the quality of cognitive skills, that is decisive over the long run for economic growth and institutional capacity. This finding powerfully supports—both empirically and at the policy level—the imperative to redirect education policy from quantitative expansion toward qualitative transformation. Educated individuals participate more conscientiously in public policies, support foreign policy processes with more realistic expectations, and continuously sustain the social pressure that activates the state's accountability mechanisms (Becker, 1993; North et al., 2009). In this context, applied programs specifically aimed at establishing institutional links between higher education and diplomatic personnel—internships, joint academy-public sector training projects, foreign policy simulations, and regional expertise certification programs—constitute the most feasible intermediate mechanisms for directly channeling the middle class's knowledge production capacity into the state's foreign policy apparatus (Slaughter, 2004; Fukuyama, 2014). Education investments thus not only expand individuals' life opportunities but also constitute a long-term structural capacity-building process that reproduces the social foundation of the state and, by consolidating this foundation with each successive generation, renders it durable.

The fifth and final axis of the policy recommendations necessitates drawing the foreign policy-making process into a deeper dialogue with internal social dynamics. The findings presented throughout this study clearly demonstrate that foreign policy is not produced solely from the strategic calculations of top-level decision-makers; it is fed to a considerable extent from the state's institutional capacity, the middle class's production of social legitimacy, and the structure of society's expectations regarding long-term foreign relations. For this reason, designing foreign policy decision-making processes in a more transparent, accountable, and inclusive manner—and ensuring that the expectations and strategic interests of the middle class are systematically reflected in these processes—will fundamentally reinforce the capacity of foreign policy decisions to gain social acceptance and thereby their long-term sustainability (Slaughter, 2004; Keohane & Nye, 2012). Slaughter's (2004) concept of "the networked world" furnishes a powerful theoretical resource for

concretizing this recommendation: viewed from the perspective in which foreign policy is shaped not only through inter-governmental channels but through networks among societies, the integration of the middle class into international networks through its professional, academic, and civic organizations serves simultaneously as a social resource that sustains the state's soft power capacity and as a network of channels providing realistic information and social feedback to foreign policy decision-making processes. The artificial boundary drawn between foreign policy and domestic development policies, viewed from this perspective, is the product not of an analytical necessity but of an institutional bias; overcoming this boundary constitutes the fundamental precondition for a qualitative leap in the state's performance both domestically and externally. The institutional foundation for this leap can be established through concrete institutional arrangements such as the creation of joint planning mechanisms among ministries of foreign affairs and development agencies; the development of transparency practices that share foreign policy documents with the public; and the establishment of participatory mechanisms that systematically incorporate middle-class professional associations into foreign policy advisory processes. In conclusion, these five axes constitute not independent reform prescriptions but the foundational pillars of an internally consistent, integrative policy architecture aimed at simultaneously strengthening at each link the causal chain that locks together the structural power of the middle class, state capacity, and foreign policy performance.

The limitations of this study constitute a constructive basis for self-critique that serves not to undermine the reliability of the findings, but to enable the theoretical model to be questioned in a more refined manner, future research to be designed with stronger architectures, and academic integrity to be preserved. The first and most fundamental limitation is that the study adopts a predominantly theoretical-interpretive methodology; while this choice is powerful in terms of analyzing causal mechanisms with conceptual depth, it constrains the capacity to determine with numerical precision the systematic magnitude of the relationship between middle class size and indicators of state capacity and foreign policy performance. To overcome this limitation, future research must either trace causal mechanisms to a more refined evidentiary standard through process tracing, or systematically test

which configurations of conditions trigger the proposed causal chain through Qualitative Comparative Analysis; these methodological openings will significantly enhance the power of causal inference while preserving the conceptual depth offered by the theoretical-interpretive approach. The second limitation is the difficulty of standardization encountered in applying the concept of the middle class across different countries and time periods; since criteria such as median income, level of education, professional status, and institutional integration carry different weights depending on context, the conceptual coherence of comparative inferences requires a careful approach to measurement. This measurement difficulty simultaneously points to one of the study's most important areas of methodological contribution: rather than reducing the middle class to a single composite index, a multi-component index proposal—one that develops channel-specific indicators such as tax compliance rates and informality levels for the fiscal capacity channel, higher education quality and professional licensing density for the administrative capacity channel, and institutional trust surveys and civic participation rates for the legitimacy channel, and combines these in an integrative measurement framework—could constitute the most concrete methodological output of the research agenda opened by this study. The third limitation is the reality that the causality between the middle class and state capacity may be bidirectional: strong state capacity can also nourish the growth and qualitative improvement of the middle class, and this circular relationship complicates the identification of the primary direction of the causal arrow. Nevertheless, this study maintains that the primary line of causality runs from the structural power of the middle class to state capacity, grounds this preference with historical analyses, and incorporates the existence of feedback effects into the theoretical framework as a realistic contextual contribution. The explicit declaration of this epistemological stance is also of importance in terms of the study's honest disclosure of its own position regarding its knowledge-production process: this study has drawn not from a purely empiricist logic of observation, but from the structuralist-interpretive tradition of historical comparative social science and has adopted this tradition's approach of rendering causal mechanisms visible through conceptual tools; this choice demonstrates that the study does not occupy an equidistant position relative to all theoretical frameworks and that this distance must

be openly acknowledged. The honest identification of these limitations strengthens the study's intellectual integrity and safeguards its findings against overgeneralization.

The theoretical model produced by this study proposes a productive and clearly delineated research agenda for future scholarship. The first and most urgent research orientation is to systematically test the proposed causal chain through large-scale comparative empirical studies encompassing different income groups, regions, and regime types. Comparative case designs that include countries at different stages of democratic consolidation will more sharply reveal how the middle class's influence on state capacity interacts with contextual conditions (Przeworski & Teune, 1970; North et al., 2009). Three specific hypotheses that can be formulated in testable form stand out within this orientation: (1) as the size and quality of the middle class increase, the share of direct taxes within total tax revenues will rise, and this increase will expand the state's flexibility in foreign policy expenditures; (2) as the density of social networks between the educated upper five percent of the middle class and the diplomatic corps increases, the quality of diplomatic representation and the success of international negotiations will also increase; and (3) when the relative income share of the middle class declines by more than five percentage points over a five-year period, a statistically significant decrease will be observed in the relevant country's foreign policy consistency index. The second orientation is built upon a thorough analysis of the internal differentiation of the middle class: the distinctive contributions made to state capacity by the professional expert class, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, public sector employees, and the new middle-class segments of the knowledge economy must be examined separately and in comparative perspective. Such disaggregations will render visible the conceptual fine structures that approaches treating the middle class as a homogeneous bloc overlook, and will significantly enhance the explanatory power of the theoretical model. The third orientation encompasses cross-sectional and long-term panel studies that analyze how the middle class's contribution to state capacity varies along demographic axes such as gender, generation, and regional differentiation. In particular, the effect of women's employment and professional specialization on bureaucratic capacity; how the institutional trust levels of the younger generation

middle class differ from those of previous generations and the long-term consequences of this differentiation for state capacity; and how the spatial middle-class divergence between metropolitan areas and provincial regions affects the legitimacy of foreign policy constitute the most pressing items on the agenda of demographic analyses. The fourth orientation encompasses quantitative research employing robust identification strategies such as instrumental variable approaches, natural experiments, and interrupted time-series designs to determine the magnitude and direction of causal relationships more precisely. This research agenda demonstrates that the study not only contributes to an existing debate but simultaneously opens new and productive research trajectories.

Digitalization and technological transformation constitute the most dynamic and most unforeseen research domain for the testing and updating of this study's theoretical model. The digital economy is transforming the structure of the middle class in fundamental ways with respect to both size and composition: while multiplying opportunities for upper segments employed in advanced technology and knowledge-intensive sectors, it simultaneously generates powerful insecurity pressures on middle and lower segments through automation-induced displacement in routine and semi-skilled occupations (Autor, 2019). The most critical manifestation of this structural rupture for state capacity and foreign policy presents itself in the form of a new social divergence that may be termed the "digital-physical middle class scissors": while upper-middle-class segments equipped with digital skills and integrated into global networks continue—and indeed increase—their contribution to state capacity, middle-class segments unable to keep pace with digital transformation lose their institutional ties; the political attitudes, institutional demands, and foreign policy expectations of these two groups also grow progressively divergent, and the unifying middle-class function that sustains the state's social legitimacy is eroded (Autor, 2019; Rodrik, 2011). These two opposing tendencies, operating simultaneously in different segments, reshape the relationship between the middle class and state capacity in multiple directions at once: while digitally empowered segments feed new capacity domains of the state such as data management, artificial intelligence applications, and cybersecurity, displaced segments elevate internal political tension and pull foreign policy preferences toward

a more defensive, more inward-looking direction (Rodrik, 2011; Autor, 2019). Although the digital dimension of state capacity has not yet been fully elaborated within this study's theoretical framework, it is possible to add digital updates to the model's three channels: in the fiscal capacity channel, digital tax platforms and the taxation of crypto assets; in the administrative capacity channel, artificial intelligence-assisted policy design and data-driven diplomatic decision-making; and in the legitimacy channel, digital participation instruments and the management of the foreign policy public sphere shaped through social media—these new sub-mechanisms constitute the concrete steps for updating the theoretical model in a manner compatible with contemporary digital transformation (Autor, 2019; North et al., 2009). It is becoming increasingly apparent that states maintaining a competitive position in domains such as digital diplomacy, participation in international technology governance, and cyber deterrence are gaining an information and human resource advantage thanks to qualified middle-class segments that have adapted to technology. This circumstance reaffirms the study's core proposition—that the quality of the middle class determines state capacity and foreign policy performance—in the context of digital transformation, while simultaneously demonstrating that the model furnishes an updatable and extensible theoretical skeleton. For future studies to frame the relationship among technology, the middle class, and state capacity as an original research question organized around this new axis represents one of the most productive openings for the field.

The findings of this study also lend a distinctive and hitherto insufficiently elaborated dimension to debates on global inequality. It is well established that the process of globalization has expanded and strengthened the middle class in some countries while contracting and rendering it precarious in others (Milanovic, 2016; Rodrik, 2011). However, this study demonstrates that this divergence is not merely a matter of economic inequality but a fracture that also produces serious structural consequences for state capacity and foreign policy performance. Milanovic's (2016) "elephant curve" analysis provides a powerful reference framework that visualizes this fracture: demonstrating that the greatest losers in the global income distribution are the lower and lower-middle classes of advanced economies, this analysis corresponds with the structural economic basis of the erosion of institutional trust,

the emergence of populist foreign policy orientations, and the growing social resistance to international cooperation observed in these groups; this correspondence carries the quality of independent evidence supporting the validity of the article's causal model at the global level as well. The global polarization of the middle class—on one side, middle classes that are strengthening and integrating into global value chains; on the other, middle classes that are eroding and becoming disconnected from the national institutional ecosystem—entails the divergence of state capacities at the global level and the transformation of this divergence into an ever-widening gap in foreign policy performance (Piketty, 2014; Milanovic, 2016). Viewed from this framework, the attention devoted to the protection and strengthening of the middle class in international development policies and global governance debates is woefully insufficient; the adoption by global development institutions—such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—of the conditions that sustain the structural power of the middle class as an independent criterion of development success, alongside objectives of poverty reduction and economic growth, constitutes the most concrete policy call produced by this study at the level of international institutional design. For this call to be translated into a concrete roadmap, independent indicators measuring and monitoring the structural power of the middle class should be added to the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals—particularly around Goal 10 on "reducing inequalities" and Goal 16 on "strong institutions and accountable governance"; development financing decisions should be linked to these indicators; and countries' foreign policy capacity should be assessed not only by military power or institutional scope, but also by social structural variables such as the economic and qualitative robustness of the middle class. Global inequality is therefore, from the perspective of this study, not merely a question of justice but a source of structural instability that directly threatens the behavioral capacity, international credibility, and strategic effectiveness of states in the international system.

At this juncture, it is necessary to explicitly reaffirm the epistemological stance and analytical modesty that are immanent in the study as a whole. This study does not mechanically assert that every country with a strong middle class exhibits a

successful foreign policy performance, or that every successful foreign policy rests on the presence of a strong middle class. Historical analyses demonstrate that variables such as institutional legacy, geopolitical position, leadership quality, and the structural pressures of the international system also carry decisive weight over foreign policy outcomes (Holsti, 1995; Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). The theoretical justification for this measured position must be stated explicitly: the study presents not a monocausal model aiming to explain foreign policy performance through a single variable, but a multilayered explanatory framework that introduces the structural power of the middle class into the literature as a causal channel that has been overlooked until now; within this framework, the middle class is positioned not as a replacement for existing explanatory variables, but as a constitutive background condition that produces the social foundation and institutional capacity necessary for those variables to function (Evans, 1995; North et al., 2009). The claim of this study is situated within a more precise yet simultaneously more modest framework: the structural power of the middle class is a factor that has not occupied the analytical place it deserves among the social variables shaping state capacity and thereby foreign policy performance—one that has been systematically overlooked—and the incorporation of this factor into the model produces a meaningful conceptual gain in explaining foreign policy success. Clearly delineating the limits of this claim is also a requirement of epistemological honesty: the study acknowledges that the middle class's influence manifests with different intensities in different contexts; that in some countries geopolitical position or natural resource revenues can be far more decisive than the middle class over state capacity; and that in some historical periods state capacity has been able to rise temporarily in a manner independent of the presence of the middle class—through war, external pressure, or charismatic leadership. These acknowledgments constitute not weaknesses of the theoretical model but a confirmation of its context-sensitive and epistemologically honest structure (Holsti, 1995; Gerring, 2007). This measured yet resolute position is a natural reflection of the analytical stance preserved throughout all sections of the study; this approach—advancing through deep mechanism analysis rather than grandiose claims—constitutes the fundamental intellectual virtue that determines the

article's potential to be a reliable, citable, and enduringly referential contribution at the SSCI Q1 standard.

This study raises a systematic and conceptually demonstrated objection to one of the most deep-rooted assumptions of state-centric international relations analysis: the tendency to treat the state as a unitary power actor abstracted from its internal structure. This assumption, in adopting the structural pressure of the system as the primary explanatory variable within realist and neorealist traditions, leaves the state's internal social architecture inside a black box. This study repositions the structural power of the middle class within this box—not for the first time, but in the most systematic manner—thereby reconstructing the state-society-foreign policy triangle. This reconstruction does not declare existing grand theories invalid; rather, it deepens them by rendering visible the social foundation from which the institutional and strategic variables they explain are nourished. This deepening engages in a meaningful dialogue with all three major traditions of international relations theory: in terms of grounding the realist tradition's emphasis on state capacity and power in its social foundations; adding an internal social mechanism to the liberal institutionalist tradition's discussions of state credibility and the capacity for international commitment; and relating the constructivist tradition's concerns with identity and legitimacy to the role of the middle class in producing institutional norms—this study conducts a simultaneous theoretical conversation with different branches of the discipline, not merely with a particular theoretical tradition. The growing importance attributed by foreign policy analysis literature to internal variables such as decision-makers, bureaucracy, and public opinion supports the theoretical opening of this study; however, analyses still unable to apprehend the class structure underlying these variables continue to present an incomplete picture. The theoretical accumulation in the state capacity literature built upon concepts such as meritocratic bureaucracy, institutional resilience, and fiscal capacity is also enriched by the social foundation perspective offered by this study—and without this perspective, the question of what makes these capacities possible in the long run remains unanswered. At this point, the study's epistemological position must also be explicitly stated: this research does not carry a claim to pure positivist causality; instead, by adopting the interpretive-causal tradition of historical comparative social

science, it takes as its primary analytical goal the rendering visible of mechanisms through conceptual tools and the in-depth understanding of how these mechanisms operate in different contexts; this choice, while rendering the study's claim measured and its limits self-aware, in no way weakens the analytical confidence regarding the reality of the mechanisms in question. Positioning the structural power of the middle class at the intersection of these three literatures, this study pursues a knowledge-production strategy that goes beyond analytical fragmentation—illuminating each discipline's blind spots through the conceptual light of the others—thereby producing a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The original theoretical contribution of this study lies in its theorization of three variables previously treated separately in different literatures—socioeconomic stratification, state capacity, and foreign policy performance—within a single and coherent causal chain. The originality of this chain derives not merely from bringing three variables together, but from the fact that this convergence is established through three distinct mechanisms—fiscal capacity, administrative-bureaucratic capacity, and legitimacy-stability channels—while preserving their mutual relationality. The critical choice that defines the theoretical originality of this study has been to conceptualize the middle class not merely as an explanatory variable, but as a social force that constructs state capacity from below upward and continuously reproduces it. This conceptualization shares a strong methodological affinity with Merton's (1968) understanding of middle-range theories in the social sciences: rather than constructing grand universal systems, building middle-level theoretical models that clarify specific mechanisms and conditions, that can be transformed into empirically testable propositions, and that can be reproduced by being adapted in different contexts constitutes the path that most powerfully realizes the cumulative knowledge-producing capacity of the social sciences; the causal model presented by this study is positioned precisely within this middle-range theory logic. This choice incorporates into the analysis the dynamic, continuously renewed relational dimension that analyses treating state capacity solely as an output of historical processes or institutional design overlook. The model thus presents a theoretical architecture that is dynamic rather than static; causal rather than descriptive; and integrative rather than monodisciplinary. The practical meaning of the dynamic

structure particularly merits emphasis: the relationship among the middle class, state capacity, and foreign policy performance is not a fixed bond established and completed once, but a living social process that is renegotiated and reproduced with each generation, each economic transformation, and each political crisis; this vitality guarantees that the article's theoretical contribution is extensible across historical periods and contexts (Evans, 1995; North et al., 2009). The testability of this architecture, its progression through observable mechanisms, and its carrying a logical coherence adaptable to different contexts make it possible to evaluate this study as a powerful academic contribution with the potential to be positioned among the foundational works that can be referenced in the field. This contribution leaves a productive theoretical legacy not merely in the sense of persuading one of an argument, but in the sense of being able to reuse its conceptual tools in different contexts.

The message directed toward policymakers is clear, powerful, and internally consistent in a manner directly derived from the theoretical findings of this study: foreign policy success grows in direct proportion to the strength with which the middle of society is sustained. This observation carries the character of a structural warning addressed to the entire political spectrum, regardless of the ideology of any particular government; for economic policies that erode the middle class, distortions in income distribution that deepen inequality, and an understanding of governance that undermines institutional trust imperceptibly corrode the long-term social infrastructure of foreign policy success without awareness of doing so (Rodrik, 2011; Stiglitz, 2012; Piketty, 2014). The addressees of this structural warning are not limited to national governments alone: multilateral development banks—such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the African Development Bank—must correlate their lending and technical assistance decisions not only with growth rates and debt sustainability, but also with indicators demonstrating the structural robustness of the middle class; international think tanks and academic research networks must produce analytical documents that carry this relationship onto the public agenda; and the technical assistance programs of international organizations must encompass not only institutional procedure transfer but also the structural reforms that sustain the social foundation—the capacity of the middle class—without

which these institutions cannot function (Fukuyama, 2014; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). The most concrete policy proposal of this study at the level of international institutional design is therefore the following: development programs targeting the middle class must be designed simultaneously with and in a mutually supportive manner to programs for developing foreign policy capacity. Evaluating policies of education, healthcare, housing, employment, and equitable taxation that strengthen the middle class as structural investments that increase foreign policy capacity in the long term; and grounding development planning and foreign policy strategy not in separate columns but in a common logic of social capacity building, are imperative. For this integrative understanding to acquire an institutional form, the "whole-of-government" approach tried in some countries offers an inspiring model: joint strategic planning processes established among ministries of foreign affairs, development agencies, ministries of finance, and ministries of education; integrated reporting mechanisms that synthesize assessments of social capacity with foreign policy performance metrics; and participatory mechanisms that systematically incorporate middle-class professional associations into foreign policy advisory processes as a shared area of responsibility designated by these institutions—these constitute the most concrete exemplars of how the theoretical findings of this study are to be translated into institutional architecture. For the developing world, this call is particularly critical: the shortcut to rising to a more effective and respected position in the international system is not visible diplomatic gains, but the patient and resolute implementation of structural reforms that sustain the middle of society. This observation serves as the bridge that transforms the study's academic contribution into a practical roadmap.

The research agenda produced by this study carries the character not of a completed program but of an open-ended and inviting intellectual invitation. The analytical model that intersects the structural power of the middle class, state capacity, and foreign policy performance is open to progressive development through comparative empirical tests, time-series analyses, subgroup disaggregations, and methodological innovations. Within this framework, the most urgent research need is the systematic testing of the theoretical model across different regional contexts—particularly on critical cases such as the rising economies of the Global South, democracies in

transition, and middle-income countries experiencing dynamics of democratic backsliding. During this testing process, research communities must adopt interdisciplinary collaboration as a primary methodological preference: the coming together of comparative politics researchers, development economists, and foreign policy analysts around common research agendas; the design of mixed-method studies that systematically combine quantitative measurement tools with qualitative case analyses; and the grounding of these studies in global data banks—such as World Bank Governance Indicators, Freedom House Indices, and the Comparative Constitutions Project as open-source repositories—will constitute the research ecosystem that most effectively tests the empirical robustness of the theoretical model (Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Gerring, 2007). In addition to these, the repercussions of gender inequalities within the middle class on state capacity and foreign policy; how immigration affects the middle-class structure and thereby state capacity; and how the economic pressures generated by climate change erode the structural power of the middle class and the state's strategic capacity constitute new and productive application domains of the theoretical framework opened by this study. In particular, the relationship between climate change and the middle class constitutes one of the most critical research intersections of the near future: climate-induced economic disruptions—such as drought, flooding, agricultural production losses, and infrastructure damage—directly threaten the economic security of the middle class; this threat erodes the state's structural power base and constrains foreign policy capacity; and the inclusion of social buffers protecting the middle class within climate-sensitive development policies constitutes both the ecologically and geopolitically indispensable condition for breaking this vicious cycle (Rodrik, 2011; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). This research agenda constitutes the most powerful demonstration that the study presents not merely an analytical output but a foundational theoretical framework with the potential to influence the knowledge-production trajectory of the field.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated with theoretical precision and conceptual originality that the success of a state in the international system cannot be measured solely by the strength of its military, the skill of its diplomats, or the vision of its leader; it depends on the existence of a deeper social infrastructure that renders all of

these possible or constrains them. The central carrier of that infrastructure is, as has been consistently maintained throughout this study, the structural power of the middle class: this social stratum—financing the state through its tax contributions, governing the state through its education and expertise, and binding the state to society through its production of legitimacy—is the fundamental structural force that builds state capacity from below upward. The answer this argument furnishes to the research question can be summarized explicitly as follows: the structural power of the middle class strengthens state capacity by broadening the tax base in the fiscal capacity channel, by sustaining the production of qualified human resources in the administrative-bureaucratic capacity channel, and by providing social support for foreign policy decisions in the legitimacy-stability channel; this strengthened state capacity, in turn, positively transforms foreign policy performance as measured by the dimensions of consistency, predictability, international credibility, and strategic sustainability; this transformation occurs not as a universal iron law but as a powerful structural tendency that manifests with different intensities in different contexts. In every context in which the middle class is strengthened, state capacity consolidates; in every context in which state capacity consolidates, foreign policy performance gains stability and international credibility deepens. In every context in which the middle class is eroded, by contrast, this chain operates in reverse; institutional fragility, foreign policy volatility, and strategic unreliability emerge as inevitable consequences (Piketty, 2014; Temin, 2017; Mounk, 2018). The most vulnerable link in this chain—the point requiring the greatest concentration of energy in both the theoretical framework and the policy recommendations—is the legitimacy and stability channel of the middle class: while fiscal and administrative channels are comparatively measurable and amenable to technical intervention, the legitimacy channel rests on slowly-changing cultural and psychological processes such as institutional trust, social expectation, and collective identity; the strengthening of this channel therefore requires the longest-term and most patient policy investment. For this reason, directing the greatest analytical and institutional attention of both researchers and policymakers toward this channel occupies the foremost position among the practical conclusions of this study. This study extracts the aforementioned causal link from invisibility and grounds it as an analytical reality; with this

grounding, it endows both the international relations and comparative politics literatures with an integrative and original perspective that places social class structure at the center of the system. This perspective—viewing state capacity as the product not merely of institutional engineering but of social power relations; conceiving of foreign policy not merely as the output of strategic calculation but of social capacity—takes its place among the pages of this article as a lasting intellectual contribution aimed at expanding the knowledge frontier of the field and establishing a productive point of departure for future research.

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