

Peculiarities of Modern Latin American Regionalism

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Regionalism has gained a significant popularity in present-day international relations and political science. Besides attracting impressive attention as a form of economic, political and social organization since the World War II, in the 21st century Regionalism has evolved into a popular field of study too. Today Regionalism is multidimensionally defined. It is an ideology and political movement that focuses on the development of a particular region. In international relations Regionalism is transnational cooperation to achieve a common goal or resolve a mutual problem within a specific geographical region. It also refers to a group of countries that are linked by geography, history or economic characteristics, such as Latin America. Therefore Regionalism seeks to strengthen the ties between these nations, like the European Union. Regionalism in Latin America has a history going back to the revolutionary and post-colonial period. The leaders of the wars of independence envisioned the idea of creating united Latin American regional state or confederation, in order to protect their fragile independence out of European powers. Importantly, regionalism in Latin America has historically oscillated between the United States of America led and exclusively Latin American and integration projects.

Keywords: Regionalism, the Americas, Latin America, Regional Studies, Regional Politics, International Relations, Geopolitics

INTRODUCTION

Regions and Regionalism have become integral constituents of present day global politics. Some people even believe that today's world order is a regional world order. For example, Peter Katzenstein rejects the "purportedly stubborn persistence of the nation-state or the inevitable march of globalization", arguing instead that we are approaching a "world of regions" (Katzenstein, 2005). Similarly, Amitav Acharya highlights the "emerging regional architecture of world politics" and the construction of "regional worlds" (Acharya, 2007, 2014). In recent years, the creation of regional organizations and arrangements has been endorsed all over the world, in order to deal with regional problems and seek economic and social development through cooperation among different nations.

On October 30, 1947 the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was signed by 23 nations in Geneva. Its overall purpose was to boost international trade by reducing or eliminating trade barriers to promote countries' economic recovery after World War II.

As an international trade treaty GATT also maintained meaningful regulations. Its most important trade principle was non-discrimination embodied in the most-favored-nation clause, which requires a contracting party to offer the same trade terms to all other signatory countries (Arenas García, 2012).

In contrast, Regional Trade Agreements (RTA) involve discriminatory preferences for imports coming from distinct countries. Paragraph 4 of Article XXIV of GATT defines the purpose of

RTAs and states that, “the contracting parties recognize the desirability of increasing freedom of trade by the development, through voluntary agreements, of closer integration between the economies of the countries parties to such agreements. The purpose of a customs union or of a free trade area should be to facilitate trade between the constituent territories and not to raise barriers to the trade of other contracting parties with such territories” (The Text of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, 1986).

Regional Trade Agreements are reciprocal preferential trade agreements between two or more countries with the objective of reducing barriers to trade between signatory parties. They include Free Trade Agreements, Customs Unions, Preferential Trade Agreements, Common Markets and Economic Unions. These groupings may be concluded between countries not necessarily belonging to the same geographical region. Examples of regional trade agreements include Southern Common Market (Mercosur), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Commonwealth of Independent States Free Trade Area (CISFTA), Georgia and China Free Trade Agreement, the European Union (EU) and Georgia Free Trade Agreement (Regional Trade Agreements, 2018).

Several distinct phases of development of Regionalism can be distinguished after formation of the GATT. However, this phenomenon has a long history going back in several centuries. Between 1947 and 1957 RTAs were created among bordering countries. After the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1958 a wave of integration projects spread throughout other parts of the world. By the early 1970s process of regionalism had slowed down. The new regionalism began in the mid-1980s (Campos Filho, 1999).

LATIN AMERICAN REGIONALISM IN THE 1990s

Contrary to Europe, where a single process of regional integration has undergone various stages of expansion, Latin America experienced different waves of Regionalism expressed in signing of several regional or sub-regional agreements launching or reactivating numerous integration projects.

Establishment of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in 1948 gave birth to uniquely Latin American regional organizations. Since then various attempts have been made to form free trade areas at the sub-regional level.

With the rise of globalization and interdependence since the mid-1980s, the so-called ‘new regionalism’ emerged all around the world (Matiuzzi de Souza, 2016).

Integration spirit, therefore, renewed in Latin America as well. After the process of democratization, countries in the region were seeking cooperation. In 1986 a bilateral agreement was signed between Brazil and Argentina with the objective of promoting bilateral trade and jointly defending democracy. It ultimately led to the creation of the “Mercado Común del Sur” (MERCOSUR) by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay in 1991, one of the most important initiatives to form a free trade area (FTA) among the four countries (Estevadeordal, Goto, & Saez, 2000).

Since the beginning of the 1990s with a new trade-centered market-friendly conception of integration several factors affected on Regionalism, like changes in the global economy, policy swings in the United States and Europe. Furthermore, under the hegemony of the United States, neo-liberalism became the dominant ideology from the beginning of the 1990s. The GATT registered a record number of preferential trading agreements in that period of time. However, the neo-liberal era ended abruptly with the economic crisis at the end of the 1990s.

Social actors and leftist political parties throughout Latin America fiercely criticized the Washington consensus and elaborated an alternative. Washington Consensus, a set of economic policy recommendations worked out by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and U.S. Department of the Treasury for developing countries, and Latin America shared the neoliberal view, that the operation of the free market and the reduction of state involvement were crucial for development of the global South.

By the late 1990s increasing criticism to the results of the Washington Consensus led to a change in approach that focused on poverty reduction and the need for participation by both developing country governments and civil society.

Frustration towards the Washington Consensus led to an eventual paradigm shift in the Latin American regional integration. Regionalism was re-politicized, whereby economic integration reclaimed to be an instrument to propel development.

Paradigm shift in Regionalism in Latin America coincided with “Pink Tide” – the political trend of turning towards left-wing governments that rejected neoliberalism. Leftist Brazil and Venezuela were the ones that took the leadership in regional integration initiatives.

During much of the 1990s, the Latin American left was seeking for divergent policy from neoliberalism on a collective basis. The primary platform to work on it became the Sao Paulo Forum.

The Sao Paulo Forum (SPF) was created in 1990, when political parties from Latin America and the Caribbean assembled by the proposal of the Brazilian Workers Party to discuss the new, post-fall of the Berlin Wall international setting and the consequences of the neoliberal policies that had been adopted by the region’s right-wing governments. The main objective was to debate a people-led and democratic alternative to neoliberalism. The initiative of Fidel Castro and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva brought together 48 leftist and anti-imperialist parties and organization, as they called themselves, from all over Latin America and the Caribbean.

After the first SPF, the group has been meeting on a regular, almost yearly basis being called Foro de São Paulo in reference to the location of the first meeting. The SPF turned to be a productive stage for transnational consultations that eventually prepared the left parties to gain victories in elections and take control over governments at the end of the 1990s.

The first SPF took place a few weeks after President Bush Senior unveiled his Enterprise for the Americas Initiative (EAI), a hemispheric program that he projected would establish a free-trade zone stretching from “Anchorage to Tierra del Fuego,” expand investment and provide a measure of debt relief for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Hufbauer, Jeffrey & Lambsdorff, 1991). The forum rejected Bush administration’s Free Trade Area of the Americas as anti-imperialist and demanded a “new concept of unity and continental integration”. This new concept was defined in the following way: “it entails the reaffirmation of sovereignty and self-determination of Latin America and our nations, the full recuperation of our cultural and historical identity and the spur of international solidarity of our peoples” (Dabène, 2012).

The next SPFs encouraged the conceptualization of regional integration as an instrument to defend sovereignty against all imperialist dangers, political consolidation, deepening of democracy, and building a consensus around core values.

The Second SPF held in Mexico City in 1991 highlighted the necessity of emancipation in a context of worldwide capitalist restructuring. The third SPF in Managua called for an “alternative integration”, “peoples integration”, “from below”, and creating “networks of exchange, coordination and complementarity of productive, financial and social policies”. Beyond trade, the integration processes were to build on the “dynamic articulation of cultures”. In Cuba in 1993, the fourth SPF argued that only an economically and politically integrated Latin American and Caribbean community would have the strength to assert itself independently in a world controlled by big economic blocks and their policies totally adverse to the interests of peoples of the region. Although Regionalism has been mostly associated with capitalist and imperialist threat at that time, SPF still acknowledged that the economic and political integration was a precondition to pursue the goals of the region (Dabène, 2012)..

In 1994 the SPF did not convene, nevertheless the First Summit of the Americas, organized by the Organization of the American States was held in Miami. In the summit Bush Senior’s Free Trade Area of the Americas was agreed to be created. As a response, the fifth SPF in 1995 in Montevideo described it as first stage of a process that aimed at implementing a new purpose of collective security and at reinforcing an integration model even more subordinated and dependent on the United States of America.

Oddly though, regional integration disappeared from the final declarations of the 6th to 9th SPFs. However, the sixth SPF summit in El Salvador in 1996 again pointed out that the integration did not exclude national interest and that only through sub-regional and regional integration schemes it was possible to gain the specific weight for negotiating successfully with economic blocs that consolidate the world, again insisting that a transfer of sovereignty is not foreseen despite of the goal of a Latin American union (Dabène, 2012).

SEQUENCE OF INTEGRATION PROJECTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY LATIN AMERICA

Six years later in 2001, the tenth SPF in Cuba again proclaimed a deep integration of “Latin-American community of nations and peoples” opposing the FTAA and proposed an “active role of the State, supplemented by civil society participation and granting the regional institutions with redistributive capacities” (Dabène, 2012).

In 2002, Lula da Silva became President of Brazil. His victory was celebrated by his comrades and during the eleventh SPF, urging to take this historical opportunity for deep regional integration with supranational institution building.

The “Pink tide” climaxed during the presidency of Hugo Chavez, who tried to build an alliance of leftist leaders across the hemisphere. Roughly a decade after Chavez came to power in 1999, leftist politicians had captured the presidency in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile and Peru. Three-quarters of Latin America’s population were already under the left-wing rule (Encarnación, 2018; Stephens, 2018).

Soon new regional organization, called Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) was founded by Venezuela and Cuba in 2004. The SPF publicly supported ALBA and disapproved the United States’ bilateral FTAs with Latin American countries. Additionally, it considered the Mercosur-Andean Community FTA, as essential platform for a deeper integration. The SPF added finance, defense, infrastructure, education, science, culture, labor rights or social security to the agenda of regional integration. It is paradoxical, that on the one hand the forum supported ALBA as separate integration scheme defending the Latin American identity and solidarity. On the other hand, the Community of South American Nations which

eventually became the main regional integration project as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) by 2008. Though, the concepts of cooperation, coordination, integration and unity were rarely defined into specific strategies as the SPFs can still be considered as intergovernmentalist fora.

In Latin America, several regionalist projects with differences in scope, size and relevance were put in motion since the beginning of the 21st century. The left undeniably introduced a paradigm shift regarding regional integration. It has been claiming that integration must protect Latin America from imperialist danger through a deeper institutionalized Regionalism. However, it appeared more than populist rhetoric than real deep integration.

Some Latin American countries even featured their commitments to the regional integration in their constitutions. 153rd article of the Venezuelan constitution sets the objective of creating a “community of nations” and “granting supranational organizations, by means of treaties, with the exercise of necessary competencies to achieve regional integration”. The preamble of the Ecuadorian constitution pledges to the Latin American integration as dreamed by of Simón Bolívar (The Constitution of Ecuador, 2008; The Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 2009).

Attitude towards Regionalism in Latin America has always been tentative and ambiguous, thereby frequently misinterpreted. While, there has always been an obvious interest in deep supranational integration, it requires ceding or pooling sovereignty in order to create a supranational structure capable of developing regional integration. This is one of the main internal obstacles that hinder the process of integration. Due to the excessive nationalism Latin American countries are not willing to give up any amount of sovereignty for the construction of supranational institutions, which makes it impossible that regional or sub-regional integration processes can be advanced or consolidated there.

Controversy over sovereignty led some countries to develop their own integration plans. In 2000s, Brazil and Venezuela emerged as major political actors that began promoting regional integration on their own. Initiatives of these two countries shaped the peculiarities of regional integration movement in the 21st century Latin America.

After the election of President Itamar Franco, Brazil began trying to take the lead in regional integration projects. In 1993 Franco proposed the creation of a South American Free Trade Area (SAFTA), as the southern alternative to NAFTA and a result of the convergence of the Andean Community, Mercosur and Chile. Why did the topic of regional integration eventually become so important for Brazil? By the end of 20th century Brazil was disappointed with the results of Mercosur and was seeking coalition in order to balance the U.S. influence in the region and contend for regional leadership with an ultimate goal to become a global player. However, the Brazilian political ambition for leadership in the region was less consensual and actively challenged by Argentina.

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso took more concrete steps and called for the first South American Summit in Brasilia in 2000. The summit's purpose was to create a zone of “democracy, peace, solidarity-based cooperation, integration and shared economic and social development” (Carciofi, 2008). In essence, it formed the foundation for what would become Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA), an ambitious plan with the guiding vision to facilitate South American integration.

The newly elected President Lula continued and amplified Cardoso's policy orientation regarding regional integration (Spektor, 2010). On the third South American Summit held in Cusco, Peru in 2004 the Brazilian idea of a South American community was accepted. The Community of South American Nations (CASA) aimed at becoming a loose alliance fostering the convergence between CAN and MERCOSUR and promoting specific policy coordination, rather than becoming an institutional supranational entity (Dabène, 2012).. Working on the project continued on the next summits in Ayacucho, Peru and Brasilia, Brazil which was followed by the adoption of a Strategic plan for deepening South American integration in Cochabamba, Bolivia in 2006. The agenda included a wide scope of areas, incorporating economic, political, social, cultural or environmental issues. During a special summit in Margarita, Venezuela in 2007 the South American Energy Council was created and the Community of South American Nations was renamed as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). The UNASUR treaty was signed in 2008 in Brasilia.

The first decade of the 21st century was not particularly stable in Latin America. The region remained politically polarized, however the economic growth was better as per capita GDP grew by an average of 1.9 percent annually as compared with 0.3 percent for 1980 to 2000 (Weisbrot, 2011).

Geopolitical condition in the Andean region was notable tense. Confrontation among Venezuela and Colombia escalated since the beginning of 2000s and was further aggravated over ideological differences between two governments. In 2008 situation was even intensified over the Andean diplomatic crisis between Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela.

Being concerned by the strained climate that was destabilizing regional relations, Brazil decided to get involved in the conflict resolution and elaborate a consensual agenda for UNASUR based on common ground. However, support for a continental initiative was not the only agenda Brazil had. Brasilia aimed on creating an alternative to the U.S.-dominated Organization of American States (OAS), keep Mexico away from Brazil's zone of influence, and eventually benefit from the audacious foreign policy of Hugo Chávez.

In December 2008, Brazil took the initiative to call up the first Summit of Latin America and the Caribbean Heads of States and Government for Development and Integration (CALC), held in Costa do Sauipe, Brazil. The objective was to establish a cooperation process comprising of all the Latin American and Caribbean region. It was the first time, all 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries were brought together, which had not jointly met in other mechanisms without the presence of countries from outside the region.

In February 2010, Mexico jointly held the 2nd Summit in Cancun. At that event, the participants approved the idea of creating a new regional organization entitled Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). In the Summit of Caracas, in December 2011, CELAC was officially launched as a successor of two similar regional blocs: the Latin American and Caribbean Summit on Integration and Development (CALC) and the Rio Group that was formed in 1986 as an alternative to the OAS.

Brazilian-led sequence of integration projects IIRSA, UNASUR, CELAC was clearly driven by a Brazilian pursuit to assert its leadership in the region. At the same time Brazil tried to promote a state of "South-Americaness" and to get away with the concept of Latin America, which was fading away in the post-Cold War international scenario (Freias Couto).

Venezuela's initiative towards regional integration was closely related to its president Hugo Chavez. Inspired by Simon Bolivar, he steadily supported the idea of regional unity in opposition to the US "imperialism". He made Latin American integration the foundation of his foreign policy. After the 1997 Summit of the Americas Venezuela began actively working with its neighbors with the goal of regional unity.

Following the Chavez's proposal to create an alternative to the Free Trade Area of the Americas, Venezuela and Cuba signed an agreement of cooperation that eventually was enlarged to the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of our America (ALBA). Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro made it explicit that the agreement was open to other countries to sign in. Since its launch Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Honduras and several Caribbean islands also joined the alliance.

ALBA for Chavez was the umbrella initiative, accompanied by parallel initiatives such as Banco del Sur (Bank of the South) - a part of his crusade against the institutions of international capital he called "tools of Washington", an alternative to International Monetary Fund and World Bank dominance. Supplement initiatives included integration projects like, Television del Sur (Telesur) - a media conglomerate broadcasting throughout the ALBA bloc which was supported by the leftist governments and promoted as a "Latin socialist answer to CNN" and Petro-America - a resistance instrument to multinational oil corporations. The purpose of these initiatives was reinforcing the integration of the Latin American nations.

ALBA was also accompanied by a Trade Agreement for the Peoples (TCP), establishing a free trade area between members, the creation of multinational state-controlled firms and creating a common regional currency.

Chavez became an inspiration for the left-wing leaders to win power across Latin America. He often mentioned that his ambition was to create a confederation of republics in Latin America. Although, he managed to organize an union of leftist governments, he could not convince key political actors as Brazil and Argentina to join the alliance.

Ultimately, ALBA turned out to be just a tool of Chavez for giving voice to his own controversial foreign policy, rather than a real integration project. Meanwhile, with ALBA's launch it became obvious that Brazil and its driven regional integration projects were incapable to establish a clear leadership in the region.

Chavez also was one of the biggest supporters of CELAC. He viewed it as an effort to challenge the "interference" of the United States.

The founding declaration of Community of Latin American and Caribbean States aims "to advance social welfare, the quality of life, economic growth, and to promote independent and sustainable development" by ways of promoting political, economic, social and cultural integration, but due to Venezuela-Cuban leadership roles in the bloc some described it just as an attempt to reject U.S. influence. "Time" described CELAC as "a badge of Latin America's increasing independence from U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere" (O'Boyle, 2015).

Chavez and other leftist leaders hoped that the bloc would deepen Latin American integration, stop U.S. hegemony and consolidate control over regional affairs.

An editorial published in Brazilian "Estado" newspaper on 25 February, 2010 said that "CELAC reflects the disorientation of the region's governments in relation to its problematic

environment and its lack of foreign policy direction, locked as it is into the illusion that snubbing the United States will do for Latin American integration what 200 years of history failed to do” (Latin America Economic Integration, Cooperation Investment and Business Guide: Strategic Information and Opportunitie, 2018).

CELAC’s members include every country in the Americas, with the exception of Canada, the United States, and the territories of European countries in the Western Hemisphere. Altogether, the organization encompasses 33 countries exceeds 650 million people. Despite the huge potential, CELAC remains uncertain and fragile project that lacks unity, regional influence and international significance.

Latin American 21st century regionalism is undoubtedly different from the previous trade-centered waves, though none of them could attain proper supranational institutional structures or intergovernmental decision-making. In most regional integration projects in Latin America political leaders such as Presidents have always remained key figures that shaped the way of Regionalism there.

Since Donald Trump became president, much has been said about the “Latin Americanization” of U.S. politics (Encarnación, 2018). The election of Trump was accompanied by the Conservative wave or the “Blue Tide” in Latin America to the response of “Pink Tide”. It have surged since 2015 with the election of center-right president in Argentina followed by Brazil, Paraguay, Peru, Colombia, Chile. For the first time since the 1980s, the continent witnessed the major shift to the right.

New right and right-center governments have responded to the regionalism of the left by deepening their commercial links with the United States and the European Union (EU) and by organizing the Alianza del Pacífico (Pacific Alliance), a traditional arrangement for free-trade and freedom-of-movement.

Pursuing commercial, economic, and political integration, the Pacific Alliance was formed by Peru, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico when they signed the Lima Declaration in April, 2011. The Pacific Alliance is distinct from UNASUR, ALBA, and CELAC. If these three view regionalism as a means against the U.S. influence and globalization, the Pacific Alliance seeks to expand it through cooperation among members with the specific goal of strengthening ties with the Asia-Pacific region. The Alliance’s goal was to increase competitiveness by integrating economies and allow for the free flow of capital, goods, people, and services among members.

Besides trade liberalization, openness to foreign investment and the integration of a common market, the Pacific Alliance implemented several other integration projects such as visa-free tourist travel, a common stock exchange, and joint embassies in several countries.

CONCLUSION

Regionalism in Latin America has a history going back to the revolutionary and post-colonial periods. Some local political leaders favored the idea of creating united Latin American regional state or confederation, as a way of protecting their fragile independence from the European powers.

The first efforts for Latin American political integration which began in the early 1810s ended in the mid of 1860s. After a hiatus of almost a century, integrationist attempts re-emerged since World War II, either on regional (Latin American Free Trade Association (LATFA), Latin American Integration Association (ALADI)), or sub-regional level (Organization of Central American States, The Andean Community) with the primary focus on economic regionalism.

Despite the widespread disappointment caused by the unsatisfactory results of trade liberalization and industrialization in the 1970s and early 1980s, economic integration remained at the heart of the new-regionalism approach during the 1990s. However, 21st century regionalism in Latin America shifted to regional socio-political convergence as a way of promoting a more autonomous and socially sensitive development model.

Worth mentioning that regionalism in Latin America has always been vacillating between Pan-American integration projects led by the United States of America and exclusively Latin American movements. The Union of South American Nations, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States were all founded as part of the drive for regional integration. Despite numerous attempts, Latin America integration has never been fulfilled.

Taking into consideration the substantial rise of Regionalism in global politics in recent years, there is a huge potential in the integrated Latin America. The combined markets would give the region more weight on the global economic stage. Furthermore, united Latin America would have greater political influence to easily garner the attention of the United States and other world powers. It would also enable the Latin American nations to better promote their interests in multilateral discussions and negotiations. In general, this could improve the opportunities and wellbeing of more than half a billion Latin American people.

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