

Lessons from Regional Responses to Security, Health, and Environmental Challenges in Latin America

Edited by

Ivo Ganchev

Founder of the Centre for Regional Integration, UK

Series in Politics



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Acknowledgements

Ivo Ganchev

Founder of the Centre for Regional Integration, UK

In our increasingly interconnected world, both opportunities and challenges spread quickly across states more quickly than ever. Before and after these processes take place at the global level, they begin and end at the regional level. To help manage relevant opportunities and challenges, the number of regional organizations, treaties, associations, and other similar forms of collective governance has increased substantially in number since WWII. This is a major trend in international politics and it has emerged in order to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for new mechanisms of regional cooperation, integration, and coordination.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a region where a substantial number of regional organizations and treaties co-exist, evolve, and adapt simultaneously. Since the start of the twenty-first century, the landscape of frameworks governing the region has undergone a process of continuous transformation while constantly accommodating dynamic adjustments for both political and pragmatic reasons. When the COVID-19 pandemic started, some regional bodies provided much needed support to governments and people alike, while others did not have the mandate or resources to do so, and a third group that had previously functioned well suspended their operations due to a lack of member state capacity, but maintained a façade of activity nevertheless.

Observing these trends, some of my colleagues decided to focus their research agenda specifically on the LAC regional responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, producing excellent specialized books and papers on the topic. As important as the lessons from the pandemic are, I always thought that examining them in a broader context would help to make research works more relevant in the long run and link them to the broader theme of collective challenges that LAC states are facing. In early 2021, I conducted a brief survey among 78 fellow political scientists about their views on the most pressing collective challenges for Latin America in terms of areas of regional governance where research is still lacking.

After grouping the responses thematically, three areas stood out: security, healthcare, and environmental protection. Upon further reflection, I realized that the areas indicated in the survey responses are essential for protecting the borders, lives and land that constitute the social and environmental ecosystems of

LAC. Security, healthcare, and environmental protection are interrelated, but they are also reshaped through collective governance, which provides various fruitful research threads to explore. Understanding that the need to conduct such work was too large to ignore, I realized that exploring these topics requires a collaborative effort.

This inspired me to conceptualize this edited volume, which explores how regional, sub-regional and national frameworks for LAC governance address collective security, healthcare and environmental protection challenges and are reshaped by them. Engagement with these topics has produced valuable findings and lessons for students, scholars and practitioners of regionalism, Latin American studies and political science more broadly, as well as for those who engage with regional or international organizations related to LAC.

This volume took more than two years to compile and it is the result of a group effort by numerous scholars and organizations. Without them, it would not be possible. I would like to express my profound gratitude to everyone who helped to make this book a reality, in the order of their involvement. I hope to show my appreciation to everyone involved in its publication and to help readers understand key aspects of the process that produced the end result.

First, I would like to thank Vernon Press for trusting in this research project from the start, as well as for allowing me the creative freedom to design the conceptual framework that underpins this volume and to make final decisions about its content. This has greatly facilitated my work as an editor and enabled me to create a coherent compilation of contributions.

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appreciate the work that academic communities do to provide us with platforms for sharing and exchanging ideas.

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Finally, on behalf of all contributors, I would also like to thank the external peer reviewers who shall remain anonymous. These colleagues generously gave us their time and provided us with elaborate feedback and tips that improved our work and the quality of the book over several months prior to finalizing the manuscript. This is a testament to their genuine desire and selfless commitment to help.

Similar to the way that various governmental and non-governmental organizations work together to provide a framework for supporting and deepening Latin American regionalism, everyone involved in the creation of this edited volume also had a crucial role to play. The collaboration, cooperation and, ultimately, integration of our efforts made this project, and it has been an honour for me to work with everyone involved.

We hope that you will enjoy reading the book!

Notes on contributors

Introduction to the Editor

Ivo Ganchev is the Founding Director of the Centre for Regional Integration. He has taught at several universities, including Queen Mary University of London and Beijing Foreign Studies University. Ivo holds a PhD from Peking University. His research has appeared in academic journals such as *World Affairs*, *Strategic Analysis* and *International Studies*.

Introduction to the contributors (in alphabetical order)

Dircea Arroyo Buganza is an Academic Coordinator of Regional and Legal Studies at Universidad Anáhuac México. She holds a PhD from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Her research has appeared in several books and in academic journals such as *Red de Estudios Superiores Asia-Pacífico*.

Alla Yurievna Borzova is a Professor of Theory and History at the International Relations Department of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN). She holds a PhD from the same institution. Alla has authored or co-authored over 100 research publications, which have appeared in academic journals such as *Latinskaya Amerika*, *Vestnik RUDN* and *Asia and Africa Today*.

Camila de Macedo Braga is a Post-doctoral Fellow at the Institute of International Relations, University of São Paulo. She holds a PhD in Political Science from the same institution, where she is also currently the Coordinator of the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CCP-NUPRI). Camila has also served as a Global Fellow at the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies, Brown University, since 2016.

Rafael A. Duarte Villa is a Professor at the University of Sao Paulo and holds a PhD from the same institution. He is also the Director of the Political Science Department at the same university. Rafael has served as the Director of the International Research Center there and as a Fellow at Columbia University and at the International University of Andalucia. He has authored numerous books and recently co-edited the volume *Power Dynamics and Regional Security in Latin America* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

Alina Gamboa Combs is a Lecturer and Researcher at Universidad Anáhuac México. She holds a PhD from the University of Warwick. She has authored the book *Regional Integration, Development and Governance in Mesoamerica*

(Springer, 2019), and her research articles has have appeared in journals such as *Foreign Affairs Latinoamérica*.

Tatiana de Souza Leite Garcia is an Associate Researcher at the Department of Geography of the University of São Paulo and a Consultant for the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). She holds a PhD from the University of São Paulo. Tatiana has authored articles for academic journals such as *Confins Revue Franco-Brésilienne de Géographie* and she has recently co-edited the book *América do Sul: geopolítica, arranjos regionais e relações internacionais* (Edições FFLCH/USP, 2022).

Miguel Gomis is an Assistant Professor at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. He holds a PhD from Universidad Complutense. Miguel has authored numerous book chapters and research articles on governance, policy, and institutional change, which have appeared in academic journals such as *Ciencia y Poder Aéreo* and *Papel Político*.

Octavio González Segovia is a regular lecturer at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), where he recently concluded a postdoctoral stay. He has taught at the University of Potsdam, the Hertie School of Governance and Universidad de las Américas Puebla, among others institutions. Octavio holds a PhD from Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. He has authored book chapters and research articles on global health governance, which have appeared in academic journals such as *Face à Face: Regards sur la Santé*.

Victor JEIFETS is a Professor at Saint-Petersburg State University. He holds a PhD from the same institution and has published over 250 research articles in academic journals in Russia, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Spain and Portugal. He has authored numerous books and recently co-edited the volume *Rethinking Post-Cold War Russian–Latin American Relations* (Routledge, 2022) and edited the volume *The Comintern in Latin America: Historical Traditions and Political Processes* (Ves' Mir, 2021). He is also the Editor-in-Chief of *Latinskaya Amerika*, a journal of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and a leading researcher at the Institute for Latin American Studies in Moscow.

Kseniya Konovalova is an Assistant (Teaching Fellow) at Saint-Petersburg State University. She holds a PhD from the same institution and has published over 30 research articles in academic journals. Her research has appeared in academic journals such as *World Economy and International Relations*, *Latinskaya Amerika*, and *Iberoamerica*.

Ignacio Medina Núñez is a Research Professor at El Colegio de Jalisco in Zapopan, Mexico. He previously served as the Head of the Department of Iberian and Latin American Studies at the University of Guadalajara and holds a PhD from the same institution. He is a Level III member of the Mexican

National Research System and has authored numerous research articles, as well as books such as *Presidential Elections in Latin America: The Ascent of the Left* (2013) and *Política, Democracia y Educación Ciudadana: De la Antigüedad a la Época Moderna* (2015).

Fernand Guevara Mekongo Mballa is an Africa Fellow at the Centre for Regional Integration and a Doctoral Candidate at the Catholic University of Central Africa. Fernand has authored and presented papers at several global conferences, which have subsequently appeared in academic journals such as the *Journal of Law and Emerging Technology*.

Daniel Morales Ruvalcaba is an Associate Professor at Sun Yat-sen University (China) and a Member of the National System of Researchers of Mexico. He holds a PhD from the University of Guadalajara. Daniel is the creator of the World Power Index and the author of numerous research articles, which have appeared in academic journals such as *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *Third World Quarterly*, *International Studies*, *Geopolítica(s)*, *Colombia Internacional*, and *Estudios Internacionales*, among others, as well as in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.

Rafael Enrique Piñeros Ayala is a PhD Candidate and an Associate Professor (Docente) at Universidad Externado de Colombia. He holds a MA in International Relations from the same institution and his research has appeared in various books and in academic journals such as *Relaciones Internacionales and Revista Desafíos*.

Alfonso Sánchez Mugica is a Professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He holds a PhD from the same institution. Alfonso has authored dozens of articles in journals such as *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales*. He has also edited or co-edited numerous books, such as *La política exterior de México y la Constitución de 1917 en su Centenario* (UNAM, 2020).

Introduction

Ivo Ganchev

Founder of the Centre for Regional Integration, UK

The development of regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a very long and resilient historical process. Conceptually, it can be traced back to early ideas about Pan-Americanism, a concept which first emerged at the Congress of Panama, organized by Simon Bolivar in 1826. Institutionally, the world's first regional organization was established in 1889-90 in the Americas under the name International Union of American Republics (later transformed into the Pan-American Union). Since then, many political leaders have traditionally used phrases such as “we, the Latinos” (Spanish: *nosotros los latinos*) to address their people.

Since 1945, dozens of regional agreements and initiatives have shaped LAC regionalism. At least 19 of them can be classified as regional organizations and they are driven by engagement between governments, which are the only actors possessing both the legitimacy and the resources to make large strides in promoting greater engagement on a large scale across the region. While scholars have rightly pointed out that the involvement of non-state actors in regional projects requires more attention and in some parts, this book engages with this emerging field of research, Latin American regionalism remains de facto state-centric when it comes to collective governance. This consideration has influenced the topics and methods selected by the contributors in many of the chapters.

LAC regionalism is characterized by a complex web of institutionalized organizations which overlap in various ways to form a so-called “alphabet soup” or “spaghetti bowl” of regional bodies. This forms a landscape of dynamic and flexible mechanisms that serve to help states cooperate, coordinate, and pursue greater integration. These mechanisms form complex processes which are sometimes heavily politicized and difficult to evaluate. Hence, academic studies have produced widely varied and often ostensibly contradictory evaluations of LAC regionalism. They generally fall within three broad categories. Drawing on the work of Thomas Legler (2013), Cintia Quiliconi and Raúl Salgado Espinoza (2017, p. 20) accurately divide relevant authors into three types: optimists, sceptics and innovators.

Optimists examine Latin American regional integration empirically and argue that it is sufficiently resilient to resist shifts in the ideological inclinations of

both intra-regional and extra-regional political tides. These scholars believe that this is possible because organizations in the region have changed their form and focus over time while maintaining a relatively stable overall aim of deepening integration. They argue that the post-1945 history of LAC regionalism has developed in four waves; the first one was an effort to industrialize the region during the 1950s and 1960s, which only had limited success. The second wave has been labelled revisionist (Rosenthal, 1991). It was characterized by disappointment with the outcomes of the first one and inspired efforts to create more mechanisms for coordination on economic and political matters during the 1970s and 1980s. The third wave was an effort to promote economic liberalization starting with the end of the Cold War during the 1990s and it has been often referred to as open regionalism.

The fourth and most recent wave is viewed as a response to the failures of the third one and it is often referred to as “post-liberal/neoliberal” or “post-hegemonic” as these terms indicate an effort to move beyond economic reforms shaped by US influence (which some see as negative and hegemonic) according to a liberal/neoliberal economic model. The past two decades of LAC regionalism have been characterized by a shift in priorities from trade and finance to social and political concerns (da Motta Veiga and Ríos, 2007; Riggiozzi and Tussie, 2012; Serbin et al., 2012). This has led to the emergence of new regional organizations and to a change in the priorities of earlier ones as non-economic topics have become increasingly central. Academic scholarship since the start of the 21st century has reflected that and, in a way, the themes covered in this book and the research interests of its contributors are also reflective of this trend.

Sceptics, as their label suggests, are critical of LAC regionalism. Some of them have argued that it has produced organizations which are largely dysfunctional (Baquero-Herrera, 2005) and characterized by institutional weaknesses (Coral, 2011; Malamud and Gardini, 2012; Gómez-Mera, 2014). Others hold that regional integration in Latin America is a “failure” due to the lack of sovereignty transfer from national governments to supra-national organizations (Buelvas, 2013). A third group argues about the terminology that should be employed to characterize Latin American regionalism – some scholars who do this suggest that existing processes should be labelled as “cooperation”, and believe that the term “integration” should be reserved for other regions (Malamud, 2013). While some of the criticisms that sceptics make are well-reasoned, they are rarely followed by any constructive suggestions; the proposals of most scholars in this category are often either direct or indirect encouragement for LAC states to move closer to the EU model. However, given the political polarization among LAC governments and the limited resources they have, it seems to me that this is simply wishful thinking. This book does not aim to, nor could it possibly

refute these criticisms but instead seeks to learn from their limitations and offer more constructive proposals.

Innovators are dissatisfied with the state of mainstream scholarship on LAC regionalism and they seek ways to present new concepts that can help to explain its development. For instance, Briceño-Ruiz (2006) applies concepts such as “strategic regionalism” (Deblock and Brunelle, 1993, p. 596) to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), discussing the use of economic policy to develop comparative advantages in international markets. His other works emphasize the relevance of various concepts to Latin America; they include “social regionalism”, which is centred around poverty reduction and improvements in public services and “productive regionalism”, which emphasizes mechanisms for integrating the production of multiple countries (Briceño-Ruiz, 2018). Another example is the work of Mariana Vázquez (2011, p. 175), which proposes the concept of “inclusive regionalism” to emphasize shared concerns regarding the protection of civil, political, economic, and cultural rights. While such studies make admirable efforts to pursue intellectual innovation, they ultimately have limited potential to produce insights of practical relevance because of the high degree of abstraction that characterises their intended aim. The contributors to this book have been mindful of the limitations that conceptual discussions create and while some of them engage in relevant discussions, most of them remain largely concerned with empirical discussions and seek to offer rather practical insights.

This edited volume represents a departure from the approaches of most recent books on LAC regionalism. It does not focus on one or several specific regional organizations (as in Cusack, 2019; Tigre, 2017; Gómez-Mera, 2013), or on a single event (as in Meireles, de Conti and Guevara, 2023); it also does not seek to employ an overly-abstract umbrella theme such as “resilience” to unite the chapters (as in Briceño-Ruiz, 2021; Briceño-Ruiz and Puntigliano, 2013). Instead, this volume groups the contributions according to the types of policy challenges that they address in three specific areas: security, healthcare, and environmental protection. This is a conscious move and it seeks to help readers orient themselves more easily and to bring awareness to these three areas which deserve more attention in the study of LAC regionalism. After all, security, healthcare, and environmental governance and environmental protection share a fundamental common characteristic as they are issues related to the safety of the general public (Nunes, 2012). Besides, addressing them is a necessary precondition for achieving sustainable economic development; hence, challenges in these areas must be tackled for economic development and regional integration to proceed further and generate greater prosperity for the region.

The challenges that LAC faces in terms of security, health and environmental concerns are considerable and emerge in conditions that are specific to the region. There is broad consensus that LAC is characterized by “violent peace”, a phrase which was first coined by David Mares (2001) to explain inter-state bargaining processes, but later scholars began to quote in a variety of contexts. Traditional wars between LAC states have been rare: since gaining their independence over two centuries ago, they have waged 12 inter-state wars in total, with 10 of them within the region and only 3 taking place since WWII (Sarkees and Wayman, 2010). While occasional diplomatic skirmishes do happen and there are several unresolved border disputes, they rarely escalate to the point of armed conflict. However, the security of governments and citizens is under various forms of threat; the former often face rather frequent attempts for both violent and non-violent coups, which ultimately undermine the legitimacy of political mechanisms and create negative spillover effects across the region. Meanwhile, citizens must ensure that they avoid engaging with organized crime groups who could pose a serious threat to them. The annual number of homicides in Latin America fluctuates around 150,000, which is 30 times higher than that of all estimated casualties in the three intra-state wars that took place in LAC since 1945 (Igarapé Institute, 2015). This means that many of the regional security threats in Latin America are non-traditional and, thus, often challenging to isolate and tackle appropriately.

Environmental protection is another area where LAC states face collective challenges. The region is home to highly biodiverse areas, including the Amazon region which takes up 40% of South America's land area and is home to one-fifth of all species of animals and plants in the world, while the Amazon River Basin contains the same proportion of all freshwater entering the oceans globally. This aquatic system plays an important role in the global carbon cycle, influencing the maintenance of the hydrological cycle and climate in several subregions of Latin America (Goulding et al., 2003). In addition to their natural beauty and role in the regional ecosystem, LAC forests and rivers provide sources of energy and food while also serving as tourist attractions. Whether for reasons of principle, as a means of pursuing sustainable development, or as a means to pursue the concept of “living well” (Spanish: *buen vivir*), it is necessary for LAC states and their people to tackle collective environmental challenges.

Protecting and improving public health is another area where LAC faces collective challenges. Most recently, the prolonged COVID-19 crisis highlighted the weaknesses of the region's health and social protection systems (CEPAL, 2022), drawing more attention to the topic, which inspired relevant academic research as well. LAC states face various issues, such as a lack of quality healthcare availability in remote regions and inequality of access to healthcare due

to wealth disparity. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, there was a clear necessity for deeper regional coordination, but instead, what happened was that many regional organizations slowed down their work as governments focused on national priorities. This revealed that the severity of a health crisis can impact the way that national and regional bodies respond but also that its impact can be curbed when appropriate action is taken.

This book explores the way that security, health-related and environmental challenges are collectively addressed in various parts of LAC. The chapters are methodologically diverse as the approaches have been chosen to fit appropriately with the research questions explored by the contributors. Each of them presents key findings and attempts to draw lessons from or for regionalism in LAC and beyond.

The book contains eleven chapters, which are grouped into three parts. The first part examines how LAC regional organizations and actors have addressed various security challenges, such as coup attempts, deglobalization and hybrid threats. In chapter one, I compare the ways that LAC regional organizations have responded to coup attempts since the rise of post-hegemonic regionalism and evaluate their performance vis-à-vis the US-promoted OAS. I argue that during this time period, LAC organizations were moderately successful in their efforts to produce responses diverging from US interests and to articulate distinctly Latin American positions. The introduction of the first chapter aims to contextualize recent developments in LAC regionalism and its body contains detailed empirical descriptions, while the main findings are only presented in the conclusion. This is deliberate because the chapter is intended to serve as an entry point to the book, so it was designed to contain analysis that appeals to both experts on Latin American studies and readers who might require a broader overview of the political shifts underpinning the development of LAC regionalism since the start of the twenty-first century.

In chapter two, Kseniya Konovalova and Victor Jeifets explore how “deglobalization” relates to changes in the security agenda of LAC. They use historical and case study methods to examine PROSUR, the Venezuelan issue in the OAS, and contemporary Latin America-NATO dialogue as examples. The authors of this chapter reveal why the integration process has not produced a joint vision for LAC governments to face pressing security challenges. In chapter three, Rafael A. Duarte Villa, Camila de Macedo Braga, and Rafael Enrique Piñeros Ayala analyse the concept of hybrid security as it applies to the Colombia-Venezuela and Colombia-Ecuador border areas. The three co-authors use a critical and empirical perspective to understand grey areas in which control of territory, solutions to social problems, and the provision of services are determined both by the presence of the state and by various actors outside the law. In chapter four, Miguel Gomis explores the impact of the Alliance for

Prosperity of the Northern Triangle (APNT) on Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. He relies on institutional documents, field interviews, and an extensive press review to show that APNT benefited donors and NT elites while having little impact on national socio-economic conditions or institutions in the three relevant countries.

The second part of the book investigates how LAC regional organizations and actors have dealt with health challenges, such as epidemics (including COVID-19), and how these challenges have affected national power and domestic elections. In chapter five, Octavio González Segovia and Alfonso Sánchez Mugica argue that during epidemic outbreaks, LAC transgovernmental networks (TGNs) are more effective than intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), largely due to the faster speed at which they can operate. To build this argument, the authors employ semi-structured interviews with health and foreign affairs senior officials and international bureaucrats who have worked for regional organizations. In chapter six, Daniel Morales Ruvalcaba evaluates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the national power of the 14 best-positioned LAC countries in the international geostructure. He measures a wide range of variables that make up national power and the World Power Index (WPI) to categorize them according to the impact of the pandemic. He finds that some countries, such as Guatemala and Ecuador, experienced minor impacts, while others, such as Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela, suffered significant decreases in terms of their national power.

In chapter seven, Ignacio Medina Núñez discusses the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the presidential electoral processes in LAC. He reveals that the pandemic affected elections because it involved crowds in assemblies and rallies and also impacted the physical process of casting votes in person. In chapter eight, Alla Yurievna Borzova examines the interactions of Brazil, Peru, PAHO and ACTO in helping to overcome the consequences of COVID-19. She shows that these actors cooperated to improve healthcare systems and support the efforts of national governments to respond to the pandemic. She also shows that Brazil and Peru cooperate within the framework of the Organization for Cooperation in the Amazon River Basin (ACTO) on various issues related to health and development more broadly.

The third part of the book analyses how LAC regional organizations and actors have tackled environmental challenges, including various aspects of policy-making in terms of protecting ecosystems and human rights, while also drawing some lessons based on the findings. In chapter nine, Tatiana de Souza Leite Garcia presents MERCOSUR's institutional evolution in terms of its environmental policy. Based on both primary and secondary sources, she identifies and analyses the domestic, regional, and international variables that resulted in advances and limitations of MERCOSUR's environmental policy. In

chapter ten, Alina Gamboa Combs and Dircea Arroyo Buganza study the activities and efficacy of the environmental efforts of Proyecto Mesoamerica, a regional cooperation and integration project that includes the south-eastern states of Mexico, Central America, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. They focus on the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC) project to reveal that when it involved international bodies that required accountability and reporting results, promising results were delivered. However, when the MBC and other environmental projects of the PM needed funding from and were accountable only to each of the member governments, little or no progress ensued. Finally, in chapter eleven, Fernand Guevara Mekongo Mballa explores the lessons that can be learnt from the Escazú Agreement for environmental and human rights protection in Africa. He uses a comparative analysis to highlight the similarities and differences between LAC and Africa on environmental issues. He shows that the Escazú Agreement is an innovative legal instrument that contains specific provisions for Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) in LAC and argues that a similar instrument could be useful for Africa to address its own environmental challenges.

The book contributes to the academic literature on LAC regionalism by analyzing pertinent issues through a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives, so it is likely that different readers will find value in different chapters. Hence, I have refrained from adding a conclusion as this would inevitably draw more attention to some findings and observations than to others. I hope that the contributions which have been compiled in this volume will stimulate further research and debate on the role and impact of regional responses to collective challenges in LAC, inviting the readers to discover the richness and complexity of regional governance.

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