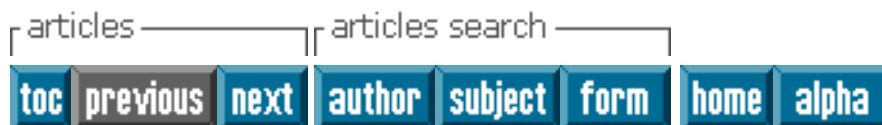


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Print version ISSN 0102-8529

Contexto int. vol.35 no.2 Rio de Janeiro July/Dec. 2013

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0102-85292013000200001>

ARTICLES

Post-hegemonic regionalism and sovereignty in Latin America: optimists, skeptics, and an emerging research agenda*

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ABSTRACT

A scholarly debate is emerging on how recent regional trends in Latin America and South America have and practices of sovereignty. This debate pits two groups engaged in regionalist analysis against each the *skeptics*. Optimists argue that recent changes in regionalism are having a transformative impact on

acknowledge that changes in regionalism have occurred, but that they have been accompanied by per sovereignty meanings and practices. The article employs a tripartite conception of sovereignty regime authority—to sketch the parameters of the debate. Given the recent origins of ALBA, CELAC, and UNASUR hegemonic regionalism which they reflect and promote, this debate can only be resolved through empirical research, especially in South America, the regional experience upon which many of the cont Such a research agenda on the regionalism-sovereignty nexus has both significant theoretical and pra understanding Latin America's and South America's unique regional, institutional, and sovereignty pa limits and possibilities for regional governance.

Keywords: Regionalism – Sovereignty – Regional Governance – Latin America – South America

Introduction¹

The defense of sovereignty has had a long tradition in Latin America. Independence struggles were dr the desire of creole elites to be the sovereigns in their own territories. One of the cornerstones of inter the protection of Latin American countries from foreign invasions and interventions, first from Europe United States. In the process, a host of legal principles related to the right of self-determination, territo non-intervention were captured in juridical instruments such as the Calvo, Drago, and Estrada doctrin OAS and UN Charters.

This strong tradition can create the impression of a static conception of sovereignty in the region. It m that sovereignty has been subject to both recurring endogenous pressures for modification as well as its Latin American meanings and practices. Kathryn Sikkink (1996), for example, underlines that histor construction of sovereignty in the region has also been linked to strong Latin American traditions of le action which have sought to promote the external protection of domestic human rights and democrac American collective-defense-of-democracy regime during the 1990s also raised the issue of whether c were moving 'beyond sovereignty' (FARER, 1996; see also VAN KLAVEREN, 2001). In recent decades, th considerable academic attention to the impact that globalization processes have had on state sovereig (KECK; SIKKINK, 1998; PETRAS, 2003; RADCLIFFE, 2001).

In the new millennium, a growing literature on Latin American and particularly South American regio important assumptions and assertions concerning the state of sovereignty in these regions, and the in region-building processes.² With one or two exceptions (see SERBIN, 2011), there have been few expli of how recent regional trends in Latin America and South America have impacted the meaning and pra Nonetheless, there is enough out there in terms of passing or ad hoc references in the growing region identify the parameters of an emerging debate. As I will highlight in this paper, a scholarly debate on t between two groups engaged in regionalist analysis: the *optimists* and the *skeptics*.³ They hold contras whether current regional tendencies associated with the recent rise of regional organizations, such as the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) American Nations (UNASUR) are leading to the creation of a new sovereignty regime. Optimists essen changes in regionalism, from the open, U.S.-dominated regionalism of the 1990s to post-liberal, post- hegemonic regionalism in the new millennium, are having a transformative impact on sovereignty.⁴ T sovereignty regime is emerging, particularly in South America, which goes beyond national sovereign construction of a regional polity, and in which sovereign authority is vested not only in heads of state in intergovernmental organizations, transnational civil society, and citizens. Skeptics acknowledge th have occurred, but that they have been accompanied by persistent and traditional sovereignty meanir evolving regionalisms in Latin America and South America have mutually reinforced national and reg ways which have narrowly enhanced presidential authority and projected it regionally through a pher *interpresidentialism*.

The truth is that little empirical research has been conducted to determine the current state of sovereign regional parameters. In part this is due to the recent origin of ALBA, CELAC, and UNASUR. As I stress in the aforementioned debate can only be resolved through ambitious empirical research, especially in Latin America where many of the contending claims are made. Such a research agenda has both significant theoretical and practical ones for understanding the limits and possibilities for regional governance.

This article is divided into four parts. First, through the notion of *sovereignty regimes*, I define sovereignty in a way that permits a dynamic analysis of its meanings and practices within changing regional contexts. Accordingly, I develop a conception of sovereign regime: sovereign; space; and authority. In the second section, I examine the assumptions in the literature on post-hegemonic regionalism regarding the question of sovereignty. I employ my aforementioned three-part notion of sovereignty regime to summarize the similarities and positions of optimists and skeptics. In my concluding remarks I emphasize the need for extensive field research and the theoretical and practical implications of the regionalism-sovereignty nexus.

Sovereignty

In order to gauge recent trends in post-hegemonic regionalism and sovereignty, it is first necessary to develop a conception of sovereignty in a way which permits its analysis in dynamic terms. Accordingly, in what follows I break down its three core components: the sovereign; territory or space; and, authority. Taken together in different configurations they constitute distinct *sovereignty regimes* (AGNEW, 2005).⁵

To paraphrase Hinsley (1986, p. 26), perhaps the most widely accepted definition of sovereignty is the sovereign within a given political community or territory. At first glance, this would seem a static definition. However, a growing number of scholars remind us that sovereignty is a social construct that is subject to continuous redefinition in terms of its meanings and practices (BIERSTEKER; WEBER, 1996; BIERSTEKER, 2002; PETERSON). Nonetheless, when we break this definition down into its constituent components, we can develop a dynamic concept.

First, any notion of sovereignty contains implicitly or explicitly some idea of who is the *sovereign*, that is, who exercises authority. In early modern times, when sovereignty was originally crafted in the context of Westphalia, the sovereign was in effect a king/queen or prince/princess or other monarch. Over the centuries, however, historic waves of democratization, who the sovereign is has become democratized in many countries: the sovereign is now the government, that is, a president or prime minister. The idea of state sovereignty suggests that the sovereign is the elected or non-elected officials who govern, together with the bureaucratic apparatus of the state.

It is also feasible that who the sovereign is may also potentially reflect notions of *popular* sovereignty, as opposed to the aforementioned elite ones. Political authority may be shared with, vested in, or contested by non-state actors, such as civil society and market agents (business enterprises and multinational corporations). Who the sovereign is also raises important ideas and values concerning citizenship and political participation. At least rhetorically if not in practice, Hugo Chávez and his government made frequent statements that the people in Venezuela were sovereign. A dynamic conception of sovereignty suggests, considerable historical variation in the social construct of sovereignty may occur along the lines of who the sovereign is.

Second, definitions of sovereignty will always contain a *spatial* or *territorial* element. Traditionally, the boundaries of sovereign authority have been articulated in national territorial terms and as part of state units. Daniel Philpott's (2001) series of historic 'revolutions in sovereignty' has resulted in the global expansion of the phenomenon from its Westphalian origins in Western Europe, through the nineteenth-century independence of colonies in Latin America up to the postwar decolonization of former colonies in Africa and Asia.

Supra-nationalism, especially in the case of the European Union, the global and regional expansion of sovereignty through a proliferation of international organizations, and the rise of transnational activism since the 1990s have opened new possibilities in terms of sovereign agency and space. With the pooling and/or delegating of

authority to international organizations which have often become at least partial sovereigns, it is no longer convenient to stick rigidly to state-centric and methodologically nationalist notions of sovereignty. Accordingly, sovereignty may also vary historically in terms of its geographic dimensions.

Third, authority is the glue that joins sovereign to territory or space in any concept of sovereignty. Authority is defined by David Lake (2010, p. 587) as 'a social contract in which a governor provides a political order of value exchange for compliance by the governed with the rules necessary to produce that order.' Authority is the nature of sovereignty. Through the social construction or de-construction of authority, sovereignty emerges between those who govern or are invested with authority, the sovereign(s), and those who are governed. This denotes *internal* sovereignty.

At the same time, there are intricate relations between those within the sphere of authority and those without. In state-centric analysis, states defend their territorially bound sovereign authority, or autonomy, from external relations that entail questions of *external* sovereignty.

As David Lake (2010) stresses, there is no reason why the analysis of authority should be restricted to states. A government need not necessarily be exclusively governmental players. Intergovernmental and transnational organizations which combine diverse state, international, and non-governmental players, may also exercise authority. Authority need not be confined solely to national territorial spaces; it may be constructed trans-nationally, regionally, or globally. Therefore, supra-nationalism, intergovernmentalism, private, and transnational forms of authority are possible.

Finally, Hinsley's previously mentioned notion of *absolute* authority is a misnomer. It is unlikely that any state has established complete and total authority over a given territory or space. Internal and external challenges always occur. These may manifest themselves in numerous, almost 'normal' ways, from tax evasion, smuggling, transnational organized crime, to everyday forms of resistance to authorities and insurrection. The process by which countries in the global South confront establishing their domestic authority while paradoxically enjoy the benefits of the interstate system has led to a phenomenon which Robert Jackson (1993) once described as 'quasi-sovereignty'. A debate exists in terms of the impact that globalization processes have had on state and governmental authority (see OHMAE, 1993; RODRIK, 2011; SCHINKEL, 2009; STIGLITZ, 2007; STRANGE, 1998; WEISS, 1998). As Stephen Kocs Stedman argued, although it is generally valued and upheld as an international organizing principle, sovereignty is often violated many times in international affairs that it is guilty of 'organized hypocrisy.' Accordingly, states are not always what they seem to be, and many assume.

The point is that sovereign authority, in whichever geographic space it is exercised, is invariably *contested* from another from within and from without, and accordingly, is a *relative* and not an absolute concept. Just as the definitional elements of sovereign and territory and space, a relative and relational notion of authority is central to any analysis of sovereignty in the Latin American context (and elsewhere).

What does sovereignty mean at the regional level, especially in light of recent trends in Latin American regionalisms? The following section makes clear that an important unresolved debate is taking shape on this topic.

Post-Hegemonic Regionalism and Sovereignty: Optimists versus Skeptics

With few exceptions (SERBIN, 2011), there have been few studies which have looked systematically at the impact of regionalism. However, using the aforementioned concepts, it is possible to identify two contending, almost antithetical positions on how recent developments in Latin American and South American regionalisms have affected the meaning of sovereignty. On the one side, optimists claim that the creation of multilateral organizations such as ALBA and the regional impulses that they promote represent a potential transformation of sovereignty in alternative and innovative directions. On the other, skeptics argue that these same developments do not represent significant changes to existing meanings and practices, and indeed, may accentuate them.

It should be mentioned that in this stylized portrayal of the debate between optimists and skeptics, the analysis combines elements of both camps. For example, Olivier Dabène (2012) calls attention to the

Latin American regional integration: consistent yet chronically unstable, and resilient in spite of frequent crises.

Convergences between Optimists and Skeptics

Before discussing their differences, it is important to point out the significant convergences that exist between optimists and skeptics.

For instance, the point of departure for both is the crisis and decline of open regionalism, once dominant in the Western Hemisphere during the 1990s and into the first years of the new millennium (SANAHUJA, 2010; 2012). The creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas at the 2005 Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata is generally taken as the culmination of a grand project of hemispheric and open regionalism, and the harbinger of new Latin American and Caribbean projects embodied in ALBA, CELAC, and UNASUR.⁶ There is also a consensus that economic liberalism, as embodied in the Washington Consensus, has also entered into serious decline as a driving force for regional integration. Concomitantly, U.S. influence in Latin America also decreased substantially in recent years. Beginning with the election of Chávez in Venezuela in 1998, a wave of left leaning governments and governing coalitions pressed for a re-evaluation of liberal economic policies and the assertion of economic and political autonomy vis-à-vis the United States.

There is general agreement that when combined, these different domestic, regional, hemispheric, and global developments have harbored an historic process of the re-definition of regional and sub-regional projects, especially in South America. It is widely accepted that in contrast to open regionalism, the priorities of regional integration in recent years are not economic, but rather overtly political and social, such that we can now speak of *post-liberal* regionalism (DIAMINT, 2013; RIGGIROZZI, 2012; RIGGIROZZI; TUSSIE, 2012; ROJAS ARAVENA, 2012; SANAHUJA, 2010; 2012). Regionalism trends tend now to be characterized best as *post-neoliberal* (GRUGEL; RIGGIROZZI, 2009; RÜCKERT, 2009), *post-liberal* (SANAHUJA, 2010; 2012), and/or *post-hegemonic* (RIGGIROZZI; TUSSIE, 2012).

Optimists and pessimists also come together on some points related to the sovereignty implications of regional integration. First, in contrast to open regionalism's liberalization impulses, post-hegemonic regionalism, as embodied in ALBA, Latin American and Caribbean (CELAC) and South American (UNASUR) institutional expressions, is accompanied by the reaffirmation of national sovereignty (MALAMUD, 2013; ROJAS ARAVENA, 2012; SANAHUJA, 2010; 2012). On the other hand, this reassertion has to do with redefining state-market relations in favor of the state as sovereign authority after neo-liberalism, and with it, strengthening the ability to return to new developmentalist trajectories.

On the other hand, it concerns the strengthening of external sovereignty vis-à-vis the United States, an intentional reduction in many Latin American and South American countries of U.S. influence, as well as a re-evaluation of U.S.-Latin American and U.S.-South American relations. A frequent observation across the literature is that the current Latin American regional construction builds on a strong tradition of *defensive multilateralism* (LEGLER, 2010; RIGGIROZZI, 2012; TUSSIE, 2009). In the former case, the recent proliferation of new regional multilateral organizations in Latin America has the common denominator of intentionally excluding the United States and Canada from membership. Organizations such as ALBA are conscious constructs of soft balancing against U.S. power (SANAHUJA, 2011). In the case of defensive regionalism, the current social construction of regions in Latin America is intentionally anchored in the creation of regional spaces which increase autonomy in relation to the United States. The search for autonomy in regional construction, of course, has a long history in Latin America (RIVAROLA PUNZON, 2013; RUIZ, 2013).

Interestingly, although it is not articulated as such in the analyses of optimists and skeptics, revitalized regionalism, through regional re-definition, constitutes a *dual spatial autonomy*: national sovereignty is interwoven with regional sovereignty. Sovereign authority at the domestic level within Latin American states is reinforced by the creation of a regional shield against both extra-regional market forces and U.S. power. Notwithstanding, there are important differences that divide optimists and skeptics in terms of how they view the role of regionalism in shaping sovereignty.

Optimists

The essence of the optimist view is captured in the following words from Pia Riggirozzi and Diana Tus

These processes (regionalism and regionalization) must not simply be seen as ad hoc sub-regional

the many crises of neo-liberalism and the collapse of U.S.-led hemispheric leadership, but rather a visible manifestation of a re-politicization of the region giving birth to new polities or regional states, social movements and leaders interact and construct new understandings of the region.

According to Ruggirozzi and Tussie (2012, p. 2), the plethora of changes occurring at the regional and sub-regional level in Latin America and especially South America in recent years signal *a change of era*, instead of simply a periodic cycle (ESCOBAR, 2010). According to Cienfuegos and Sanahuja (2010, p. 13), South America as a region appears to be entering a phase of 'great dynamism.' An underlying assumption of the optimistic position is that particularly South America is not undergoing not merely cosmetic changes but a genuine process of the transformation of regional politics.

This transformative process has at least four interconnected components: the social construction of a new regional 'thickening'; regional civil society protagonism; and, the resilience of Latin American regionalisms as manifested in and promoted by ALBA, CELAC, and UNASUR, particularly in South America. This is a regional political economy which is redefining state-society and statehood from neo-liberalism toward renewed 'statism' and developmentalism. Moreover, the regional polity is an autonomous political *arena for action*, not only for state and intergovernmental players, but also regional actors (RIGGIROZZI, 2012; TUSSIE, 2009). Importantly, through its new institutional and ideational underpinnings represented in the form of ALBA, CELAC, and UNASUR, the new regional polity allegedly moves beyond traditional regionalism (RIGGIROZZI, 2012, p. 431). In the words of Ruggirozzi (2012, p. 437): 'UNASUR is heading toward a new institutionalized polity, and potentially supra-nationality à la EU..'

The second transformative assumption of optimists is that the consolidation of a regional polity has led to regional thickening. Ruggirozzi (2012) asserts that UNASUR and ALBA are enhancing '*regionness*', or a sense of belonging, identity, and inclusion. 'Regionness' is also linked to the impression of unprecedented regional integration evidenced, for example, by the strong Latin American (and Caribbean) consensus for the re-inclusion of the region in forums such as the Summits of the Americas; the collective perception of the exhaustion of the U.S.-led policy alternatives; and, the recognition for the need to articulate common, autonomous strategies for Latin America in global politics via the creation of CELAC in 2010-2011. Lastly, Rivarola Puntigliano and Briceño-Ruiz (2013, p. 2; see also RIVAROLA PUNTIGLIANO, 2011) add that this is the first time in history that South America has transformed into a single regional player.

Third, the aforementioned points highlight the perception of an enhanced political role for transnational actors and civil society players in region formation and even possibly in governance. Accordingly, the social compact is not only presently being achieved from the top down, but from the bottom up. Presumably, this assertion reflects the effervescence of regional and hemispheric activism in recent decades, as exemplified by the collective rejection of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the World Social Forum, the Summits of the Americas, and the rise of transnational indigenous movement, to name a few.

Finally, optimists view recent events as testimony of the resilience of Latin American integration processes despite a persistent weakness. Rivarola Puntigliano and Briceño-Ruiz (2013) emphasize that Latin America has a new era of regional integration distinguished by three main characteristics: the quest for autonomy; a common regional identity; and the motivation of economic and social development.

Skeptics

Skeptics take issue with all four of the key assumptions made by optimists regarding regional transformation: the birth of a new regional polity and a single regional player; regional thickening; the influence of non-state actors, and, the resilience of regional integration. In an overall sense, whereas optimists claim that developments have led to a new era in regionalisms, skeptics underline the persistence and continuity of old political and institutional patterns. Moreover, diversity and fragmentation of experiences persists.

First, skeptics are critical about the notion of an emerging regional polity. Although there may be some neo-liberal political economy trends which favor the return of the state and developmentalism, they offer a sharp critique of Latin American and South American regionalism. That is, ALBA, CELAC, and UNASUR thus far appear to be institutional shells void of substantive multilateralism, and to which leaders are reluctant to delegate

DABÈNE, 2012; DIAMINT, 2013; HIRST, 2009; LEGLER, 2010a; 2010b; 2011; LEGLER; SANTA-CRUZ, 2011; SERBIN, 2010). If a regional polity is emerging, it is an exclusive *interpresidential* space (MALAMUD, 2012). Region has become a 'niche' for presidential initiative (DIAMINT, 2013). Regional politics are both transnational or supranational, but as consistent with a tradition of interpresidential *concertación*, or *concertación* (MERKE, 2013). Given that summit diplomacy is the preferred regional mechanism for presidential politics (see CUMBRES..., 2005; JARQUE; QUENAN, 2009; ROJAS ARAVENA, 2000; ROJAS ARAVENA; MIL), the political arena that is created is episodic rather than sustained and institutionalized. Importantly, rather than a single, coherent regional space, *region inflation* is leading to the fragmentation or segmentation of regional spaces (GARDINI, 2012).

Second, skeptics also question whether regional thickening has occurred. 'Regionness' in Latin America is anemic in terms of both economic integration and regional identity formation. Economic integration, in terms of intra-regional trade flows and in comparison with the European Union, has been weak (BURTON, 2013; MALAMUD; GARDINI, 2012; RUEDA-JUNQUERA, 2009). In terms of collective identity, Thomas L. Bruneau argues that Latin America's new regional and subregional multilateral institutions lack a proper bonding agent. Bruneau writes that the idealized vision of a South American identity that supposedly underpins UNASUR is not shared by its member states. In contrast to Escobar's (2010) optimistic analysis, Jorge Volpi (2009) questions whether a South America even exists at present as a coherent, collective identity. Skeptics would argue that the proliferation of regional experiments in recent years has been due more to shallow elitist, presidentialist, and top-down politics because of groundswell popular identification with shared notions of Latin America or South America.

Third, post-hegemonic regionalism is not leading to the empowerment of networks of non-state actors. Recent trends reflect a pronounced democratic deficit (SERBIN, 2012a; 2012b). It is telling, for instance, that despite the rhetoric of popular participation, ALBA overwhelmingly promotes presidential authority in regional politics and decision-making.

Finally, according to a skeptical interpretation, the historic resilience of Latin American integration efforts is due to a certain superficiality of current initiatives. Dabène (2012), for example, observes that a trend of 'regionalism' today, in which various regional and sub-regional arrangements have enshrined the prerogative of countries to choose selectively their level of commitment to integration schemes. Furthermore, countries such as Brazil embrace *regionalism*, promoting regional arrangements such as MERCOSUR or UNASUR to advance its extra-regional ambitions, and not necessarily because of a heartfelt interest in strengthening regional polities and identities. From a power politics perspective, Mexico championed the creation of CELAC to counter its exclusion from the Americas caused by UNASUR's creation. Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru recently launched the Pacific Alliance initiative which has trade and investment promotion as its official *raison d'être*, but which also counts on the support of major powers in South America. These impressions contrast sharply with the idea of growing unity of purpose and shared identity among the participating states in post-hegemonic regionalism.

Optimists versus Skeptics on Sovereignty: Sovereigns, Space, and Authority

Returning to my earlier conceptual discussion of sovereignty, the positions of optimists and skeptics on the sovereignty tendencies of post-hegemonic regionalism can be compared and contrasted along three dimensions: the sovereign; the territory or space involved; and the forms of authority that result. [Figure 1](#) summarizes these viewpoints.

Figure 1*The Impact of Post-Hegemonic Regionalism on Sovereignty*

Analytical Elements of Sovereignty	OPTIMISTS	SKEPTICS
Sovereign (Agency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Heads of state – Transnational networks – Popular sovereignty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Heads of state – Interpresidentialism
Territory/Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – National sovereignty – Dual spatial autonomy vis-à-vis United States (national and regional sovereignty) – Construction of a regional polity, especially in South America – Regional and sub-regional spaces as transnational 'arenas for action' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – National sovereignty – Dual spatial autonomy vis-à-vis United States (national and regional sovereignty) – Interpresidential spaces
Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – State – Intergovernmentalism – Trans-nationalism and/or networked authority – Potential Supra-nationalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – State – (Hyper-)presidentialism – Interpresidentialism or collective presidentialism
Summary	– South American popular sovereignty as an emerging sovereignty regime	– Continuation of existing sovereignty regime with regional extension of executive sovereignty

With respect to which agents are sovereign, optimists claim that democratically elected presidents express the expression of popular will, both at the state and regional level. Nonetheless, they also give the impression that non-state players may also be enjoying empowerment, such that we may increasingly be able to speak of state and popular sovereignty. On the contrary, skeptics perceive current regional trends as strengthening the authority of heads of state, both individually and collectively, at the regional level. Regional politics is almost exclusively dominated by presidents.

In terms of space and/or territory, optimists and skeptics come together in their assessment that post-1990 trends are strengthening national sovereign spaces. Additionally, regional trends in Latin America and particularly in South America are promoting a *dual spatial autonomy* or sovereignty. That is, interconnected autonomous political spaces are simultaneously constructed at the domestic and regional spaces vis-à-vis the United States and to a lesser extent vis-à-vis the forces of globalization. The convergence ends here, though. Whereas optimists posit that a regional political arena for action are in the making, skeptics see only the construction of privileged, elite, interpresidential spaces that are fragmented and lack institutionalization and continuity.

Optimists suggest that a combination of interlinked authority forms is arising: state, intergovernmental, regional, networked, and potentially supranational. Skeptics argue that state authority at the national level and interpresidentialism and collective presidentialism at the regional level are mutually reinforcing. Since multilateral institutions and networked multilateralism are so weak, they perceive very little intergovernmentalism, but rather, regional politics dominated by platforms and spaces for political dialogue privileging presidential activism.

In sum, optimists suggest that a novel sovereignty regime may be in the process of construction: *South American sovereignty*. For their part, skeptics counter that existing sovereignty meanings and practices persist, all of which are characterized by the regional projection of presidential authority, or *executive sovereignty* (on executive sovereignty, see CC

Concluding Remarks: Regionalism, Sovereignty, and Governance

Optimists suggest that thanks to post-hegemonic regionalism, and its manifestations in ALBA, CELAC, a sovereignty regime may be in the making, especially in South America, with enhanced popular sovereignty and regional polity. Skeptics challenge that apart from unprecedented presidential and interpresidential authority at the national level, there has been little evident transformation in the agency, spatial, and authority dimensions of statehood in Latin America and South America.

With ALBA, CELAC, and UNASUR not even ten years old yet, and current regional trends still in redefinition, we must decide the outcome of this debate between optimists and pessimists.⁷ One message is clear: this debate requires research through extensive, careful, and painstaking empirical research. Scholars of Latin American and South American politics need to get out of the office and into the field to conduct interviews with key informants, from national-level actors to transnational and regional activists, as well as ordinary citizens.

The regionalism-sovereignty nexus opens a broad research agenda. Is a new regional polity emerging in Latin America? Is there more continuity or change in the political and institutional tendencies of post-hegemonic regionalism? Are Latin American political elites so reluctant to delegate authority and construct their own strong institutions? Are non-state players and citizens increasing their role in regional politics in terms of the contestation and transformation of existing sovereign authority? Taking into consideration that supra-nationalism, legal multilateralism, and networked multilateralism are all relatively recent additions to the long history of global politics, under what conditions might Latin American leaders promote similar institutional and authority trends in their regions? Is regionalization or regional thickening really occurring in regions such as South America and why?

This research agenda has at least two broader implications. First, in theoretical terms, Latin American regionalism comparisons appear to have only limited applicability for understanding what is going on in Latin America. As Miles Kahler and David Lake (2009) observe, supra-nationalism à la European Union is the exception to the general patterns of authority beyond the state in global politics. Similarly, Latin American and South American regionalism lacks the universalist logic as found in neoliberal institutionalist analyses of international institutions, with their emphasis on transaction costs, collective action problems, information flows, and the like. That is, the apparent benefits of viable international institutions with substantial delegated or pooled state authority seem to be confined to the region's key decision-makers, because as of yet there are few if any of this type of regional multilateral institutions. This reinforces the sui generis character of the politics of regionalism and institution-building in the region. A second theoretical implication seems to be therefore that regions matter in explaining this state of affairs (ACI and JOHNSTON, 2007; KATZENSTEIN, 2005). Given the seemingly limited or problematic applicability of existing conceptual tools fashioned by intellectuals in other empirical contexts, Latin American scholars therefore need to be describing trends and patterns in regional politics and sovereignty to theorizing much more why and how they are transformed.

The second implication has to do with praxis. Through its emphasis on authority, sovereignty analysis provides a 'real world' regional governance patterns and possibilities. Following the work of James Rosenau (2000), regional governance involves the construction of spheres of authority that transcend national territorial boundaries. A key element that connects sovereignty meanings and practices with real existing governance. Kahler and Lake (2009) argue that the absence of supranational authority does not mean that governance is not occurring beyond the state. The focus on supra-nationalism is the only alternative to national forms of governance blinds us from seeing other forms that might exist, such as more vertical or networked forms that extend authority spatially through the region. In the United States previously, or combinations of interstate and/or transnational players currently. Contrary to what is often claimed, if nationalism is absent in Latin America, we need to understand better what specific, real forms of governance are being practiced in regions such as South America. Moreover, if Latin American political elites persistently construct and promote supra-national forms of regional governance, it would be immensely helpful to ascertain whether these forms are equally effective or inferior to supra-nationalism and strong international institutions for regional problem-solving. We have barely scratched the surface in terms of our knowledge of the limits and potential of different forms of

intricately linked with regionalism and sovereignty trends in the region.

Notes

[1](#) The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers and Sean Burges for their feedback. An analysis is of course the author's responsibility.

[2](#) Although it has proven a highly contentious concept, partially paraphrasing Hettne (2005, p. 545), region is defined as a highly politicized tendency to organize the world in terms of regions, involving potential state players, as well as diverse political, economic, cultural, social, identity, and other dimensions.

[3](#) I hesitate to use the term *pessimists* and therefore prefer the etiquette *skeptics*. My labeling exercise is not meant to be a critique. The scholars who are critical of current regionalist currents in Latin America and South America are not in favor of integration and 'thicker' regionalism. On the contrary, there is a general view that increased Latin American cooperation, integration, and unity are all desirable. These scholars are skeptical that current trends are a departure from existing practices and patterns of sovereignty.

[4](#) Although I recognize the merits of all three labels, post-liberal, post-neoliberal, and post-hegemonic regionalism, to space constraints than anything, I limit myself to the use of the latter term. Post-hegemonic regionalism (RIGGIROZZI; TUSSIE, 2012) overlaps considerably with the other two concepts and explicitly acknowledges different directions in various contemporary Latin American and South American regionalisms.

[5](#) It is worth noting that Agnew (2005) breaks down sovereignty regimes into two components: state authority and territoriality. This conception, accordingly, is state-centric. I subdivide sovereignty regimes into three categories to leave open diverse possibilities in terms of sovereign agency, that is, for who is the sovereign; what is the territory; and what forms of authority may ensue.

[6](#) It is important to acknowledge that ALBA, CELAC, and UNASUR are distinct organizations with their own characteristics and mandates, especially in relation to regional tendencies. ALBA promotes a regionalist notion of 'América' with strong ideological connections to Twenty-First Century Socialism, and an internationalist and confrontational orientation vis-à-vis the United States (see ALTMANN BORBÓN, 2011; TORO, 2011). CELAC, with its even more diffuse and heterogeneous yet more inclusive regional parameters, Latin America and the Caribbean, establishes an ideologically pluralistic space for political coordination and dialogue (see ROJAS ARAVACA, 2011). UNASUR, in its course, helps carve out a South American regional space which is also ideologically pluralistic (see SAZDANOVIC, 2011). Nonetheless, as I discuss in these pages, optimists and skeptics suggest important common threads at the level of institutions in terms of their links to sovereignty.

[7](#) It is worth noting that changes are occurring so quickly in terms of regional tendencies that the literature has not even begun to evaluate what the implications are of the new regional arrangement, the one constituted by Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, as well as possibly Costa Rica, Panama, and even Uruguay. A better understanding of post-hegemonic regionalism(s), and the regionalism-sovereignty nexus. The Pacific Alliance emphasis on trade promotion, investment, and expanding commercial ties with Asia-Pacific, seems to open up a new regionalism in Latin America. The Pacific Alliance phenomenon further reinforces the case for more research on this topic.

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* Article submitted on October 2nd, 2013 and approved for publication in November 19th, 2013



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