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## A Comparative Analysis of Regional Institution Engagement and Development Trajectories in South America and Eastern Asia

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A Comparative Analysis of Regional Institution Engagement and Development Trajectories in  
South America and Eastern Asia

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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## **Dedication**

To my family, who have given me the most excellent support, they have seen my potential and helped me be a better person every day.

All my friends and relatives have always been there and unconditionally given me the strength to move forward and accomplish my dreams.

I would like to thank my trumpet professor, Edward Carroll, who gave me a life-changing opportunity to study here at Bard College through the Bard Conservatory of Music.



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## Abstract

This project analyzes the reasons behind South American struggles connected to regional organizations compared to Southeastern Asian economic and political development in the second half of the 20th century. When exploring the unique characteristics and historical context of South American and Eastern Asian regional blocs such as the Union of South American Nations (USAN/ Union de Naciones Suramericanas, UNASUR), Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR); Eastern Asian regional blocs such as The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). This project seeks to understand the factors contributing to their distinct trajectories, highlighting how they have achieved economic and political success differently. Both regions have shown vast differences in their contributions to the world's growth, particularly in the last 20 years. This project seeks to determine why South America has tried to maintain stable regional organizations subject to constant political and economic shifting but struggles to show a steady and long-standing position in front of the world. Lastly, this project will suggest and analyze the causes of instability in South American development. In addition, it will present specific recommendations for enabling both regions to grow successfully in the broader global context, considering their political and economic differences.

## Introduction

Regional international organizations have become an increasingly important tool of statecraft in South America and Asia. The central question of this work pertains to why South America continuously struggles to sustain regional institutions effectively and in stable conditions rather than finding what is naturally effective for the region. So, what are the root causes and interconnected factors contributing to Latin America's persistent challenges in achieving lasting political and economic stability? Additionally, what potential strategies or solutions exist to address these issues? Before globalization and open socioeconomic policies took place, the neoclassical socio-political and economic theory ignored new reforms on export-led growth that serve as a foundation for understanding development in newly industrialized countries (NIC).<sup>1</sup> However, the success of non-industrialized countries has seen exponential growth, which nowadays is considered part of the six percent of world growth and one-third of world trade.<sup>2</sup> It is also our question whether these organizations have the potential to facilitate cooperation, promote economic growth, and address security challenges in the region. However, the region faces various challenges that can limit its effectiveness, including political instability, corruption, and limited resources.

In South America, for example, regional institutionalism has significantly promoted economic integration and reduced political tensions between countries. Organizations such as the

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<sup>1</sup> See 1. Stephan Haggard, *Pathways from the Periphery: The Politics of Growth in the Newly Industrializing Countries*, vol. 1 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 15.

<sup>2</sup> "Global Trade Liberalization and the Developing Countries -- an IMF Issues Brief." International Monetary Fund, November 2001.

[https://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2001/110801.htm?trk=public\\_post\\_comment-text](https://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2001/110801.htm?trk=public_post_comment-text).

The dual nature of globalization for developing countries acknowledges both challenges and opportunities. While noting concerns about increased income inequality and potential negative impacts on specific industries, the report emphasizes globalization as a source of growth and dynamism. It underscores the importance of appropriate policies, such as maintaining macroeconomic stability and investing in education, to maximize the benefits of globalization. The report positions the IMF as a supportive institution committed to assisting countries in navigating the complexities of globalization and implementing sound policies for sustainable development.

Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN) have worked to reduce trade barriers and promote regional trade. At the same time, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) has focused on addressing security challenges and general integration in the region. These organizations have also helped to promote a sense of regional identity and cooperation among member states. Despite these achievements, however, regional institutionalism in Latin America has faced significant challenges, including political tensions between member states, a lack of resources to support the organization's activities, influential Transnational criminal organizations, and, most importantly, overlapping institutions throughout the region. These challenges have limited the effectiveness of these organizations and raised questions about their long-term viability.

When comparing South America and Asia, this paper aims to investigate why regional organizations have had different outcomes and identify their roles in their region. Organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). These organizations have also helped to promote a sense of regional identity and cooperation among member states. These organizations, together with some degree of state reforms, have helped incentivize each country's local growth. Protecting the local market and an export-led strategy impacted Asia's internal market but continues to make South America and Latin America struggle with a long-standing character of policies. Like in South America, however, regional institutionalism in Asia also faces significant challenges, such as political tensions between member states, powerful external actors such as China and the United States, and territorial disputes in the South China Sea. These challenges have limited the effectiveness of these organizations and raised questions about their long-term viability.

This project will explore the role of regional institutionalism as a tool of statecraft in South America and Asia, as well as analyze and provide results regarding joint organizations such as The Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC). In addition, this section includes the different types of regional international organizations operating in these regions, their strengths and weaknesses, and the challenges they face in achieving their goals. It will also consider potential solutions to improve the effectiveness of these organizations, the impact within the regions, and the influence of external powers and organizations that could make the region address its progress in the future. Finally, it will discuss the empirical points of view and implications of regional institutionalism for broader questions of global governance and the future of international cooperation.

## Chapter I

### **South American Regional Blocks as an Alternative to the Influence of Major Global Hegemonies**

In a world dominated by major global powers, South American nations have long sought to forge a path of their own, seeking alternative avenues to navigate the complexities of international relations and foster regional cooperation. In this case, the historical intervention of the United States in South America, for example, has profoundly shaped the region's development, influencing political, economic, and social trajectories.<sup>3</sup> Major powers have always taken the responsibility and the freedom to shape the world according to each country's hegemonic and general interests. As Stephen Haggard explains, in a stratified and established world economy, the addition of newly developing countries generates some degree of inequality.<sup>4</sup> This hegemonic and hierarchical power characterized strategies to promote economic growth, democracy, and containment during the Cold War, fostering cooperation rather than oppression among weaker states.

The region has witnessed the emergence of significant regional blocs, such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN), which have aimed to unite member states, promote shared interests, and reduce dependence on external powers. Among these behavioral paths, their desire to increase its presence and significance as an alternative to the influence of major global hegemonies has become a top priority, including the dynamics of interaction between their most prominent member states. These groups have

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<sup>3</sup> See James L. Dietz, "Destabilization and Intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Latin American Perspectives* 11, no. 3 (1984): 3–14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2633287>.

<sup>4</sup> 1. Stephan Haggard, *Pathways from the Periphery: The Politics of Growth in the Newly Industrializing Countries*, vol. 1 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 15.

played an important role in revitalizing a region desperate to unshackle itself from the enduring legacy of colonialism.

Colonization shaped South America's history to the most recent currents of thought, such as economic neo-liberalism, leading to a legacy of external intervention, financial exploitation, and political domination. The 19th and 20th centuries witnessed a struggle for independence, with many nations seeking autonomy and sovereignty. The involvement of these countries in an era of globalization has limited their autonomy in implementing policies, and domestic social conflicts have hindered their maneuverability.<sup>5</sup> As Brazil embraced globalization and more actively participated in the global economy, it faced challenges to its autonomy in implementing domestic policies. The integration of Brazil into the global economic system exposed its policies to international market dynamics, particularly in sectors like agriculture and finance. For instance, Brazil's agricultural sector, a key sector of its economy, is deeply interconnected with global commodity markets. This interdependence can restrict Brazil's ability to set domestic agricultural policies independently, as fluctuations in global commodity prices often exert pressure on the country's agricultural sector, impacting its policies and trade practices. However, the shadow of global hegemonies loomed as powerful nations from beyond the region often wielded influence over South American affairs. Throughout history, South America has often been under the influence of dominant global powers. These powerful nations, usually located outside the region, held significant sway over the affairs of South American countries.

This influence casts a shadow over the region, shaping its political, economic, and social dynamics. The term 'global hegemonies' refers to countries or alliances that exert substantial

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<sup>5</sup> See Humberto Campodónico, Gilles Carbonnier, and Sergio Tezanos Vázquez. "Alternative Development Narratives, Policies and Outcomes in the Andean Region." In *Alternative Pathways to Sustainable Development: Lessons from Latin America*, edited by Humberto Campodónico, Gilles Carbonnier, and Sergio Tezanos Vázquez, 3–15. Brill, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w76w3t.8>.

control and influence on a global scale. Internationalist and comparative regionalist Jorge F Garzon explains that the term unipolarity is now evolving into a multipolar plane in which the influence of a single country is no longer enough to overcome global economic growth and political development. He defines that the world is transitioning from a multipolar world, based on the influence of a single country among a group of individual actors, to a group of united actors. Specifically, Garzon defines this phenomenon as 'regio-polarity,' the power union among neighboring states in a given region.<sup>6</sup> When it comes to powerful actors in the international community, these nations possess economic and military might and the ability to shape international policies and decisions.

Regio-polarity denotes the contemporary rise of influential regional powers or blocs, marking a departure from a unipolar or bipolar global order. These regional actors, such as China East Asia, the European Union, and Brazil in South America, wield significant political, economic, and security influence within their regions and increasingly on the global stage. They shape regional policies, institutions, and alliances, challenging the existing international order and impacting global geopolitics, trade, and security. Their rise can either promote regional stability or contribute to conflicts, and their interactions with smaller neighbors and other global powers are complex, involving cooperation and rivalry. This phenomenon is vital for understanding modern international relations and the evolving global power structure.

Haggard analyzes the dependency of newly developing countries that face both external influence and national interaction between state politics. Inequality within the context of dependency theory in developing countries is deeply intertwined with import-led industrialization. These strategies, aimed at reducing foreign dependency by promoting domestic

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<sup>6</sup> Garzón, Jorge F. "Multipolarity and the Future of Regionalism: Latin America and Beyond." German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07600>.



industries, often led to stark disparities in these nations. While imports did contribute to limited industrialization, they frequently discriminated against skilled and semi-skilled workers, resulting in wage disparities. It sometimes prioritized the production of goods that weren't entirely useful or efficient, exacerbating economic inefficiencies.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, dependency isn't solely an effect of foreign influence; it's more fundamentally a national feature stemming from domestic policies and structures. While external factors like international trade and finance play a role, a nation's economic policies, resource allocation, and governance decisions often significantly impact its dependency status. A nation's level of internal inequality, corruption, political stability, and ability to harness and redistribute resources effectively determines its dependence on external forces. Hence, dependency is intrinsically linked to domestic dynamics and choices, making it a predominantly national characteristic rather than just a byproduct of foreign influence.

In South America, these hegemonic powers would exert their influence to serve their interests, sometimes at the expense of the sovereignty and autonomy of the countries within the region. This influence manifested in various ways. Economically, global hegemonies might dictate trade terms, making it challenging for South American nations to establish fair economic relationships. Politically, they could back confident leaders or political movements, thereby impacting the domestic governance of these countries. Militarily, these powerful nations might intervene in regional conflicts, further shaping the balance of power.

When we refer to a loomed large pattern, it means that the presence and impact of these global powers represent far-reaching implications, and their influence is still present. In this case,

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<sup>7</sup> See Stephan Haggard, *Pathways from the Periphery: The Politics of Growth in the Newly Industrializing Countries*, vol. 1 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). Analysis from Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) (1973)

those countries draw the more beneficial paths for them, casting a shadow over developing countries and potentially limiting their ability to assert their preferences and interests on the global stage. The idea that these global powers placed an unprecedentedly high influence over South America's decision-making underscores their active role in shaping the region's destiny<sup>8</sup>. They aren't passive observers but proactive players who use their economic, political, and diplomatic leverage to steer events and decisions in South America according to their agendas. In essence, the phrase describes a historical reality in which South America, like many other regions, has often been subject to the interests and actions of dominant global powers.

This reality has prompted South American nations to seek alternative ways to overcome this situation, such as forming regional blocs like UNASUR and CAN, to collectively address challenges, strengthen their bargaining power, and assert their autonomy in a world where global hegemonies continue to cast their influence. The need to counteract this influence and strengthen regional solidarity became evident in the latter half of the 20th century. South American nations shared common challenges, including economic disparities, political instability, and the demand for a collective voice in global affairs. This realization paved the way for the creation of regional blocs as a means to foster cooperation, integration, and development.

Colonialism left a long-term mark, leading to a legacy of external intervention, economic exploitation, and political domination. The region witnessed a struggle for independence in the 19th and 20th centuries, with many nations seeking autonomy and sovereignty. The need to counteract this influence and strengthen regional solidarity became evident in the latter half of the 20th century. South American nations shared common challenges, including economic

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<sup>8</sup> Flandes, Daniel, and Thorsten Wojczewski. "Contested Leadership in International Relations: Power Politics in South America, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa." *German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA)*, 2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07591>.

disparities, political instability, and the demand for a collective voice in global affairs. This realization paved the way for the creation of regional blocs as a means to foster cooperation, integration, and development.

The article "Missed Opportunities: *The Economic History of Latin America*" investigates the historical economic path of Latin America throughout the scope of Armendáriz and Larraín's book *The Economics of Contemporary Latin America*. It analyzes the elements that have influenced the economic past of this region and converses about the changes that have been seized or overlooked.<sup>9</sup> It explains the crucial moments that have marked the economic evolution of the region. It offers an exciting approach to understanding the opportunities that are tied effectively to advance growth, development, and stability, as well as the missed chances that have left a lasting impact on the economic landscape of Latin America. Various factors have influenced Latin America's financial history, including colonial legacies, external interventions, domestic policies, and global economic trends. Several reasons have shadowed the region's development, including inequality, fiscal management, and structural reforms. As a result of this, there are a vast number of ways that the region still applies to its political advancement, ranging from market liberalization to social welfare programs.

When we draw on historical insights and economic analysis, there is a perspective of the region's repetitive nature of economic growth and contraction. As a result, the region suffers from constant changes that, in some instances, are not foreseen, thanks to the volatility that political and social changes can cause. If we specifically examine Venezuela's political and economic volatility, it becomes clear that the country has experienced persistent fluctuations in

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<sup>9</sup> See IMFreview of 1. Beatriz Armendáriz and Felipe Larraín B., *The Economics of Contemporary Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017).  
<https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2017/10/05/NA100517-Missed-Opportunities-The-Economic-History-of-Latin-America>

government policies. These policies, often characterized by unplanned experimentation, have significantly disrupted and altered the social fabric of the population.<sup>10</sup> Through its detailed exploration of Latin America's economic history, the article aims to provide policymakers, economists, and scholars with valuable insights into the factors that have shaped the region's economic trajectory. It offers a balanced perspective on the successes achieved, the challenges that persist, and the potential avenues for future economic development. It includes examples like Argentina's economic upsurge in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, followed by economic stagnation and decline in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Venezuela's remarkable growth spurred by heightened oil exports from the 1950s to the 1980s.

### **South American Regional Organizations, UNASUR, MERCOSUR, CAN:**

#### **The Practice and the Theory Behind.**

In the intricate horizon of South American geopolitics, the emergence of several regional international organizations helps explain the pivotal response to the continuous challenges discussed in the earlier sections of this essay. As previously discussed, this project unearthed the pervasive shadow cast of global hegemonies in underdeveloped countries, which often exerted their dominance over the region's affairs. As Brutto, Olavarria, and Salazar define, 'strategic integration' has been reimagined from the neoliberal values of the past, which were based on invasive economic and political interactions<sup>11</sup>. The best example of this traces back to the efforts of former US presidential administrations to imprint liberal and democratic ideology throughout the region. Therefore, the mission of South American regional organizations focuses on

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<sup>10</sup> Crandall, Russell. "The Post-American Hemisphere: Power and Politics in an Autonomous Latin America." *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (2011): 83–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23039410>.

<sup>11</sup> Brutto, Giuseppe Lo, Carlos Otto Vázquez Salazar, and Margot Olavarria. "The Strategic Integration of Latin America: A Disputed Project." *Latin American Perspectives* 42, no. 4 (2015): 61–72.

decreasing social inequality, better defense of resources, and enhancing dialogue insight.<sup>12</sup> This dynamic has consistently compelled South American nations to search for new and redesigned alternatives and mechanisms that allow them to navigate international relations while safeguarding their sovereignty and collective interests.

It is highly significant to acknowledge the inherent constraints associated with governing solely based on objectives without well-structured plans for execution, policy mechanisms, or systems for ensuring accountability. Crucially, without remedial measures, introducing adaptable global objectives into domestic contexts may not only perpetuate pre-existing inequalities, but also endow them with a layer of internationally endorsed legitimacy.<sup>13</sup> This situation highlights the pressing need for comprehensive governance that establishes goals and meticulously outlines what tools governments or organizations employ and how responsible management is ensured, all to guarantee that the pursuit of global goals respects local dynamics and equity considerations.

After all, this would open a window for potential biases that different governments within a regional organization may bring to the governance structure. The notion of a balanced approach between comprehensive governance and flexibility considers member states' diverse perspectives and preferences. It implies the need for mechanisms that accommodate various national interests within the framework, preventing any single bias from dominating decision-making processes. This recognition aligns with the complex nature of regional organizations, where states with diverse political ideologies, economic priorities, and social contexts collaborate. The challenge is

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<sup>12</sup> Giuseppe LoBrutto, Carlos Otto Vázquez Salazar, and Margot Olavarria. "The Strategic Integration of Latin America: A Disputed Project." *Latin American Perspectives* 42, no. 4 (2015): 61–72.

<sup>13</sup> "When International Sustainability Frameworks Encounter Domestic Politics: The Sustainable Development Goals and Agri-Food Governance in South America." *World Development* 135 (November 1, 2020): 105053. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105053>.

establishing effective governance and ensuring effective governance, knowledge, and mitigating biases to promote equitable decision-making.

## UNASUR

UNASUR emerges as an alternative to regional collaboration and collective agency, enhancing its history of seeking to reduce external dependencies and fostering cooperation among its diverse member states <sup>14</sup>. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, UNASUR, the Union of South American Nations, emerged as a regional organization in 2008, succeeding the South American Community of Nations (CSN). CSN originated from the Cuzco Declaration signed by 12 South American leaders in 2004, uniting trade groups like the Andean Community and Mercosur. UNASUR was envisioned to foster regional integration, addressing issues like democracy, education, energy, environment, infrastructure, and security while striving to eliminate social inequality and exclusion <sup>15</sup>. Its members include Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela, with Panama and Mexico holding observer status. They aimed to emulate the European Union, with long-term organizational goals encompassing a continental free trade zone, a single currency, and an interoceanic highway.

The historical context opens a vision of the need for regional institutions like UNASUR. Unasur, in this case, has a different profile compared to other institutions; its main feature is closer to the idea of regional governance, which makes it different from other conventional ways of regional integration. <sup>16</sup> Its beginnings are grounded in the desire to reduce vulnerability to

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<sup>14</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "UNASUR." Encyclopedia Britannica, November 22, 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/UNASUR>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Miriam Gomes Saraiva. "Procesos de Integración de América Del Sur y El Papel de Brasil: Los Casos Del Mercosur y La Unasur / Integration Processes in South America and the Role of Brazil: The Cases of Mercosur and Unasur." *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, no. 97/98 (2012): 87–100. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41635272>.

external powers and cultivate a collaborative environment where South American nations could collectively address shared challenges. The diverse objectives of UNASUR, spanning from economic integration to social inclusion and political cohesion, mirror the diversity of concerns plaguing the region. As we delve into the inner workings of this regional bloc, we uncover the intricate dynamics that drive the interactions between its prominent member states. Yet, every endeavor of this magnitude has its challenges. UNASUR's trajectory has been marked by periods of robust cooperation and instances of divergence, reflecting the intricate interplay of national priorities and the intricacies of regional diplomacy. The organization's resilience in these challenges and ability to adapt and evolve offer insight into the region's determination to assert its autonomy and define its destiny.

There is an approach that suggests that the persistent challenge UNASUR faces in effectively handling international disputes reveals a noticeable gap in its institutional capacity. UNASUR has typically relied on presidential agreements and resolutions from foreign ministers to grapple with regional crises. However, the success of such approaches varies based on the nature of the issues and the feasibility of swift, favorable resolutions. Notably, South American leaders have shown a predominant concern for upholding peace and preserving democratic governance within the region<sup>17</sup>. The Brazilian leadership in the region faced a challenge consisting of integrating more member states into the organization, such as Venezuela and later Bolivia. In this case, the Bolivarian vision, consisting of a broader idea of an international and political confederation of Latin American sentiment, proposed a new sentiment based on

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Kersfield, "El Papel de La Unasur Ante Los Conflictos Internacionales: Dos Estudios de Caso," *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 58, no. 218 (May 1, 2013): 193–208, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0185-1918\(13\)72296-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0185-1918(13)72296-7).

rejecting the United States influence<sup>18</sup>. In this case, the primary purpose is to give the South more autonomy over political and economic maneuvers within the region and globally.

This focus is deeply rooted in the region's history, starkly contrasting with other parts of the world. Unlike areas with a history of armed conflicts, South America has largely adhered to a pacifist doctrine, making the protection of democratic regimes a paramount objective within UNASUR. This is profoundly significant because the historical context underpins the organization's commitment to maintaining stability and preventing the resurgence of authoritarian rule.

Moreover, South America is in a continuous quest to assert its autonomy in the face of established global powers like Europe and the United States. However, this pursuit has marked challenges that have tested the region's ability to compete, cooperate, and carve out its place on the global stage. The desire to transcend this historical legacy and secure a prominent role in international affairs prompted South American nations to form UNASUR. This regional organization, inspired by the success of the European Union, aimed to counterbalance external dominance and foster greater self-determination. However, the path to constructing a multipolar world is fraught with challenges. South America competes with established global players like Europe and the United States, who have significant economic, military, and political influence. The economic disparities between South America and these global powers hinder the quest for parity. The European Union, with its advanced economies and integrated markets, commands a considerable edge, while the United States wields unparalleled military prowess and diplomatic relevance. This situation translates into the challenge of asserting themselves in international negotiations, where the louder resonance of these dominant players can overshadow their voices.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid



Furthermore, the pursuit of multipolarity encounters complexities in geopolitical alliances. The historical ties and strategic partnerships between South American countries and major powers like the United States can lead to delicate balancing acts. While aiming for autonomy, these nations may navigate intricate diplomatic landscapes, considering their allegiances and interests beyond the region. Coherence among UNASUR member states also poses a challenge. Divergent national interests, political ideologies, and levels of development can hinder effective collaboration. For example, consider the case of Venezuela and its exponential increase in divergent and communist policies. As witnessed in UNASUR's temporary suspension in 2018 as an organization, achieving unity remains an ongoing struggle even after the withdrawal of Brazil from the organization, marking a breaking point in the tradition of the South American giant to keep the region in good diplomatic terms.

The multipolar aspiration demands consensus among nations with varying priorities, adding a layer of complexity to the journey. The formation of UNASUR aligned with South America's ongoing pursuit of independence and building a multipolar world. The region's historical context, challenges to compete with established powers, and the intricacies of maintaining unity within the organization underscore the complexity of this endeavor. UNASUR's evolution reflects South America's resilience and determination to forge its path, enhance regional autonomy, and contribute to transforming global power dynamics.

While UNASUR has demonstrated effectiveness in reacting to external threats against established governments, it has been less proficient in proactively preventing the erosion of democratic systems. It points to cases like those of Ecuador and Paraguay, where UNASUR's responses showcased its potential while exposing inherent limitations. To address this issue, UNASUR must establish a new institutional framework to encourage dialogue and

consensus-building on emerging issues that could lead to conflicts. Such issues could encompass disputes between countries or crises within a single nation that broadly affect the entire South American region. Additionally, it is vital to stress the importance of reinforcing democracy and constitutional values at the regional level, recognizing that destabilizing events in one country can reverberate across the broader South American context.

When prioritizing healthcare, UNASUR aligns itself directly with the enduring social movements that have advocated for equitable access to health services across South America. This shift signifies UNASUR's recognition of the region's historical struggles for healthcare access and health equity<sup>19</sup>. As UNASUR expands its scope to include healthcare, it becomes a more significant player in addressing the health disparities that have persisted on the continent. However, unable to bring about meaningful enhancements to the fundamental conditions of the region, UNASUR has transformed into more of a deliberative body and knowledge hub, especially in the realm of healthcare. This shift can be seen as a triumph for the bureaucratic apparatus, ensuring job security and possibly allowing new job opportunities at the expense of rapid response toward tangible solutions. Although this transition represents a step back rather than a step forward concerning the advancement of regional integration, the focus tilts more toward discussions and information exchange rather than concrete initiatives that address the current challenges faced by the region.

UNASUR's expanded responsibilities in healthcare encompass a wide range of functions, including needs assessment, program development, and the enhancement of human resources and leadership in the health sector. These functions reflect UNASUR's commitment to improving the overall health landscape in the region. Moreover, UNASUR will organize knowledge and

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<sup>19</sup> Pía Riggirozzi and Jean Grugel, "Regional Governance and Legitimacy in South America: The Meaning of UNASUR," *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (July 2015): 781–97, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12340>.

research related to health policies and governance, aiming to respond to the demands of the South American Health Council and member states.<sup>20</sup> This research-driven approach is intended to provide valuable insights that can inform decision-making processes and advocacy efforts related to health. Furthermore, UNASUR will contribute to shaping the organization's standard external policies to support negotiations in global and international contexts. This strategic positioning underscores UNASUR's goal of becoming a more influential and responsive regional body in healthcare and broader global and international agendas.

The expansion of UNASUR's role in healthcare marks a significant turning point for the organization. By aligning itself with the enduring social struggles for health equity, UNASUR acknowledges the importance of healthcare access as a fundamental right and a critical driver of social well-being. This expansion also underscores UNASUR's determination to be more proactive and influential in addressing the healthcare challenges that persist within South America. When taking on a broader range of functions in healthcare, UNASUR demonstrates its commitment to research, information dissemination, and the formulation of standard policies to support the region's health priorities. In doing so, UNASUR aims to play a more substantial role in improving healthcare access and outcomes for the people of South America, making it an increasingly relevant and dynamic regional organization.

## **MERCOSUR**

The struggle of South American countries to consolidate the idea of a unified regional bloc is deeply rooted in their complex history, marked by a shared colonial past. Mercado Comun del Sur, MERCOSUR/MERCOSUL, established by the Treaty of Asunción in 1991, was initially comprised of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, primarily focusing on fostering

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

economic cooperation. Over the years, the organization expanded, with Venezuela gaining full membership in 2012 and Bolivia in 2015, reflecting MERCOSUR's commitment to broader regional collaboration. While its core objective remains economic integration, MERCOSUR has evolved to political encompass and social cooperation, pivotal in shaping trade relations and reducing barriers among member nations in South America.<sup>21</sup> Brazil has emerged as the primary actor and leader within the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), exercising significant influence over the economic and political dynamics of the region. Seizing an opportunity during a period of relatively weaker policy-making from the Obama administration, Brazil strategically propelled the development of its industries and facilitated the integration of national industries into the global community. This proactive approach outlined Brazil's determination to position itself as a significant player on the international stage.

Under Brazil's leadership, MERCOSUR has experienced a trajectory that spans from a more liberal orientation to one characterized by Bolivarian principles, aligning with the socialist ideologies of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> This evolution reflects Brazil's active role in shaping the ideological direction of the bloc. In this case, the participation of other member states that differ from the primary current of thought serves to balance the influence of an influential leader within any region and organization.<sup>23</sup> Brazil has consistently advocated for the autonomy of states in commercial engagements, emphasizing the importance of each member nation's sovereignty in shaping their economic relationships. Brazil's influence has thus extended beyond financial considerations to encompass broader political and ideological dimensions within the

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<sup>21</sup> Miriam Gomes Saraiva, "Procesos de Integración de América Del Sur y El Papel de Brasil: Los Casos Del Mercosur y La Unasur / Integration Processes in South America and the Role of Brazil: The Cases of Mercosur and Unasur," *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, no. 97/98 (2012): 87–100.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Fienes and Thorsten Wojczewski, "Contested Leadership in International Relations: Power Politics in South America, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa" (German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), 2010), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07591>.

MERCOSUR framework.<sup>24</sup> The organization aims to facilitate trade, reduce barriers, and promote economic cooperation among its member states, including Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the organization's vision serves to create and extend the ties of neighboring countries beyond special trade agreements.

The aspiration was to unite these newly independent countries under a shared cultural and linguistic heritage, envisioning a stronger voice on the global stage. However, the practical implementation of pan-Hispanism encountered several obstacles. One of the most significant challenges was the diverse cultural identities developed within the region over centuries. Latin America is a mosaic of indigenous, African, and European influences, leading to a rich tapestry of traditions, languages, and customs. These cultural differences made creating a homogeneous pan-Hispanic identity that could transcend national boundaries difficult. Political divisions also hindered the consolidation of forthcoming strategies within the region.<sup>26</sup> The newly formed Latin American nations faced internal power struggles, territorial disputes, and differing ideologies that often took precedence over the broader vision of unity. Nationalism, born out of the struggle for independence, sometimes led to competition rather than cooperation among these nations.

Economic considerations further complicated the realization of pan-Hispanism. Latin American countries had diverse economic structures and resources, leading to varying levels of development. This economic disparity made it challenging to establish a unified financial framework that could benefit all nations equally. MERCOSUR and most regional blocs in South America recognized the need to overcome historical divisions and prioritize economic interests

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid 20

<sup>25</sup> Luigi Manzetti. "The Political Economy of Mercosur." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 35, no. 4 (1993): 101–41. <https://doi.org/10.2307/165956>.

<sup>26</sup> 1. Mahrukh Doctor, "Prospects for Deepening Mercosur Integration: Economic Asymmetry and Institutional Deficits," *Review of International Political Economy* 20, no. 3 (June 1, 2013): 515–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2012.671763>.

as a stepping stone toward greater unity. The organization focused on creating a common market and harmonizing trade policies to enhance regional financial performance. Its inception symbolized a departure from the lofty ideals of pan-Hispanism and instead adopted a pragmatic approach aligned with the global economy's contemporary realities.

MERCOSUR's evolution also reflected the lessons learned from past attempts at unity. When concentrating on economic cooperation, trade liberalization, and investment promotion, MERCOSUR achieved tangible results that positively impacted the economies of its member states. This approach demonstrated that regional integration could be achieved through practical measures that align with the needs and priorities of the participating nations. The struggle of Latin American countries to consolidate the idea of pan-Hispanism underscores the complex challenges of unifying diverse nations with shared linguistic and historical ties. While pan-Hispanism faced hurdles due to cultural, political, and economic differences, contemporary initiatives like MERCOSUR provide a more pragmatic path to regional integration. When economic cooperation aligns with the needs of member states, MERCOSUR exemplifies how unity achieves practical measures that bring Latin American economies closer together.

While MERCOSUR and UNASUR share a regional context and objectives, their structures and purposes differ significantly. UNASUR aimed for broader integration and cooperation across South America, addressing political and social dimensions alongside economic concerns. However, UNASUR faced challenges, such as internal disputes and member withdrawals, which led to its relative stagnation. MERCOSUR, on the other hand, has maintained its primary focus on economic integration since its inception. While not immune to challenges, MERCOSUR has managed to navigate them more effectively, perhaps learning from the experiences of UNASUR. The economic orientation of MERCOSUR, centered around trade

and market access, has provided a more stable foundation compared to the broader and politically charged objectives of UNASUR. In this sense, the perceived performance of UNASUR influenced MERCOSUR in shaping its priorities and organizational structure. MERCOSUR's more targeted approach to economic collaboration, focusing on reducing trade barriers and fostering economic ties, could be a response to the challenges faced by UNASUR. While both organizations have faced difficulties, MERCOSUR's ability to maintain its economic focus may indicate a more pragmatic approach that has allowed it to advance beyond some of the pitfalls encountered by UNASUR.

### **Success and Failures: Facing Internal and External Challenges.**

This section delves into the successes and failures of South American regional organizations, tracing their evolution from UNASUR to its predecessor, CSN. Through a critical lens, we evaluate their effectiveness in addressing challenges like democratic governance and socio-economic development. Analyzing member state dynamics, external influences, and the resonance of long-term goals, this section concisely explores the intricate journey of regional integration in South America.

One critical success of South American regional institutions has been their role in promoting regional cooperation and integration. For example, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) has worked to consolidate diplomatic efforts and negotiations among its member states, contributing to regional stability and peace. These institutions have helped address pressing regional issues, such as poverty alleviation and healthcare access, fostering solidarity among member countries. This cooperative spirit is evident in UNASUR's commitment to addressing health disparities and its efforts to provide technical support to national health institutions, illustrating a practical approach to addressing common problems.

These institutions, however, face substantial challenges, both internal and external. Internally, the region's political diversity has often led to disagreements and difficulties in reaching consensus on critical issues. The ideological differences among member states, coupled with changing leadership, have sometimes hindered the effectiveness of these institutions. Externally, the influence of major global powers, such as the United States, has cast a shadow over South American affairs, impacting the region's autonomy and sovereignty. This external influence has, at times, created friction and strained the unity of these organizations. Furthermore, overlapping regional institutions in South America, like the Pacific Alliance and



the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), have complicated the regional landscape. While they may promote economic integration and political dialogue, they can also dilute the collective strength and cohesion of the broader regional institutions, contributing to inefficiency and fragmentation.

The success and failure of South American regional institutions reflect a complex interplay of internal and external dynamics. These organizations have fostered cooperation, addressed shared concerns, and promoted regional stability. However, they have also faced challenges from political diversity, changing leadership, and external influences. The presence of overlapping regional institutions further complicates the landscape. As South America continues to grapple with these dynamics, the effectiveness and impact of these regional bodies remain subjects of ongoing debate and adaptation.

The South American landscape, shaped by regional institutions like MERCOSUR and ALBA dynamics, reveals several noteworthy conclusions. Firstly, the behavior of powerful countries like Brazil, Argentina, and Chile within these regional bodies underscores that their national interests and internal needs often take precedence. Despite their participation in regional organizations, these nations continue to prioritize their concerns and sovereignty. This series of events highlights the complexity of regional integration, as these countries maintain a degree of autonomy and may only sometimes act in complete solidarity. It challenges the assumption that creating regional institutions would lead to a more unified approach among member states. However, this does not diminish the significance of these organizations in facilitating dialogue and cooperation, even if individual interests occasionally take precedence.

Secondly, the absence of a significant external threat has limited the impetus for South American countries to increase collaboration beyond political and economic engagement within

the region. Unlike regions with more immediate external challenges, South America has not faced a common external threat that compels countries to close ranks. While this can foster a sense of stability, it also means that regional organizations may need to be more robustly activated. South America's political and economic engagement within the region has primarily made a desire to tap into its economic potential and navigate complex geopolitical interests. This situation underscores the region's unique position globally, where cooperation is driven more by opportunity than external coercion.

Lastly, some organizations, like ALBA, which initially aimed to foster regional solidarity, have encountered challenges due to the region's inherent political diversity and instability. The dissolution of ALBA, or its transformation into a less cohesive entity, underscores the difficulty of maintaining a unified front in a region marked by diverse political ideologies and frequent leadership changes. While these organizations may serve as an initial platform for cooperation, their effectiveness can undermine the region's political intricacies. These developments highlight the need for adaptability and the ability to evolve in response to the ever-changing dynamics of South American politics.

South American regional organizations reflect a balance between individual national interests and regional cooperation. The absence of a significant external threat has allowed countries to prioritize their own needs, and the regional political diversity has posed challenges to the sustainability of some regional bodies. South America's dynamic landscape continues to shape the path of regional integration, emphasizing the importance of flexibility and adaptability in the face of shifting political and economic currents.

## Chapter II

### **Asian Regional Blocs (The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN))**

In an era of interconnected economies and dynamic geopolitical landscapes, the emergence of Asian regional blocs has taken center stage as pivotal mechanisms for enhancing collaboration, economic growth, and political stability across the continent. This chapter delves into deepening the insights and general mission of East and Southeast Asia's two most important political-economic regional organizations. As Asia assumes an increasingly prominent role on the global stage, regional organizations like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have garnered significant attention for their potential to shape the destiny of this diverse and vibrant region. Concurrently, the Southeast Asian countries, united by their geographic proximity and shared challenges, have embarked on their journey of cooperation, aiming to tap into their collective strengths and create a sustainable and inclusive future.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a testament to Asia's commitment to fostering closer economic ties and integration. Comprising 15 countries, including major players like China, Japan, and Australia, RCEP seeks to create a free trade area that covers nearly a third of the global economy. This ambitious agreement showcases Asia's recognition of the economic advantages of regional cooperation, capitalizing on the complementary nature of member states' economies and their collective potential to drive growth, innovation, and prosperity<sup>27</sup>. The rapid economic growth in East and Southeast Asia

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<sup>27</sup> Shen Minghui, "Evaluation of Regional Economic Integration in East Asia," in *Asian Economic Integration in an Era of Global Uncertainty*, ed. Shiro Armstrong and Tom Westland (ANU Press, 2018), 259–92, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt20krz01.17>.

between 2000 and 2017 was driven by foreign direct investment (FDI) and trade integration<sup>28</sup>. FDI was crucial in expanding productive capacities and enhancing trade complementarity<sup>29</sup>. East and Southeast Asia experienced rapid economic growth during the 1980s and 1990s, driven by two key factors: foreign direct investment (FDI) and increased trade integration.

In addition, Between 1990 and 2017, East Asia experienced substantial growth in inward foreign direct investment (FDI) flows, increasing from 118.4 billion US dollars to 140.6 billion US dollars. Southeast Asia also saw a notable rise in inward FDI flows in the same period, growing from 14.4 billion US dollars in 1990 to 21.9 billion US dollars in 2017. This suggests that the regions attracted significant foreign investment. Regarding trade growth, East Asia exhibited fluctuations, with total trade growth percentages at 8.46% in 1990, peaking at 31% in 2010, and then declining to 9.15% in 2017. On the other hand, Southeast Asia consistently showed positive trade growth percentages, increasing from 21.36% in 1990 to 35.07% in 2010 and remaining at 14.9% in 2017. These figures indicate a dynamic economic environment, with both regions actively engaging in trade.<sup>30</sup> The significance of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in the context of regional economic integration delves into the economic impact of FDI in Asia, exploring how FDI influences the economy through mechanisms like stock effects, productivity enhancements, co-finance effects, and trade impacts.

Furthermore, it highlights the growing importance of Newly Industrialized Economies (NIEs) as sources of FDI directed toward ASEAN and China. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a trailblazer in Asian regional cooperation, fostering diplomatic

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Shigeru T Otsubo, and Tetsuo Umemura. "Forces Underlying Trade Integration in the APEC Region: A Gravity Model Analysis of Trade, 'FDI,' and Complementarity." *Journal of Economic Integration* 18, no. 1 (2003): 126–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23000734>

<sup>30</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB). (2017). *Integration indicators database*. Data retrieved from [aric.adb.org/integrationindicators](http://aric.adb.org/integrationindicators)

collaboration and economic integration among its ten member states. Born out of a commitment to maintaining regional stability amidst post-colonial uncertainties, ASEAN has evolved into a platform for dialogue and consensus-building on various issues, including security, trade, and socio-cultural exchanges. Its emphasis on the "ASEAN way," characterized by non-interference and mutual respect, underscores the region's unique approach to diplomacy and regional governance. In South Asia, a distinct trajectory of cooperation has emerged among neighboring countries with historical, cultural, and economic ties.

As this chapter unfolds, we delve deeper into the intricacies of Asian regional blocs such as RCEP, and ASEAN, examining their motivations, objectives, successes, and challenges. We also turn our gaze to South Asia, dissecting the characteristics of cooperation among its nations and evaluating the impact of organizations like SAARC on the region's development journey. We will explore the collaborative endeavors of these diverse Asian nations. We will gain insight into the complex interplay of economic, political, and cultural forces shaping the continent's present and future.

The Asia-Pacific region has witnessed the emergence of several influential regional blocs, each with its own unique practice and underlying theory. Among these, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) have played pivotal roles in shaping the economic, political, and strategic landscape of East and Southeast Asia. These regional groupings are founded on diverse principles and objectives, reflecting the complexity of the region's dynamics. ASEAN and RCEP represent distinct regional blocs in East and Southeast Asia, each with its theory and practice. ASEAN emphasizes diplomatic consensus and non-interference, and RCEP focuses on economic integration and promotes open trade and cooperation through non-binding commitments.

These regional groupings illustrate the diversity of approaches to regional cooperation in a complex and dynamic part of the world. Eastern Asia's countries have demonstrated an apparent and growing willingness to enhance cooperation through regional blocs, reflecting their recognition of the benefits of collaboration in addressing everyday challenges and fostering shared prosperity. This trend has been particularly evident in recent years, and several key factors attributed to economic, global, security, technological, and shared culture and identity.

The proliferation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) in Asia has brought remarkable diversity and complexity to the region's economic landscape. Park mentions that 13 intra-regional Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) took place in East Asia between 2001 and October 2013"<sup>31</sup>. This diversity in FTAs reflects the pressing needs and aspirations of Asian countries for greater economic integration and Trade expansion within the region. The diversity of FTAs in Asia demonstrates the region's need for economic and trade expansion. These Agreements are about opening markets, fostering regional cooperation, enhancing competitiveness, and ensuring stability. As Asian countries continue to seek opportunities for growth and development, FTAs and 'intra-regional agreements' play a pivotal role in shaping the region's economic future and strengthening its position globally.<sup>32</sup> As a result, nations are compelled to either strengthen existing ties or forge new paths for economic and socio-manufacturing advancements, navigating the intricacies of evolving financial landscapes within the proliferation of trade agreements.

These series of events open the way for countries to pursue the creation of more foreign trade agreements (FTAs) that facilitate the approach to their desired economic and socio-cultural

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<sup>31</sup> Inwon Park, "Regional Trade Agreements in East Asia - CIAO." Database. [ciaonet.org](http://ciaonet.org), March 2014. <https://www.ciaonet.org/record/32494>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

exchanges. Some have similar or completely different approaches in which the member states decide to participate. East Asian countries engage in multiple FTAs and regional organizations due to diverse economic objectives, the potential for complementary trade relationships, and pragmatic economic diplomacy. This approach allows them to tailor strategies to their unique needs, secure preferential access to specific markets, and increase their resilience to economic shocks and market protection.<sup>33</sup> Geopolitical considerations influence choices, as some agreements strengthen political or security ties. Experimentation, risk mitigation, and the desire to play influential roles regionally and globally further drive this multi-pronged approach, reflecting the complex dynamics and objectives in East Asia's regional and global engagement.

### **The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**

Formed during the Cold War amid turbulence and instability within the region. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN, is a regional organization founded in 1967 to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in Southeast Asia.<sup>34</sup> ASEAN's theory is deeply rooted in the principles of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), which emphasizes non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, peaceful conflict resolution, and mutual respect for sovereignty. In practice, ASEAN conducts regular meetings and summits among its ten member states, which include Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. These meetings are platforms for discussing regional issues, from economic cooperation and trade to security concerns.

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<sup>33</sup> Naoko Munakata, *Transforming East Asia: The Evolution of Regional Economic Integration* (Brookings Institution Press, 2006), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt6wpg0d>.

<sup>34</sup> Moon, C.. "ASEAN." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 14, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ASEAN>.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, ASEAN shifted its focus from primarily political concerns to economic matters. They recognized the potential for mutual economic growth and development through regional economic organization integration. Adopting the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992 marked a significant milestone in this transition. AFTA sought to reduce trade barriers and promote economic cooperation among member states, facilitating the regional flow of goods and services. This shift in emphasis from political security to economic cooperation has been a critical factor in ASEAN's transformation into a robust economic bloc. Today, ASEAN is a testament to the fusion of political collaboration and economic integration, contributing to the region's economic dynamism and pivotal in the broader Southeast Asian and global economy.

One of ASEAN's notable achievements is establishing the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, which aims to create a single market and production base within the region, fostering the free flow of goods, services, investments, and skilled labor. Therefore, ASEAN has played a pivotal role in regional conflict resolution. Notably, it mediated the Cambodian conflict between 1979 and 1990s, demonstrating its commitment to maintaining peace and stability. ASEAN's practice reflects its theory of promoting regional harmony through peaceful dialogue, mutual respect, and economic cooperation.

Two pivotal factors constrain ASEAN's role in shaping security dynamics in Southeast Asia. Firstly, the influence of major global powers significantly shapes the security policies that ASEAN can implement.<sup>35</sup> These powerful nations often set the boundaries within which ASEAN's security strategies operate, reinforcing the region's reliance on external players. Secondly, within the ASEAN organization, divergent perceptions and interests regarding security

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<sup>35</sup> Shaun Narine, "ASEAN and the Management of Regional Security," *Pacific Affairs* 71, no. 2 (1998): 195–214, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2760976>.



matters create complexities. This internal diversity limits intra-organizational cooperation, making assessing the practical impact of ASEAN's stated security goals challenging.

This situation highlights the delicate balancing act ASEAN must perform between regional autonomy and external influence. While the organization strives to maintain regional stability, it operates within a broader global framework where major powers have a substantial say in shaping regional security dynamics. The internal differences within ASEAN member states regarding their security priorities and interests emphasize the complexity of achieving a unified regional security strategy.<sup>36</sup> These factors outline the intricacies of ASEAN's role in Southeast Asian security and exemplify the organization's need to navigate a complex interplay of internal and external influences to pursue regional stability and prosperity.

ASEAN's potential power to influence the rules of engagement in Southeast Asia extends to its role as a diplomatic intermediary and its capacity to engage with non-regional actors. Promoting a peaceful and cooperative approach to regional issues contributes to defining the norms and principles that govern interactions within the region and between Southeast Asia and external partners. ASEAN's unique position allows it to navigate a delicate balance between regional autonomy and the engagement of global powers like the United States. It ensures that provincial interests are considered, and regional engagement rules are shaped to support regional stability and prosperity.

An illustrative example of ASEAN's potential power in shaping regional engagement rules involves its role in managing the South China Sea dispute, which has implications for not only Southeast Asian nations but also for non-regional actors, particularly the United States. The South China Sea is a contentious area with overlapping territorial claims, and it has been a focal

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid

point for regional tensions. ASEAN's engagement in this issue has showcased its influence in guiding regional interactions and involving non-regional actors. Through the mechanism of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which includes countries like the United States, China, and other major powers, it has provided a platform for dialogue and negotiations regarding the South China Sea. Its emphasis on peaceful dispute resolution and developing the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea reflects its commitment to establishing rules and norms for regional engagement. While the process has been challenging and ongoing, the organization's central role in these discussions demonstrates its ability to influence the rules that govern interactions within the region and with external actors.

ASEAN's economic integration efforts, exemplified by initiatives like the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), have bolstered the region's economic growth and made Southeast Asia an attractive destination for foreign investment. The region's economic dynamism has contributed to member states' prosperity and solidified ASEAN's role as a significant player in the global economy. This economic clout enhances ASEAN's influence in regional and international forums. The organization has adapted to the evolving geopolitical landscape by engaging with major global organization powers, including the United States, China, and the European Union. Its centrality in regional diplomacy has allowed it to act as a mediator and facilitator in managing regional disputes, such as those in the South China Sea. ASEAN's role in fostering dialogue and cooperation has been crucial in preventing conflicts from escalating. Despite its limitations, the organization remains pivotal for regional cooperation, stability, and prosperity. ASEAN's ability to incorporate member states with diverse interests, its diplomatic approach, economic

integration, and adaptability in the changing global landscape has contributed to its enduring influence in Southeast Asia.

### **The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a groundbreaking free trade agreement (FTA) that represents one of the largest and most significant economic partnerships in the world. Taking place in November 2020, RCEP encompasses 15 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including 10 ASEAN member states (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) and five of their trading partners (China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand).<sup>37</sup> RCEP is characterized by its vast scope and ambition, aiming to facilitate economic integration, reduce trade barriers, and promote cooperation in various areas. One of the critical characteristics of RCEP is its comprehensive approach to trade and economic cooperation. The agreement addresses various aspects of economic relations among member states, including eliminating or reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers to trade in goods, promoting services trade, and facilitating investment flows. RCEP also includes provisions related to intellectual property rights, e-commerce, competition policy, and dispute resolution mechanisms, making it a comprehensive framework for regional economic integration.

China's drive propelled the creation of RCEP, making it a vital institution operating exclusively within neighboring countries. At the end of 2020, 15 East Asian nations virtually signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a landmark multilateral trade agreement. Two parallel initiatives had laid the groundwork for this agreement, with

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<sup>37</sup> 1. Shobhit Seth, "Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Definition," ed. Michael Boyle and Yarilet Perez, investopedia, September 22, 2022, [www.investopedia.com/terms/r/regional-comprehensive-economic-partnership-rcep.asp](http://www.investopedia.com/terms/r/regional-comprehensive-economic-partnership-rcep.asp).

ASEAN+3 countries driving the East Asia Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and 16 nations from the East Asia Summit (EAS) negotiating the Comprehensive Economic Partnership in East Asia (CEPEA), led by China and Japan, respectively.<sup>38</sup> The pivotal moment for these negotiations arose as regional countries perceived a common threat to US-China strategic competition. Faced with this shared challenge, they sought an institutional framework to promote trade and foster economic recovery. Regarding ASEAN, RCEP became a strategic imperative, reflecting its approach to engaging with its more substantial regional neighbors.

This development has implications for other actors outside the region, such as the United States. The signing of RCEP raises the question of whether South Korea, as an RCEP member, will consider joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). In the face of the challenges posed by US-China competition and the COVID-19 pandemic, South Korea must work with RCEP members to revitalize the regional economy and trade, positioning itself as a leader in regional trade liberalization and the revival of regional value chains while also ensuring that RCEP does not become an instrument for China to expand its economic and strategic influence. This complex landscape underscores the evolving dynamics of regional trade and diplomacy in East Asia.

Another fundamental characteristic of RCEP is its inclusive and diverse membership, representing a significant portion of the global population and economic output. The agreement covers countries with varying levels of economic development, from highly industrialized nations like Japan and South Korea to emerging economies like Vietnam and Cambodia. This diversity creates opportunities for complementary trade relationships, allowing countries to tap into each other's strengths and address their respective development needs. Additionally, RCEP's

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<sup>38</sup> Lee Jaehyon, "Diplomatic and Security Implications of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)" (Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2021), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29687>.

sheer size and economic significance position it as a driving force in shaping the regional and global trade landscape, fostering greater economic interdependence among member states and providing a platform for cooperation in a rapidly evolving and interconnected world.

The tariff system within the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreements represents a significant achievement in trade liberalization. RCEP, which encompasses 15 member nations in the Asia-Pacific region, has established a structured timeline for reducing and eliminating tariffs on a wide range of goods. This approach has not only incentivized intra-regional trade but has also facilitated increased market access for participating countries.

One of the critical successes of the RCEP tariff system is its comprehensive coverage. The agreement addresses tariffs on various products, including industrial goods, agricultural products, and services. This broad scope means a significant step toward fostering an open, integrated regional market.<sup>39</sup> The gradual reduction of tariffs has unlocked substantial economic opportunities for RCEP members. As tariffs progressively phase out, businesses within these countries benefit from increased access to diverse markets, promoting trade expansion and economic growth. This approach aligns with RCEP's overarching objective of strengthening economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region. While the full extent of RCEP's success in tariff reductions will become more evident as the agreement takes place, its framework is a pivotal step toward enhancing regional trade and cooperation.

The design of RCEP as a regional organization roots itself in creating a unified bloc within the region. While it includes diverse economies with their trade dynamics, it is a single,

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<sup>39</sup> Shen Minghui, "Evaluation of Regional Economic Integration in East Asia," in *Asian Economic Integration in an Era of Global Uncertainty*, ed. Shiro Armstrong and Tom Westland (ANU Press, 2018), 259–92, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt20krz01.17>.

comprehensive trade agreement that supersedes individual bilateral or minor trade agreements among its member states. However, it's important to note that some RCEP member countries may have preexisting bilateral or subregional trade agreements. RCEP does not nullify these agreements but coexists alongside them. For instance, some ASEAN member countries have bilateral trade agreements with non-ASEAN RCEP members, which remain in force. RCEP serves as an overarching framework for trade liberalization and economic cooperation, aiming to harmonize and streamline trade rules and practices across the Asia-Pacific region. While it is a significant and all-encompassing trade agreement for the member countries, it does not replace or eliminate preexisting bilateral or subregional trade agreements. These minor agreements continue to operate alongside RCEP, and the success of RCEP lies in its capacity to enhance and coordinate economic integration within the broader Asia-Pacific region.

Many East Asian economies have embraced export-oriented strategies, attracting foreign direct investments (FDIs) and engaging in regional and global production networks. In response to East Asian regional integration, the United States actively participated in Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations with Singapore, Australia, ASEAN, and the ROK, ultimately leading to its decision to spearhead the TPP negotiations<sup>40</sup>. While FTAs addressed traditional issues like tariff reduction and dispute settlement, more intricate matters such as intellectual property rights, competition policy, and environmental regulations have been less frequently incorporated. Facing the challenge posed by the TPP, ASEAN initiated RCEP in 2012, involving the remaining ASEAN+6 countries. Australia and New Zealand, with close economic ties to East Asia, participated in various forms of regional economic integration, from ASEAN+1 FTA to RCEP. Although the TPP offers a higher level of liberalization than East Asia FTAs, the East Asian economies share common interests in negotiating more FTAs within and outside the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid

region<sup>41</sup>. Despite the significant contribution of market-driven economic integration to East Asian production networks, challenges like cross-border measures and discriminatory regulations persist, impacting business costs.

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid*

### Chapter 3

#### **Comparing Strategies and External Influences in Both Regions Through Regional Institutions.**

The behavior of both regions within regional institutions unveils intriguing insights into how these geographically distant yet strategically significant regions approach the complex task of fostering cooperation, enhancing stability, and realizing their regional aspirations. Despite the unique historical, political, and economic contexts that distinguish South America and Southeastern Asia, both regions share common objectives in their regional strategies.

In both regions, prominent regional institutions are conduits for pursuing these shared goals. Each institution employs strategies that underscore the importance of regional cohesion through political dialogue, conflict prevention, and economic cooperation. While these approaches may manifest differently in each region, they ultimately reflect the parallel ambition to bolster regional stability and prosperity. As mentioned in Chapter 1, for example, the desire to create new institutions tied to different currents of thought, such as the Bolivarian vision, managed to shape and intensify the desire of South American nations to limit the influence of a non-regional power. However, the distinct historical backgrounds, external influences, and unique regional challenges faced by South America and Southeastern Asia lend a fascinating backdrop to these common strategic threads, illustrating how regional diversity and regional commonality coexist in the ever-evolving landscape of global politics and economics.

In South America, the three industrial powerhouses of Brazil, Argentina, and Chile have been at the forefront of the region's economic transformation. As South America's largest economy, Brazil has harnessed its vast resources and burgeoning consumer market to fuel robust industrial growth. Its industries span manufacturing and agriculture to technology and energy,



making Brazil a regional industrial juggernaut with a GDP (real growth rate. Argentina, known for its strong agricultural and agro-industrial sector, has developed a diversified industrial base. With notable expertise in automotive, pharmaceuticals, and food processing, Argentina's industrial sector has contributed significantly to its economic development. Collectively, these nations have elevated their financial profiles and played pivotal roles in driving regional integration and cooperation.

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, Mercosur's internal trade has emerged from \$4 billion in 1990 to over \$41 billion in 2010, with some fluctuations<sup>42</sup>. The bloc's tariff reduction by 10 percent in 2021 and efforts for trade deals with countries like Bolivia, Chile, Israel, Peru, and India are notable. However, more extensive agreements, including one with the EU, face challenges due to concerns about the Amazon Rainforest. The U.S. lacks trade deals with Mercosur, and past initiatives like the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) stalled. Recent trade tensions, U.S. tariffs in 2019, and Brazil's interest in an FTA suggest evolving dynamics. Mercosur's EU deal faces hurdles, and internal tensions arose after economic crises in Brazil and Argentina in 1999 and 2001.<sup>43</sup> Uruguay's attempts to forge a trade pact with China and join the Trans-Pacific Partnership add complexities, with divergent views within Mercosur, notably between Brazil and Argentina. The trajectory of Mercosur reveals a dynamic regional trade landscape marked by successful internal trade initiatives, challenges in securing major global deals – including the influence of foreign actors such as the US – and ongoing tensions within the bloc, reflecting the complexities of South American economic integration.

Moreover, The United States has significantly impacted South America and Asia's economic and trade landscape through its policies, influence, and trade agreements. Historically,

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<sup>42</sup> "Mercosur: South America's Fractious Trade Bloc," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/background/mercosur-south-americas-fractious-trade-bloc>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

the U.S. has been a significant trading partner and source of investment for many countries in South America. A bilateral and multilateral trade agreement network primarily governs the United States' economic ties with South American nations. The most prominent is the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), significantly impacting North and South American trade. Furthermore, the U.S. has been influential in the region's economic integration initiatives, such as the Pacific Alliance, which seeks to enhance trade and cooperation among its member countries.

The United States has pursued an extensive network of Asian economic engagements, including trade agreements and partnerships with various countries. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), though later renamed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) after the U.S. withdrew, was a critical agreement that aimed to bolster economic integration among Asia-Pacific nations. However, the U.S. chose not to participate in the CPTPP, signaling a shift in its approach to regional trade. The U.S. has also maintained a robust economic relationship with major Asian economies such as China, Japan, and South Korea. The bilateral trade relationships with these countries have far-reaching implications for regional and global trade dynamics. The United States' economic influence in Asia extends to its support for ASEAN countries and its involvement in regional organizations like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The U.S. has been a crucial player in fostering economic cooperation and trade liberalization in the region, while its trade policies and agreements continue to shape the economic landscape of Asia.

The powerful trio of South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan has left an indelible mark on the region's economic landscape. South Korea's astonishing rise as an economic powerhouse holds its popularity due to its innovative technology sector, robust manufacturing industry, and

global conglomerates. Its rapid industrialization, often called the '*Miracle on the Han River*,' has propelled South Korea onto the worldwide stage and served as a model for other nations in the region. Similarly, Singapore has become a global economic hub with its strategic location and efficient infrastructure. Its industries span finance, technology, shipping, and logistics, making it a significant player worldwide. Renowned for its electronics and semiconductor industries, Taiwan has fostered a vibrant technology ecosystem, contributing to the region's remarkable economic growth. These nations serve as prominent influences within Southeastern Asia through their extraordinary economic achievements and as examples of successful development models for the region.

Despite their differences, prominent South American and Southeastern Asia strategies share common themes that reflect the regions' aspirations for regional integration, cooperation, and stability. In South America, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) has emphasized political dialogue, conflict resolution, and democratic governance as primary strategies. The promotes peace and stability by facilitating diplomatic negotiations during political and organizational crises and conflicts. UNASUR's strong focus on democracy is rooted in the region's history of authoritarian regimes and military coups. Similarly, in Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) significantly emphasizes conflict prevention and economic cooperation. ASEAN seeks to foster regional stability by building trust and promoting economic growth, recognizing that political stability is often contingent on economic prosperity.

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The dynamic landscape of East Asian economies, marked by export-oriented strategies and active participation in regional and global networks, reflects a complex interplay of traditional and contemporary trade considerations. The region's response to challenges, exemplified by the initiation of RCEP and active involvement in the TPP, underscores the

evolving nature of economic collaboration. As impediments persist, such as cross-border measures and regulatory complexities, there's a shared recognition among East Asian economies of the necessity to foster their regional trade arrangements. The U.S., navigating these currents, has strategically engaged in TPP leadership to safeguard its role in East Asian regionalism. In this intricate tapestry of economic integration, the pursuit of shared interests and negotiations for more FTAs remains a driving force, shaping the future trajectory of East Asian economic collaboration.

### **The Case of FEALAC**

The Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC) is a unique and innovative organization that seeks to foster dialogue and partnership between two seemingly distant and diverse regions: East Asia and Latin America. Its mission is to promote cooperation and understanding across these regions in various fields, including politics, economics, culture, and education. The establishment of FEALAC reflects the growing recognition of the economic and strategic importance of East Asia and Latin America on the global stage. This recognition has led to a mutual desire to enhance ties and explore common interests.

Moreover, there is a political and strategic dimension to FEALAC's mission. Political and security concerns link with economic interests in an increasingly interconnected world. According to Taeheok Lee in the recent study of FEALAC, the importance of inter-regional governance asserts that globalism and regionalism mutually reinforce each other. Focused on FEALAC, an underexplored entity, the study contains that, despite gradual institutionalization, FEALAC has the potential to shift from a rule-taker to a rule-maker, especially in addressing climate change. The study suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic allows FEALAC to enhance its

global role.<sup>44</sup> Emphasizing the efficacy of addressing significant issues at the (inter-)regional level, the paper foresees (inter-)regionalism beyond the UN system as a defining characteristic of the 21st century.

East Asia and Latin America have recognized the significance of aligning their political and diplomatic strategies to address shared challenges, such as global governance, climate change, and regional stability. FEALAC serves as a forum where leaders from both regions can engage in diplomatic dialogue, address common issues, and work together to enhance regional and global stability. The organization recognizes that the collective voice of East Asia and Latin America can have a meaningful impact on international affairs and that cooperation in diplomatic and political realms is essential for safeguarding their interests. The establishment of FEALAC drives a multi-dimensional pursuit of common interests, encompassing economic, political, and strategic concerns, and reflects the growing importance of both regions on the global stage.

Latin American countries have substantially diversified their external relations in recent decades, recognizing the strategic importance of engaging with a broader array of global partners.<sup>45</sup> Amid this transformative global landscape, the growing significance of East Asia has emerged as a focal point for many nations in the region. The shift towards East Asia means a departure from a traditionally Eurocentric foreign policy, reflecting Latin America's determination to harness the economic and geopolitical potential of vibrant East Asian economies.

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<sup>44</sup> Taeheok Lee, "FEALAC and Inter-Regional Governance: A 'New' Path to Pacific Partnership," *Social Sciences* 12, no. 6 (June 2023): 323, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12060323>.

<sup>45</sup> Faust, Jörg. "Latin America, Chile, and East Asia: Policy-Networks and Successful Diversification." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 36, no. 4 (2004): 743–70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3875538>.

<sup>25</sup> Deborah Joanne James . "The Creative Content Programme and Audiovisual E-platform: An Institutional Analysis of UNESCO\U27s Influence on the Development of Independent Documentary Content and Production Practice." (2011). <https://core.ac.uk/download/56687249.pdf>.

The diversification of external relations with East Asia is, in many ways, emblematic of Latin America's redefined role in global affairs. Nations in the region have increasingly sought to tap into the economic dynamism of East Asia, which boasts significant players like China, Japan, and South Korea. Through intensified trade, investment, and diplomatic ties with East Asian partners, Latin American countries have embarked on a quest to bolster their economic growth and development. Furthermore, these relationships serve as a counterbalance to the influence of traditional Western powers and mitigate over-reliance on a single global region. This strategic diversification also opens doors to collaborative efforts in critical areas such as technology, infrastructure, and sustainable development, positioning Latin America as a dynamic player in the evolving global landscape.

## Chapter 4

### **What now? Lessons and concluding thoughts: what problems must be addressed**

After looking at the latent situation in the South American and Southeastern Asian regions, the key issues must be addressed. Some recommendations are based on the study of the behavioral patterns throughout the region's history. When it comes to South American regionalism, many challenges beckon thoughtful consideration, strategic diplomacy, and cooperation. The region's historical, political, and economic diversity has often led to tensions, diverging interests, and extreme retaliation among South American countries. Effective regional integration mechanisms are imperative to navigate these complexities. Addressing trade imbalances, political disputes, and historical grievances requires nuanced diplomatic strategies prioritizing collaboration over confrontation. As a regional heavyweight, Brazil has been pivotal in shaping the approach to reduce tension and foster regional cooperation. Through its diplomacy, Brazil has aimed to create a harmonious regional environment by emphasizing dialogue, conflict resolution mechanisms, and the pursuit of common goals.<sup>46</sup> Brazilian diplomacy is crucial in steering South American regionalism toward stability and shared prosperity by mitigating extreme retaliation and promoting a more cooperative regional spirit.

There can be a natural misconception that joining a regional organization will inevitably lead to a replication of the European Union's model, particularly considering the historical context of post-World War II Europe. Pastrana Buelvas makes a vital point analyzing Haas's conception of unity and sovereignty within the framework of a regional organization, in this case, what is nowadays known as the European Union. The EU's formation was a response to the devastations of two major conflicts, fostering an environment where nations sought deeper

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<sup>46</sup> Pedro Silva Barros and Julia de Souza Borba Gonçalves, "Crisis in South American Regionalism and Brazilian Protagonism in Unasur, the Lima Group and Prosur," *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 64 (November 29, 2021): e009, <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7329202100209>.



economic and political integration to ensure lasting peace. However, assuming that every regional organization will follow a similar trajectory overlooks the unique historical circumstances that shaped the EU.<sup>47</sup> Different regions face distinct challenges and historical backgrounds, and their integration paths may vary significantly. Expecting a carbon copy of the EU's development could lead to misunderstandings about regional cooperation's complexities and diverse dynamics.

Economic imbalances among countries within the region pose a substantial hurdle, necessitating a concerted effort to address trade disparities and promote a more equitable distribution of resources. Political stability is another critical concern, with historical tensions and varying ideologies often creating obstacles to cohesive regional governance. The emphasis on dialogue and constructive engagement reflects Brazil's commitment to fostering peaceful relations among neighboring nations. Its approach recognizes the importance of shared interests and common objectives, acting as a catalyst for building trust and understanding. However, the region must navigate historical grievances that have, at times, strained relationships. Resolving these issues requires a nuanced approach, acknowledging the complexities of historical conflicts and working toward reconciliation.

The problems confronting Mercosur and South American regionalism are diverse. Ongoing political and economic turmoil, intensified by corruption investigations and financial mismanagement, must focus on governance and stability measures. Internal divisions within Mercosur, particularly concerning modernization and protectionist policies, highlight the necessity for collective efforts and a shared vision. Adapting trade relations with China demands a careful balance between economic engagement and safeguarding regional interests.

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<sup>47</sup> Eduardo Pastrana Buelvas, "Why Regionalism Has Failed in Latin America: Lack of Stateness as an Important Factor for Failure of Sovereignty Transfer in Integration Projects," *Contexto Internacional* 35 (December 2013): 443–69, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-85292013000200005>.

Additionally, recovering from the financial repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic calls for coordinated efforts in public health and poverty reduction.<sup>48</sup> It is necessary to highlight that leaders advocating for modernization and market openness, like Lula, underscore the significance of collaborative decision-making between major trading partners such as Brazil and Argentina to overcome these challenges and promote sustainable regional development.

The other problem with unity within the region is based on the problem of giving up sovereignty. The fact that countries within the framework of a regional institution will not give up a considerable, or any 'amount' of sovereignty towards any regional institution, whether it is Mercosur, Unasur, or even countries in Asia that are members of ASEAN and RCEP. In this case, the challenge of divergent national interests within regional organizations such as Mercosur, Unasur, ASEAN, or RCEP extends beyond mere disagreements. For Example, The Myanmar crisis, marked by decades of military rule and ethnic conflict, witnessed a failed transition to democracy, leading to a coup in 2021.<sup>49</sup> Despite ASEAN's attempt with the Five-Point Consensus, there has yet to be much progress, challenging ASEAN's credibility. Acknowledging these limitations, Indonesia is pursuing a quieter, multi-stakeholder diplomatic approach to address Myanmar's conflict, emphasizing trust-building and potential peace process revival.<sup>50</sup> The outcome and effectiveness of this approach still need to be determined.

These differences, rooted in varying geopolitical, economic, and cultural contexts, present intricate obstacles that either expedite decision-making and conflict resolution or impede progress. The complexity arises from the need to navigate through the nuanced priorities of individual member states, making it a delicate task to achieve consensus on issues of regional

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>49</sup> "Myanmar's Troubled History: Coups, Military Rule, and Ethnic Conflict," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/myanmar-history-coup-military-rule-ethnic-conflict-rohingya>.

<sup>50</sup> guillermo, "ASEAN in 2023: What to Expect - Foreign Policy Research Institute," accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/06/asean-in-2023-what-to-expect/>.

importance. These disparities can be advantageous in offering diverse perspectives but also pose the risk of protracted negotiations and hindered collective action.

### **Conclusion**

This study selected two of the most prominent organizations in the two regions. In the case of South America, MERCOSUR is a pioneer of regional economic policy, and UNASUR is the core policy and diplomacy of the region. In East Asia, the RCEP is a financial mediator between its member states, and ASEAN assumes a broader role in developing relations between its members and allies. The South American and Southeast Asian regions face many challenges that require thoughtful consideration, strategic diplomacy, and cooperation for effective regional integration. Economic imbalances, political instability, and historical tensions necessitate nuanced diplomatic strategies to address trade disparities, foster reconciliation, and build trust. Brazil's pivotal role in steering South American regionalism toward stability is evident in its commitment to dialogue, conflict resolution, and pursuit of common goals. However, the misconception that regional organizations should replicate the European Union's model overlooks unique historical circumstances and diverse dynamics, emphasizing the need for region-specific approaches.

Economic imbalances within the region demand collective efforts, and political stability requires reconciling historical grievances through dialogue and understanding. Ongoing political and economic turmoil in Mercosur highlights the importance of governance and stability measures while maintaining sovereignty within regional institutions poses a significant hurdle. The complex nature of divergent national interests within regional organizations like ASEAN and RCEP reflects the delicate balance between diverse perspectives and the risk of impeded

collective action. The multifaceted obstacles underscore the need for collaborative decision-making, trust-building, and region-specific solutions to promote sustainable regional development.

After Analyzing some core issues in the region, some suggestions and findings might broaden the perspective on the region's capacity for troubleshooting. Firstly, fostering a spirit of cooperation beyond political differences is crucial, given the diverse political landscapes in the region. An openness to dialogue and collaboration can facilitate consensus-building and help overcome historical tensions. MERCOSUR, for instance, could benefit from a more flexible approach that accommodates its member states' varied economic and political priorities, promoting a balance between cooperation and sovereignty. Streamlining bureaucratic processes is equally imperative. Lengthy discussions and administrative hurdles have often slowed decision-making and hindered the effective implementation of regional initiatives. Implementing mechanisms to expedite bureaucratic processes and reduce red tape can contribute to more agile responses to economic and political challenges. Therefore, exploring avenues for collaboration with external partners can inject fresh perspectives and resources into regional projects. Recognizing the evolving geopolitical landscape and adapting regional frameworks to accommodate the changing dynamics is essential. This ensures these organizations remain relevant and effectively promote South American nations' shared interests and development.

Finally, the effectiveness of these suggestions hinges on the flexibility of the regional organization's framework regarding different forms of government, be it socialist or capitalist. The proposed solutions may encounter resistance if the organizational structure rigidly disapproves of deviations from a specific political ideology. Contrarily, regional entities like ASEAN and RCEP have demonstrated a degree of adaptability, accommodating diverse political

systems and fostering collaboration based on shared interests. However, the potential influence of external actors introduces another layer of complexity. Divergent geopolitical interests may sometimes deviate from the region's collective goals, emphasizing the need to carefully balance regional autonomy and engagement with external forces. Achieving success in implementing these recommendations relies on the regional organization's openness to inclusivity and ability to adjust to the evolving political dynamics within its member states.

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