BRINGING REGIONAL SUBSYSTEMS BACK IN:
South America and the Case for a Regional Subsystemic Approach to the Study of International Relations

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Carlos Gustavo Poggio Teixeira
PUC-SP/FAAP

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RESUMO

The regional subsystemic approach to the study of international relations was born in the fifties but was largely forgotten after the seventies with the emergence of neorealism. When it resurfaced after the Cold War, it was largely absorbed by the regionalist approach and while both neorealism and regionalism remain popular in the mainstream field of international relations, the regional subsystemic approach has been largely neglected. This paper aims to rediscover this approach by highlighting its distinctive character as an additional level-of-analysis, offering a definition of regional subsystems, and suggesting ways to operationalize it. The South American subsystem is used as a case in point; one which the regional subsystemic approach could be particularly useful, since it captures the realities of the Americas more accurately than the culturally referenced notion of Latin America.

Palavras – Chave

regional subsystem, Latin America, international relations theory, regionalism, South America
BRINGING REGIONAL SUBSYSTEMS BACK IN: SOUTH AMERICA AND THE CASE FOR A REGIONAL SUBSYSTEMIC APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The literature on regional subsystems (or “subordinate systems”\(^2\), or “partial international systems”\(^3\) as they have also been called) gained momentum in the sixties and seventies, but the success of the neorealist approach in late seventies and its focus on the global level and the constraints imposed by the international system - which was a useful fit for the Cold War environment - eclipsed the regional approach.\(^4\) After the end of the bipolar configuration, however, a new wave of studies taking the region as a referent for analysis appeared. The reasons for this resurgence are commonly attributed to the fact that great powers had less incentive to intervene after the end of the Cold War, which tended to give more autonomy to regions to develop with a lower degree of outside influence. Nonetheless, this literature was in general more concerned with processes of regionalization based on cooperation and the establishment of institutions, and thus little room was left for the regional subsystemic approach that had been developed up until the seventies. This paper aims to bring this literature back in the field of international relations by using the example of South America as a case in point.

THE REGIONAL SUBSYSTEMIC APPROACH

The regional subsystemic approach to study regions, as contrasted to other possible approaches, takes into consideration two main factors in order to establish the existence of a regional subsystem: geographical proximity and patterns of interaction. In fact, an approach

\(^1\) This paper draws extensively from my 2012 book, in which I develop further the approach described here. See: Carlos Gustavo Poggio Teixeira, Brazil, the United States and the South American Subsystem: Regional Politics and the Absent Empire (Lanham: Lexington, 2012).
that takes only the first criterion is not necessarily systemic, while approaches considering only the second are not necessarily regional. Even though other criteria have been offered by the literature for the identification of a regional subsystem, geographic proximity and regular interactions can be considered as providing both necessary and sufficient conditions. In fact, an approach that takes only the first criterion is not necessarily systemic, while approaches considering only the second are not necessarily regional. In a widely cited article analyzing the literature produced on regional systems up until the early seventies, William Thompson concluded that there were a “lack of uniformity” in the concept of regional subsystem and identified a total of twenty-one attributes mentioned in the literature, which he reduced to the two that were the “most consistently cited” and that were after all “already implied by the regional subsystem term”: proximity and regular interaction. The other nineteen characteristics attributed to regional subsystems, such as common developmental status, degree of integration, or shared ethnic, cultural, and historical bonds were deemed neither necessary nor sufficient conditions.

Accordingly, this paper maintains that there are two - and only two - sufficient and necessary variables for the establishment of a regional subsystem: geographic proximity and patterns of interaction. This reasonably parsimonious definition serves the purpose of international relations research and the field would greatly benefit if it was applied more consistently. focusing on geography and interaction a regional subsystem is understood here as being a subset of the international system reflecting the outcome of actual patterns of interactions – including the whole spectrum between conflict and cooperation - among countries in condition of geographic proximity. Members of the same regional subsystem have a higher degree of interaction among themselves in relation to members outside the subsystem, and as a result their primary foreign policies concerns lie within their own regional subsystem. That means that usually they seek first and foremost to establish a position within their regional subsystem before taking into account their situation in the international system as a whole – this fact, which is commonly neglected by studies focusing on great powers, is especially consequential when it comes to analyzing the foreign policies of regional powers. Defining a regional subsystem in just in terms of geographical proximity and patterns of interaction, without specifying a minimum number of states, means that there can be as many regional subsystems as there are neighboring interacting states. In fact, one could envisage a number of different regional subsystems containing only two states, and the less the number of states, the more would be the coherence of the proposed subsystem. But at the same time, the more the number of regional subsystems identified, the less

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parsimonious the subsystemic approach becomes. The question of drawing boundaries then is related to balancing the need for coherence with the need for parsimony in order to retain the usefulness of the regional subsystem concept as an analytical tool and a research program.

Both the criteria pointed out above justify the existence of two relevant regional subsystems in the so-called “Western Hemisphere” – a South American and a North American subsystem. This paper argues that there is a distinct pattern of interactions within Latin America that justify treating South America as a distinct regional subsystem. In other words, there is clearly a distinctive pattern of relations within South America that is not captured by the customary concept of Latin America. The practical significance of this is that Latin America as a concept has limited applicability in the field of international relations, and its theoretical predominance often leads to error of analysis, judgment and, ultimately, policies. In fact, this research implies that dropping the concept of Latin America altogether in favor of the notion of a South and a North American regional subsystem would lead to a significant refinement of the understanding of the international relations in the Western Hemisphere.

The notion of a common culture or identity, or of supposed historical affinities, is common misconception of regional subsystems - and this is especially relevant for the case of Latin America. Since the term Latin America is itself culturally referenced – as opposed to being geographically referenced like every other standard regional classification in the world such as “Eastern Europe,” “West Africa,” or “Southeast Asia,” for example, the temptation to justify treating Latin America as a regional subsystem based on cultural factors is immense. Obviously this is true only for those who bother offering an explanation for this choice, since many analysts just assume the existence of a Latin American subsystem as a self-evident truth. Apart from the discussion of the questionable wisdom of ascribing to Latin America a “common culture, religion, language, and race,” culture and identity - as well as the establishment of international organizations - only matter for regional subsystemic analysis as long as they affect patterns of interaction. As a matter of fact, as Thompson remarked, “with emphasis on interaction, these characteristics are rendered unnecessary even though they may be frequently present and of some significance.”

If the culturally-defined concept of Latin America is used to refer to a regional subsystem, one has to prove that it is somehow more useful to group Mexico with Brazil than to group Mexico with the United States in a regional subsystem. If culture and identity are

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7 Thompson, ”The Regional Subsystem: A Conceptual Explication and a Propositional Inventory,” 99.
used as the main variables, the first grouping would arguably make more sense. However, if patterns of interaction (as well as geography, for that matter) are used as the central factor, the United States and Mexico should be grouped as part of a North American subsystem. The case of Mexico is illustrative because several analyses seem to assume that including Mexico in studies that mainly focus on South America makes the notion of a supposed Latin American subsystem more credible. In the same manner, the inclusion of Mexico and other Latin American countries in an all-encompassing Latin American subsystem instead of in a North American subsystem is often justified in the basis of the level of development. Because the United States stands out as an industrialized developed country, the reasoning goes, it somehow does not make sense for it to be grouped with less developed Latin American states. However, like culture, a common level of development is not a criterion for the identification of a regional subsystem. In fact, as also rightfully pointed out by Thompson, “proximate and interacting actors may be rich or poor.”

The definition proposed above has three main components that deserve careful consideration. The first, is the fact that a regional subsystem is a subset of the international system as a whole, which means that the international system can be considered as the subsystem’s environment. This implicates the acknowledgment that pressures from the overall system coexist alongside subsystemic pressures, but the latter is usually more significant for the members of a regional subsystem. Second, a regional subsystem reflects actual patterns of interaction, which implies that it can only be detected by looking at past interactions, and not measuring the potential for interaction. A regional subsystem is conceived here as being a social system and as James Rosenau pointed out, “recurring - and therefore patterned - interaction is the distinguishing feature of a social system.” This means that attempts to operationalize a regional subsystem in terms of, for example, the “ability to interact militarily”, is faulty in the sense that it does not reflect the actual patterns of interaction. One needs to look at a reasonably long period of time in order to detect these

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8 A good example is Carlos Alberto Astiz, ed. *Latin American international politics; ambitions, capabilities, and the national interest of Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina* (Notre Dame Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969). The section on Mexico's foreign policy obviously concentrates on its relation with the United States and it barely mentions Mexico's relations with other Latin American countries. When it does is mostly Cuba, such as the discussions about expelling Cuba from the Organization of American States.


11 This criterion is offered by Douglas Lemke, *Regions of war and peace*, Cambridge studies in international relations 80 (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). The author gives an objective measurable definition of regional subsystems based on the distance that can be covered by day between a “home country's locus of power to the nearest point of its dyadic partner” in miles per day and its share of regional power. Then he calculates “what each state's adjusted power [to consider distance] is at other state's national capitals.” If it's less than 50% of the local state's power share, then it’s not militarily reachable, thus it is not considered as part of a region.
patterns and bear in mind that “not all interactions are equally important in shaping the external behavior of an individual state; key patterns of interaction must be uncovered and explored.” Nevertheless, the problem of operationalizing interaction is certainly challenging. As Michael Wallace remarked, “nations may enter into relationships with one another in so many different ways, and interact by such a wide variety of means at so many different levels, that no single measure, however comprehensive, can claim to be completely adequate.” In fact, the index presented by Wallace himself – based on common membership in international organizations – is highly inadequate as it concentrates only in the cooperation aspect of interaction, thus ignoring the possibility of subsystems in which conflictual relations prevail. Finally, the third characteristic of the definition suggested above is the fact that a regional subsystem includes members in condition of geographic proximity. The geographic criterion is crucial regardless of the level of interconnection or interdependence of the global international system, a condition that has led some scholars to discount the importance of geography. As Mouritzen suggests “even a perfectly interconnected international system does not overrule the fact that one is primarily connected to one's neighbors.” Moreover, geographic proximity is positively related to intensity and opportunities for interaction, since distance is assumed to increase costs of both trade and conflict, for example.

THE CASE FOR A SOUTH AMERICAN SUBSYSTEM

The division between a North and a South American continent is part of the “standard seven-part continental scheme employed in the United States,” which would immediately provide evidence that the geographic criterion for the establishment of a regional subsystem

14 For example, by 1969 one author had stated that the geographic criterion used to identify regional subsystems “may no longer be sufficient in the face of a vastly expanding technology in electronic communications.” Instead, the criterion he used was based on “news flows analysis”: John H. Sigler, "News Flow in the North African International Sysystem," International Studies Quarterly 13, no. 4 (1969): 382.
is fulfilled. But dividing and labeling the globe into continents implies a great deal of arbitrariness, and in much of Latin America, for example, North and South America are grouped as one “American” continent, which was indeed the view prevalent among geographers until the nineteenth century. In any case, even though there is a degree of arbitrariness in any geographic division, from the point of view of a pure spatial analysis, when one looks at “the massive triangles of North and South America, tenuously linked by the Panamanian isthmus,” it becomes clear that if one intends to divide the Americas in two parts, common sense would advise the line to be drawn at the Panamanian isthmus rather than at the Rio Grande. In fact, in a study of South American geopolitics, Philip Kelly described North America and South America as “two largely disconnected American continents” which are “widened by great distances, sometimes harsh climates and topographies.” Ronald Steel notices that “New York is closer to Paris than it is to Lima; closer to Athens than to Buenos Aires. Seattle is nearer to Tokyo than it is to Santiago. Geographically, most of South America might as well be in another hemisphere, which indeed it is.” In other words, this brief geographical digression is just to make obvious that if the only criterion used to divide the Americas was geographic proximity, the notion of Latin America would probably not subsist.

Obviously, what this discussion is meant to make clear is that the concept of Latin America is not based on spatial geographical considerations - even though it is often used as a geographical concept - but on presumed cultural similarities. It is not the purpose of this research to challenge the assumption of cultural homogeneity in Latin America, but rather to present a critique of the use of cultural variables as the primary factor for regional classification. If culture is assumed to be the central variable for the identification of regions for the purposes of international relations analysis, several – if not all - other conventional regions of the world would have to be reclassified. Additionally, a case would have to be made about what cultural aspects matter the most for the purposes of identification of regional subsystems. If it is assumed to be, let’s say, religion and language, then it makes as much sense to separate the United States from Mexico, as it makes separating France from England, Egypt from Israel, and India from Pakistan and locating them in different regional

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 2.
22 For a critique of the concept of Latin America in cultural terms as justifying the perception of the American “self” against the Latin American “other” see: João Feres Jr., " A history of the concept of Latin America in the United States: Misrecognition and social scientific discourse" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2003). Also useful for this debate is Leslie Bethell, "Brazil and 'Latin America'," Journal of Latin American Studies 42, no. 03 (2010).
subsystems. Nevertheless, very few international relations scholars would make the case that it is practically and analytically useful to do so. In fact, the implicit reason why it would not be helpful to do so is exactly because France and England, Egypt and Israel, and India and Pakistan are proximate and interacting states and this is what really matters when analyzing their international relations.

Nevertheless, some would say that even though it is proper to conclude that Latin America does not fit the geographic criterion, it might very well suit the criterion of patterns of interaction. Before evaluating this claim, it is necessary to clarify the idea of patterns of interaction. In its broader sense, interaction is understood as being the result of reciprocal responses of action and reaction. In international relations, forms of interaction may include, for example, diplomatic, political, social, economic, cultural, and personal interactions. Likewise, the instruments of interaction can be diplomatic, psychological, cultural, economic, or military. These interactions can range in a spectrum that can go from conflictual to cooperative. Conflictual interactions include events such as war, intervention, blockade, clandestine actions, embargoes, covert intelligence activities, etc. Cooperative interactions consist of, for example, trade, capital investment, aid, military grant, arms transfers, personnel exchanges, etc. These different interactions “may exhibit regularities, or patterns, in space and through time, both in the foreign policies of particular states and in political relations of two or three or many states.” Therefore, by examining the spectrum of interactions through space and time in a given area of the world, certain regularities may be uncovered and general patterns can be identified. Some states will exhibit a higher degree of interactions with particular states in comparison with others. More often than not, neighboring states will tend to exhibit a relatively high degree of interaction, which is why geography matters. This relatively high degree of interaction is likely to create all sorts of interdependencies among states. States are considered to be interdependent “when the outcome of an interaction for each depends on the choices of the others.” For example, states have security interdependence when they are linked “together sufficiently closely that

24 Brecher, The foreign policy system of Israel; setting, images, process: 51.
26 Ibid., 17.
their securities cannot be considered separate from each other." 29 In contrast, the lower the degree, or intensity, of interaction, the lower the interdependence – the limit case would be indifference. A regional subsystem is then characterized by a higher degree of interaction - and thus of interdependence - among the states in the subsystem relatively to states outside the subsystem. Detecting these patterns of interaction across space and time helps the analyst to draw the boundaries of different regional subsystems.

Yet it remains the issue on how to operationalize these patterns of interactions in order to assess the degree of interactions and locate it within the spectrum varying from intense contacts, or interdependence, to infrequent contacts, or indifference. This is an obviously difficult task that apparently has not been completely resolved by the literature. Among the few who present some evidence of interaction patterns the main shortcoming is focusing only on a narrow aspect of interactions. For example, Michael Haas and Douglas Lemke concentrate on the military aspect, Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver on security patterns, and Michael Wallace on international organizations membership.30 This research does not intend to dwell upon it so as to completely unravel this operationalization issue, but a few remarks must be made in order to make the case for our assumption of the existence of a South American subsystem in terms of patterns of interaction. Along with these remarks, a suggestion on how to operationalize patterns of interaction will be proposed.

The first prerequisite for operationalizing patterns of interactions is that it should be made in such a way as to cover at least one aspect of each end of the interaction spectrum, which means including variables that account for both conflict and cooperation. Moreover, it would be useful to include different forms and instruments of interaction, such as economic, military, and political. It would also be noteworthy if the data required were easily available in order to make this operationalization effort attainable. Taking into consideration these qualifications, three variables could be used in order to evaluate patterns of interactions: wars and/or armed conflicts, trade, and regional organizations. Although far from reflecting all possibilities of interaction among states, these three variables characterize three important kinds of interstate interaction within the range between conflict and cooperation. Wars and armed conflicts represent conflictual interactions, while trade and regional organizations correspond to cooperative interactions. Moreover, these three variables cover respectively, military, economic, and political instruments and forms of interaction. And finally, data collection for these variables is readily available.

29 Buzan and Wæver, Regions and powers: the structure of international security: 43.
Although it is without the scope of this paper to conduct an extensive investigation of patterns of interaction in the Americas, by using the approach suggested above we can at least indicate some evidences that there are two different patterns in Latin America, which justify treating it as two distinct regional subsystems. A number of authors have made mention to wars in Latin America to justify patterns of interaction at the conflictual end of the interaction spectrum. Cantori and Spiegel, for example, argue that what they identify as the Latin American subsystem was at that time characterized by a low level of conflict, but they except the Chaco War between Paraguay and Bolivia, as well as “a variety of disputes which include Peru vs. Ecuador, Chile vs. Peru and Bolivia, Argentina vs. Chile, and Argentina vs. Brazil.”  

The fact that all exceptions mentioned by the authors are in South America seems to have escaped their analysis. Atkins mentions a number of “inter-Latin American” disputes and conflicts to express conflictual patterns of interaction and makes reference to the Chaco War, conflicts between Peru and Ecuador, Colombia and Peru, Ecuador and Peru, and Argentina and Chile. It is true that, contrary to Cantori and Spiegel, he at least mentions other conflicts outside South America, such as disputes between Haiti and Dominican Republic in the thirties and the war between El Salvador and Honduras in the sixties, as well as a variety of “Central American conflicts” during the eighties. Similarly, Robert Burr talks about “intra-Latin American rivalries” adding that “above all, the Latin American nations are concerned with rivalries among themselves.” He mentions rivalries between Argentina and Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, Chile, Peru and Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador, Dominican Republic and Haiti, Guatemala and other Central American countries, and Mexico and Guatemala. What becomes obvious from this picture is that what is termed by these authors as “inter-Latin American” conflicts, are not exactly inter-Latin American, but inter-South American, inter-Caribbean, or inter-Central American. This is because there is no way to provide evidence that there is a pattern of conflict in Latin America, but instead the patterns of conflict have followed the subsystemic division proposed here. The obvious reason for that is the fact that in most of these conflicts – particularly in South America – there was some kind of territorial dispute involved. This is an unquestionable example of geographical proximity affecting patterns of interaction and of the fact that geography is the main factor contributing for the durability of regional subsystems.

Patterns of conflict are especially important because they determine one key systemic characteristic: the fact that, because a system is defined by the interaction among

32 Atkins, *Latin America and the Caribbean in the international system*: 325-43.
the units, a change in one unit tends to cause changes in others. This means, for example, that an arms race caused by higher defense spending in one state of the subsystem that is not a global power tends to be confined within the regional subsystem. If Honduras suddenly decided to acquire new weapons to modernize its army, it is conceivable that Bolivia or Argentina would not be as concerned as El Salvador or Nicaragua, for example. As a matter of fact, in 2007 there were reports about an arms race in South America that did not spill over to other places in Latin America. At the same time Venezuela started acquiring military equipment from Russia, Brazil announced an increase in defense spending.\textsuperscript{34} When Chile started upgrading its armed forces, Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina reacted.\textsuperscript{35} This example shows clearly that, as Robert Pastor noticed, the “principal geopolitical concerns” of the countries in the South American subsystem “are with each other. Many have fought each other; some have lost territory to another.”\textsuperscript{36} In fact, one scholar examined the works of sixteen South American writers in the field of geopolitics and concluded that one common theme among them was that “their geopolitics pertain to South American regional and subregional affairs.”\textsuperscript{37} This makes evident the interdependence aspect that is characteristic of a regional subsystem.

But demonstrating the absence of any serious conflict that is truly “inter-Latin American” is a relatively straightforward and uncomplicated task that, once it is examined with more careful attention, it reveals itself. Nevertheless, patterns of trade could reveal a different picture. A comprehensive investigation of the patterns of trade would require looking at every individual country and assessing the percentage of exports and imports with every other country in the hemisphere across a reasonably long period of time. Although this investigation is beyond the scope of the present paper, evidence suggested by other studies seems to indicate that if this task was to be completed, it would reinforce the notion of two different subsystems in the Americas, and these would not be Latin America and North America, but South America and North America. For example, in his classificatory effort in the seventies to identify regions, Bruce Russet, when using only the criterion of economic interdependence based on trade, concluded for the existence of a South American and a North/Central American region. Indeed he observed that the major discrepancy in the

\textsuperscript{34} Andrew Downie, "A South American Arms Race?," \textit{Time}, December 21, 2007.
\textsuperscript{37} Kelly, \textit{Checkerboards & shatterbelts : the geopolitics of South America}: 84. For an extensive examination of geopolitical thought in South America see: Howard Taylor Pittman, "Geopolitics in the ABC countries: a comparison" (PhD diss., American University, 1981).
western hemisphere was on trade “where the hemisphere was split into two components, a North and Central American aggregate, and one for South America.”

Because Russet’s book was published in 1975, the data he used went only up until the seventies. Later, Gordon Mace and Louis Belanger examined trade patterns in the western hemisphere using data from 1975 to 1994. Using a variety of statistical tools, the authors concluded that the “pattern clearly reveals the relative weakness of the Southern Cone's relationship with North America, as well as its remarkable lack of economic ties with Central America and the Caribbean.” Additionally, when looking at the four last years of their data they detected a pattern showing that “the Southern Cone is developing a distinct regional trading structure” and that the “Southern Cone's integration into the region as a whole is relatively weak.”

Similarly, Jeffrey Schott, when analyzing trade patterns in the Americas, observed that “[t]he trade profiles of Western Hemisphere countries differ markedly from one side of the equator to the other,” with the countries in the northern half of the hemisphere generally far more dependent on the United States. Mace and Belanger’s conclusion is particularly relevant for the purposes of this research and deserves to be quoted in full. They see

> a growing concentration of commercial relations around two main centers: In the northern part of the hemisphere, Canada, Mexico, and the countries of Central America and the Caribbean are coalescing around the United States, which acts as the central magnet. A similar situation is developing in South America around the Brazil-Argentina axis.

For the authors, the future of any hemispheric integration scheme will be determined by how these two centers interact.

Beyond conflictual relations and trade patterns, the separation between the South American subsystem and the North American subsystem can also be demonstrated in political terms. Traditional analyses of the emergence of the so called Inter-American System that culminated with the creation of the Organization of American States (OAS) begin by distinguishing two phases: before and after 1889. The reason is that only after 1889, with the First Pan-American Conference, the conferences summoned were really inter-American in the sense of including most Latin American countries and the United States. Before that year, there were four Hispano-American conferences – thus with limited

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40 Ibid., 50-51.
42 Mace and Bélanger, *The Americas in transition : the contours of regionalism*, 244.
participation and not including both the United States and Brazil - with few concrete results: in 1826, 1847, 1856, and 1864. The usual historiography informs that these first conferences helped to establish the “fundamental rules of national behavior destined later to become basic features of inter-American cooperation,” thus giving the impression that the Inter-American system was the result of the absorption by the United States of patterns of interaction that had been previously established among Latin American states. However, closer examination again indicates the existence of two regional subsystems from the political interaction point of view even at that early stage. For example, by focusing on the Hispano-American conferences, these analyses overlook that in 1888, thus one year before the First Pan-American Conference, Argentina and Uruguay summoned a “South American Congress of International Private Law” in Montevideo which was attended also by Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay, and Chile. Commenting on the fact that the conference included only South American states, the Foreign Minister of Argentina justified it in the basis of “their close bonds of political and commercial interests and even of neighborliness. The other states of North and Central America either would not come or would come late, and perhaps one of them would assume a disturbing role of supremacy.” This short sentence expressed the two main components of the South American subsystem – distinct patterns of interaction given especially their “neighborliness”, and a certain wariness regarding the potential influence of the United States in the region.

Like most analyses on the emergence of the Inter-American System, those who concentrate on the establishment of regional institutions to demonstrate the level of political interaction in Latin America often overlook the existence of a double pattern. Cantori and Spiegel claim that “Latin American relations are characterized by cooperation of the alliance variety, as is evidenced in LAFTA and the Central American Common Market.” Again, what the authors present as evidence of a Latin American subsystem actually confirms the notion of two different subsystems as the first organization was basically a very limited South American scheme of integration that included Mexico, while the second was exclusively Central American. To reinforce the notion of Latin American political cohesiveness, the authors add that Latin American leaders had “met with President Johnson at Punta del Este, Uruguay, in April 1967 and declared their intention to create a region-wide Common Market by 1985.”

46 Cantori and Spiegel, The international politics of regions: 61.
intentions and examines what actually happened afterwards, one again will detect that regional subsystemic pressures seem to have contributed to keep South America as a separate subsystem. Following the meeting with President Johnson, Central American states issued a separate invitation to the United States for a "Central American Summit Conference," and what in fact happened in 1985 was the initial push for the creation of a Southern Common Market, when Brazil and Argentina signed a cooperation agreement that would eventually develop into the Mercosur. Indeed, as Atkins observed, the “actual practice of Latin American integration favored the subregional approaches.”

The author mentions several integration schemes from the fifties to the nineties basically organized around two areas: “Circum-Caribbean” and “South American.” It is curious, though, to notice that Atkins refers to NAFTA – the North American Free Trade Area – as a “hemispheric” arrangement, even though it is clearly a North American arrangement. However, as some authors have remarked, NAFTA in North America and Mercosur in South America can actually be seen as “competing models” of integration in the hemisphere.

Therefore, evidence indicates that in all three variables considered here to measure interaction among states, it is possible to detect two different patterns of interaction in the region referred as Latin America. From this point of view it makes little sense to think about a Latin American subsystem, since Latin America, as Moniz Bandeira has more recently put it, is “separated not only by the Panama Canal, but it is actually divided by divergent interests, economic links, and conflicting geopolitical factors.”

On the other hand, by any criterion of actual interactions, Mexico, for example, “would appear to be entirely North American.” The same would also be true for Central American and Caribbean states. Nevertheless, by focusing on other variables, a significant portion of scholarship has given little attention to

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48 Atkins, *Latin America and the Caribbean in the international system*: 179.
49 Ibid., 181-93.
50 Ibid., 203. Other authors share the same view, which seemed to be prevalent in the nineties before it became clear the failure of the FTAA. Perhaps this is because of the implicit assumption that Latin America is indivisible, which means that any arrangement between the United States and any Latin American country is logically “hemispheric”. Andrew Hurrell, for example, sees NAFTA as an example of “hemispheric regionalism”. What the author calls “Latin American regionalism” is actually the development of Mercosur in South America. Andrew Hurrell, "Regionalism in the Americas," in *Regionalism in world politics: regional organization and international order*, ed. Louise L'Estrange Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
the actual patterns of interaction in the Americas, which has led to frequent errors of judgment, analyses, and policies. It is true that when studies focusing on regions resurfaced after the Cold War, the analytical disadvantages of treating Latin America as a coherent unit of analysis became more evident. But even though there seems currently to be a more widespread acceptance that South America comprises a distinct subsystem, its implications have to be considered more deeply than has been the case thus far. Acknowledging that there are analytical and empirical grounds for treating South America as a distinct regional subsystem in its own right opens up unique possibilities for research that are usually neglect by the customary approaches to studying international politics of Latin America.