

## Costs and Benefits of Overlapping Regional Organizations in Latin America: the Case of the OAS and UNASUR

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# *Costs and Benefits of Overlapping Regional Organizations in Latin America: The Case of the OAS and UNASUR*

*Detlef Nolte*

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## ABSTRACT

This article investigates whether the overlapping of intergovernmental regional organizations in Latin America with regard to membership and mandate is harmful or beneficial to regional cooperation (with a special focus on mediation in domestic and international conflicts). The article begins by systematizing the discussion about the possible risks and potential benefits of overlapping regional organizations, and then outlines hypotheses that can be tested in concrete episodes of overlap of action. The article then analyzes nine episodes in which an overlap of action has occurred between two Latin American organizations, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). The results of the study are mixed. However, the effects of overlapping seem to be much less problematic than a large body of literature generally assumes.

*Keywords:* regionalism, regional integration, Latin America, OAS, UNASUR, democracy protection, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela

Most regions feature more than one regional organization. Often, these organizations are complementary and perform different functions. However, regional organizations can also overlap with regard to mandate and membership (Weiffen et al. 2013). They may even compete for members and over mandates.

With regard to Latin America, the proliferation and the overlapping of regional organizations, as well the possible consequences, have been broadly discussed. One group of analysts (Malamud and Gardini 2012; Malamud 2013; Gómez-Mera 2015) take a very critical view. In their opinion, the multiple memberships of states in different (sub)regional organizations will create friction between and within regional integration projects and will fuel divisions instead of unity in the region. Moreover, they will produce rule ambiguity and problems of implementation and compliance. Other authors (Sanahuja 2010; Riggirozzi and Tussie 2012; Nolte 2014) take a more benign view of proliferation and overlapping, which, they argue, may even lead to a deepening of regional cooperation, because the intensification of

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communication between governments may reduce uncertainties, increase mutual knowledge of the partners, and facilitate reciprocity.

To summarize, the appraisal of the possible costs and benefits of overlapping regional organizations in Latin America is mixed. In the end, the effects and repercussions of overlapping are an empirical question. Moreover, overlapping might be more of a theoretical problem than a practical challenge. There may be substantial *de jure* overlapping—especially with regard to membership—between different organizations, but overlapping has few practical consequences, because regional organizations may coexist with no noteworthy interaction at all. So in confronting the question of the practical consequences of overlap, one should identify cases and episodes in which *de jure* overlapping results in overlapping activities between at least two organizations (overlap of action).

This article studies whether the overlapping of intergovernmental regional organizations in Latin America with regard to membership and mandate is harmful or beneficial to regional cooperation (with a special focus on mediation in domestic and international conflicts). It first systematizes the discussion about the possible risks and potential benefits of overlapping regional organizations, and then outlines hypotheses that can be tested in concrete episodes of overlap of action. Then the article analyzes nine episodes in which an overlap of action has occurred between two Latin American organizations, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Union of South American States (UNASUR).<sup>1</sup>

## **THE PROLIFERATION AND OVERLAPPING OF REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

There is a basic consensus in the literature regarding the necessity of differentiating between two types of overlap: an overlap in mandates (or policy areas) and an overlap in the members of regional organizations (Weiffen et al. 2013). Mandate refers to the functional dimension of an institution; that is, the issue areas it covers. Membership addresses the geographical or spatial reach of each institution. Moreover, membership in several regional organizations can overlap to varying degrees. At one extreme, two regional organizations can be nested, which means that all the member states of a smaller organization are part of a larger organization, but both organizations are autonomous and independent of each other. However, membership might also only partially overlap between two organizations, with a minimum of one member belonging to both organizations.

Regional organizations can expand their membership or mandates. Both can result in overlapping. However, the overlapping of organizations' memberships as such has no consequences if there is no overlapping of mandate(s). Thus, the more interesting dynamics of overlapping take place with respect to the mandate, and this dimension needs to be further differentiated. When overlapping between regional organizations does occur, it is often not a primary intention of the organizations or their member states. Overlapping is instead a side effect of other objectives or strategies. The proliferation and overlapping of regional organizations are closely inter-

connected. In Latin America, overlapping is mostly the result of the creation of new organizations, which overlap with established ones. Thus, the question of why regional organizations overlap is related to the question of why new regional organizations are created.

Why do states or governments create or join a (new) regional organization? They do so basically because they believe that they can benefit from this membership or because they want to avert the expected negative externalities of not being a member. They join different organizations because these organizations focus on different topics. In Latin America and South America, most regional organizations have been created to promote new regional projects or objectives that have not yet been realized by existing regional organizations. They have been reactions to new challenges (or the *zeitgeist*), such as the expansion of integration schemes in different world regions in the 1990s, or to new economic paradigms (e.g., “open regionalism”).

Regional organizations survive or are newly created because they serve the conflicting interests of the state actors involved (Hurrell 1998). As Jupille et al. argue, the creation of new institutions responds to substantial deficiencies in the institutional status quo,

which may reflect the absence of institutions in the issue space (for example, with respect to newly arisen problems), at least with respect to the set of actors (membership) or the particular issue (scope) in question. Or the institutional gap may reflect normative assessment that existing institutions are, for whatever reason, illegitimate or otherwise inappropriate to the task at hand. (Jupille et al. 2013, 47)

The countries or governments engaged in different organizations generally do not focus on the problems the overlapping of regional organizations might create, but are more concerned with the strategic options that the plurality of regional organizations might offer. States join different organizations because they view each of these organizations as having a distinct mission and as representing different interests. Overlapping is the result of the activities of member states. Whether overlapping leads to problems depends on the strategies of the states that are members of different organizations.

## **THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF OVERLAPPING INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

The academic analysis of overlapping started with a focus on international regimes, through the introduction of the concepts of regime complexity and institutional interplay (Raustiala and Victor 2004; Alter and Meunier 2009; Orsini et al. 2013; Gehring and Faude 2013; Gómez-Mera 2015), and later spilled over to overlapping regional organizations (Weiffen et al. 2013). Some arguments and concepts from the literature on regime complexity, as well as from the more recent literature on the interaction of international organizations (Biermann 2008; Brosig 2010, 2011) and

contested multilateralism (Morse and Keohane 2014), can be transferred to the discussion about the effects of overlapping regional organizations.

What are the main arguments about the positive or negative effects of overlapping? First of all, the overlapping of international organizations leads to redundancy with regard to the tasks and the administrative and human resources of the organizations involved. Kellow (2012, 332–33) argues that the redundancy of international organizations “brings insurance against the risk that one organization might overlook or deliberately neglect some issue.” Thus, with multiple regional organizations, an issue neglected by one regional institution might be picked up by another. The existence of multiple political arenas offers opportunities for the development of policies that would not exist if only a single arena existed. While this argument is valid from a theoretical perspective, it may be difficult to verify empirically whether an issue would have been neglected if only one organization existed. And it would be difficult to prove whether an issue had been neglected or whether there had been a strategic decision not to tackle this issue within a specific arena or organization. Nevertheless, this article also takes into account counterfactual arguments (asking what would have happened had there been only one regional organization and no overlapping).<sup>2</sup>

In a constellation of stalemate or blockade with regard to the solution of problems in one organization, the existence of an alternative arena or organization may create a bypass for decisionmaking. “Institutional elasticity” can minimize the risk of zero-sum politics, and outright bargaining failures become less likely, because the member states have the flexibility to push for their preferred policy preferences within different, overlapping regional organizations (Hoffmann and Merand 2012).

The redundancy of regional organizations may increase the organizational and human resources within a given issue or mandate area, but it can also put a strain on the human and administrative resources of states—especially of poor and weak states. But this will occur only when organizations have a strong bureaucracy and place high demands on the human and administrative resources of the member states. In addition, redundancy may result in competition between international organizations. In economics and democratic theory, pluralism and the existence of a plurality of organizations or institutions are, in general, viewed positively, because they imply competition and freedom of choice. In contrast, in international relations (IR) theory, a negative view often prevails when it comes to overlapping international organizations (or overlapping regimes) resulting in competition.

There are a few exceptions. Alter and Meunier (2009, 20), Gómez-Mera (2015, 23), and Murphy-Gregory and Kellow (2016, 41) contend that competition among institutions can have positive effects by promoting innovation and experimentation, by increasing total resources, and by spreading risks. Furthermore, the competition between two organizations may raise the standards or benchmarks for the accomplishment of certain objectives or norms. Competition may also lead to the dynamization of interaction patterns between regional organizations. A “variable geometry” of membership in regional organizations permits states to engage in the policy areas that are close to their interests, something that would not be possible in

the case of a more limited number of regional organizations.<sup>3</sup> A state does not feel “forced to belong to the entire club, and hence is more willing to invest in the policy areas that are close to its interest” (Hofmann and Mérand 2012, 137). Moreover, policy changes in one regional organization may provoke transformations in other organizations.

In general, however, a negative view of competition between international organizations prevails, because competition over resources, members, and mandates may create inefficiencies and lead to turf battles and coordination failures in addressing international problems (Gómez-Mera 2015, 23; Alter and Meunier 2009, 20). Overlapping and the resulting regime complexity may contribute to rule ambiguity and international law fragmentation (Alter and Meunier 2009, 16). Thus, the debate over the risks and opportunities of the proliferation (and overlapping) of international organizations is closely linked to the debate about the “fragmentation” of international law (Prost and Clark 2006, 343). However, fragmentation requires that an international organization act as autonomous lawmaker.

Furthermore, international regime complexity enables cross-institutional political strategies (“chessboard politics”), in which strategic decisions or moves in one institution have an influence on the strategic options in another institution (Alter and Meunier 2009, 16–17). Morse and Keohane differentiate between strategies of competitive regime creation and regime shifting. In the first case, a coalition of dissatisfied actors creates a new institution to challenge the existing institutional status quo. In contrast, regime shifting (organization shifting) is a strategy to reshape the structure of international norms, in which countries turn to alternative regimes or organizations “with a more favorable mandate and decision rules, and then use this new forum to challenge standards in the original institution or reduce the authority of that institution” (Morse and Keohane 2014, 392).

Acharya (2011, 97) has coined the concept of norm subsidiarity “as a process whereby local actors create rules with a view to preserve their autonomy from dominance, neglect, violation, or abuse by more powerful central actors.” Norm subsidiarity might be a means to adapt general or global norms to local or (sub)regional circumstances. However, the creation of new regional organizations (with mandates similar to those of existing organizations) may create the risk that international norms are watered down, as disputes over the application of international norms are switched to parallel organizations with lower standards.

Forum shopping is a concept that was originally developed in law. There it refers to a litigation strategy whereby the complainant attempts to have his action tried in a particular court, where he feels he will receive the most favorable judgment (Busch 2007, 736, n. 3). In international relations it refers to strategies in which “actors select the international venues based on where they are best able to promote specific policy preferences, with the goal of eliciting a decision that favors their interests” (Alter and Meunier 2009, 16). Is forum shopping good or bad? Kellow (2012) argues that the fragmentation of governance and the existence of multiple arenas can provide advantages as well as disadvantages and that “forum shopping” can be a promising strategy both to advance or to block the development of multilateral agreements.

To conclude, the theoretical arguments with regard to the risks and benefits of overlapping are contradictory. At one extreme, overlapping might lead to the fragmentation of international law, as well as to blockades and gridlock between regional organizations. At the other extreme, the diversity and overlapping of regional organizations might reduce the risk that regional cooperation and integration will stagnate. Overlapping introduces institutional flexibility, and it brings a new dynamic to intraregional relations. Which of the arguments is more valid is an empirical question and has to be tested via empirical investigation.

The following hypotheses are deduced from the literature on regime complexes and institutional interplay, as well as from the more recent literature on the interaction of international organizations. One bundle of hypotheses is based on the redundancy of institutional venues and human resources that overlapping (regional) organizations produce. A second string of hypotheses is related to the possible effects of competition that the overlapping of (regional) organizations might provoke. Competition may have an impact on both the quality and the implementation of norms in a region. In practice, it will not always be possible to discriminate clearly between both dimensions. The last hypothesis refers to the possible effects of cross-institutional strategies induced by the overlapping of regional organizations. This hypothesis puts a stronger focus on the strategies of the actors involved, and it tests whether forum shopping as a strategy has positive or negative repercussions for multilateral agreements.

*H1a.* The redundancy of regional organizations increases the human and institutional resources available within an issue area (mandate), which facilitates agreements.

*H1b.* The redundancy of regional organizations creates a burden on the human and institutional resources of governments and organizations, which makes agreements more difficult.

*H2a.* The redundancy of regional organizations creates a bypass in the case of blockades.

*H2b.* The redundancy of regional organizations leads to blockades.

*H3a.* Competition between regional organizations leads to the emulation of best practices and raises normative or operational standards.

*H3b.* Competition between regional organizations leads to a watering down of normative or operational standards.

*H4a.* Competition between regional organizations leads to context-specific norm implementation and norm adaption.

*H4b.* Competition between regional organizations leads to norm subversion and rule ambiguity.

*H5a.* Forum shopping by members of overlapping regional organizations facilitates multilateral agreements.

*H5b.* Forum shopping by members of overlapping regional organizations hampers multilateral agreements.

## **OVERLAP OF ACTION: OAS AND UNASUR**

The episodes of overlap of action between OAS and UNASUR have to be analyzed in the broader context of different waves of regionalism and geopolitical change in the Americas (Dabène 2009; 2014; Bianculli 2016; Nolte and Wehner 2016). Since 2000, as a result of the left turn of many Latin American governments, Brazil's growing assertiveness as regional leader, and a diminished U.S. influence and interest in the region, Latin America, and especially South America, has increased its autonomy and "agency" (Tulchin 2016).

Historically, the Americas have been characterized by an overlapping of intraregional cooperation (in Latin America) and interamerican or hemispheric cooperation (Hurrell 1992). The OAS is the oldest regional organization. It was founded in 1948, and since 1990–91, when Canada, Belize, and Guyana joined, it has achieved the universal regional membership of the 35 states in the Americas.

Over the decades, the OAS has evolved (Horwitz 2010; Herz 2011; Heine and Weiffen 2015; Perina 2015a). In the beginning, it was an organization that had as its key objective the conservation of peace in the region. In the 1950s and 1960s, it took sides in the Cold War and was an instrument of U.S. dominance. Later the OAS broadened its activities and became more independent from the United States. With the Declaration of Santiago (and Resolution 1080) of 1991 and the Inter-American Democratic Charter of 2001, the OAS took on a more active role in the defense of democracy.

UNASUR is part of the so-called fourth wave of Latin American regionalism (Dabène 2014) or posthegemonic regionalism (Riggiozzi and Tussie 2012; Briceño-Ruiz and Morales 2017). Compared to the OAS, it is a much younger organization with a more limited geographical reach. While on the one hand UNASUR was very much a Brazilian initiative to create a forum for dialogue and cooperation, especially on matters of regional security (Nolte and Wehner 2014), it was, on the other hand, also a project endorsed by Venezuela and other left-leaning governments to strengthen South America's autonomy and promote a broader cooperation agenda (Briceño-Ruiz 2010; Briceño-Ruiz and Hoffmann 2015; Riggiozzi and Grugel 2015).

UNASUR's forerunner, the Community of South American Nations, was created during the third South American presidential summit, which took place in Cuzco, Peru, in 2004. In April 2007, the organization's name was changed to UNASUR. UNASUR's members are the 12 South American countries (including Guyana and Suriname). Since the signing of the Constitutive Treaty in May 2008, the institutional infrastructure for a multipurpose organization has been built up—including the South American Defense Council (SDC) as a mechanism for regional security and defense cooperation. Based on the previous notice of intent in the Declaration of Buenos Aires (October 1, 2010) with regard to the situation in Ecuador (see below), the participating presidents and foreign ministers signed an additional protocol to UNASUR's Constitutive Treaty that included a commitment to democ-



racy in November 2010 at the UNASUR summit in Georgetown, Guyana. The protocol applies “in the event of a breach or threat of breach against the democratic order, a violation of the constitutional order or any situation that jeopardizes the legitimate exercise of power and the application of the values and principles of democracy” (Article 1). It includes enforcement measures for the purpose of reestablishing the democratic institutional political process.

The OAS and UNASUR overlap with regard to mandate(s) and membership. Both organizations are nested, because all UNASUR member states are also OAS member states. They overlap in several issue areas, which to a certain degree reflect the topics covered by the 12 sectoral councils of UNASUR. Democracy protection and conflict mediation are salient fields of responsibility (mandates) for both organizations (Closa et al. 2016; Heine and Weiffen 2015). While one might argue that UNASUR was created to compete with and to replace the OAS in South American affairs, UNASUR has also emulated and adapted norms and practices from the OAS (Nolte and Wehner 2014), which might facilitate cooperation between both organizations. Since 2008, UNASUR has mediated in all militarized interstate conflicts in South America, as well as in intrastate conflicts that threatened democratically elected governments or the territorial integrity of a member country. The OAS also became involved in most of these crises parallel to UNASUR.

### **The Crisis in Bolivia, 2008**

The Bolivian crisis was a conflict between the central government and some of the country’s departments, and it put the country’s territorial integrity at risk (See *Latin American Weekly Report* WR-08-37, 1–4; *Latin American Andean Group Report* RA-08-10, 1–2; *Latin American Security and Strategic Review* SSR-08-09, 1–2). The provinces of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, and Tarija were demanding higher revenues from the hydrocarbon tax, as well as regional autonomy from the central government, and were even threatening to secede. The conflict escalated in September 2008, and clashes between President Evo Morales’s sympathizers and those supporting autonomy resulted in between 9 and 11 deaths (Foro Permanente de las Naciones Unidas para Cuestiones Indígenas 2009, 27). The Morales government expelled the U.S. ambassador and accused him of conspiring with the opposition prefects in the departments (*Latin American Andean Group Report*, RA-08-10, 3).

On September 15, the Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet, then president pro tempore of UNASUR, called a special meeting in Santiago. The secretary-general of the OAS, José Miguel Insulza, was also invited to that extraordinary meeting. The invitation implied that the OAS and UNASUR had the option of undertaking a joint mission and action to mediate the Bolivian crisis. However, UNASUR ultimately opted to send a separate mission to Bolivia, which would coordinate its activities with the OAS mission. As a new player, UNASUR (or the governments promoting the new organization, including Chile as the holder of the pro tempore presidency, had an interest in gaining visibility, and therefore acted separately.

In the end, the activities of the UNASUR mission proved to be more important than those of the OAS in resolving the Bolivian crisis. The political opposition in Bolivia perceived the OAS, and especially its secretary-general, Insulza (Bonifaz 2011, 10), as biased in favor of the government of Evo Morales. President Morales and the majority of the Constitutional Assembly did not object to OAS participation but preferred UNASUR (Arugay and Bonifaz 2014; Bonifaz 2011) because they expected more support from the new regional organization (and also in the event that the conflict with the U.S. government should escalate). Moreover, Brazil put its weight behind the major involvement of UNASUR (Délano 2008) and acted as a mediator between the divergent positions of South American governments in regard to the Bolivian crisis (Tussie 2016, 76–79).

*Analysis.* In the Bolivian case, the redundancy of human and organizational resources had a positive effect; it helped in finding a solution to the conflict between the central government and the departmental governments. The fact that two regional organizations took a clear stand against the secessionist movements strengthened the national government's position. There was no strain on human resources because the mediation teams of both organizations were small and the negotiation process short. Nevertheless, UNASUR and the OAS did compete. UNASUR discarded the possibility of a joint mission. However, this competition did not result in a watering down of standards; instead, it reinforced the international norm with regard to the territorial integrity of Latin American states (the *uti possidetis*; Kacowicz 2005, 59–60, 76–77) in the face of secessionist movements. One might even speak about a context-specific application of norms (through the search for solutions reflecting the Bolivian reality).

The promoters of UNASUR utilized this successful conflict resolution episode to legitimate UNASUR's role as a mediator in preserving democratic stability and peace in the region without the intervention and support of external actors (Malamud 2008). There was no forum shopping on the part of the Bolivian government, which accepted the support of both organizations—with a certain preference for UNASUR.

### **The Conflict over U.S. Military Bases in Colombia, 2009**

After the closing in 2009 of the Manta air base in Ecuador, which the U.S. armed forces had been using to support antinarcotics military operations, the Colombian government offered the United States several military bases from which to fight transnational terrorist activities and drug trafficking. The content of the resulting agreement between Colombia and the United States was initially secret. The bilateral agreement created tensions between Colombia and its neighboring countries (Iglesias-Cavicchioli 2010; Márquez 2012, 587–88; *Latin American Weekly Report* WR-09-32, 1–2). Some governments were suspicious that the bases might be used for military interventions in South America (Mena 2009; Tokatlian 2009).

The OAS did not participate in this controversy, and UNASUR's leading countries did not invite the organization to take part. UNASUR called for an extraordi-

nary summit to discuss the issue in Bariloche, Argentina, in August 2009. At first glance, the outcome of these talks among the heads of all South American states was not propitious in terms of resolving the conflict and further institutionalizing UNASUR. However, the Colombian government's willingness to attend the meeting and to consent to a common declaration can be seen as an advance for UNASUR.

The final declaration of Bariloche underscores UNASUR's vocation for "the peaceful resolution of controversies and the promotion of dialogue and consensus in defense matters." Furthermore, the declaration also condemns possible attempts at external interference in defense issues and the violation of the sovereign rights of each state: "the presence of foreign military forces cannot—with its resources and means linked to its own national objectives—threaten the integrity and sovereignty of any South American nation and, consequently, threaten the peace and security of this region" (see UNASUR 2009; *Latin American Weekly Report* WR-09-35, 1–2).

*Analysis.* In this episode, the redundancy of regional organizations was positive because otherwise—without the existence of UNASUR—no negotiations would have taken place. The United States and Colombia would have blocked a discussion in the OAS. Forum shopping facilitated a multilateral agreement. Most South American governments chose UNASUR as a venue because the chances of successfully tackling the topic were much better than in the OAS. While there was no direct competition between the OAS and UNASUR because OAS was not involved, one might see indirect competition, because the inactivity of the OAS created space for UNASUR to establish its credentials as a mediator in South American conflicts.

UNASUR did not deviate from the standards and norms set by the OAS. Moreover, it established initial normative parameters for the presence of foreign military forces in South America. Because only one organization intervened, redundancy caused no negative effects with regard to human and organizational resources. In the end, the Colombian Supreme Court declared the agreement unconstitutional because it had not been approved by Congress. (The government had argued that it was an extension of an older agreement; Salazar 2010).

### **The Colombian-Venezuelan Crisis, 2010**

In July 2010 the Colombian government requested an urgent extraordinary session of the OAS Permanent Council to investigate the sheltering of FARC leaders in Venezuela. The Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez, tried to block or postpone the meeting, as well as any OAS involvement in the matter. The OAS meeting ultimately was convened on July 22. Chávez's response was to sever all diplomatic relations with Colombia and call for an emergency meeting of UNASUR's foreign ministers to discuss the situation. From his point of view, the OAS had no jurisdiction to intervene. In fact, he declared that he would accept only UNASUR's mediation (*Latin American Weekly Report* WR-10-30, 4–5).

At the end of July the Ecuadorian president, Rafael Correa (then UNASUR's pro tempore president), scheduled a meeting, at which the ministers of foreign

affairs failed to agree on a common position to solve the crisis within the UNASUR framework. However, a window of opportunity for a peaceful resolution to the conflict opened when the newly elected Colombian president, Juan Manuel Santos, took power in August 2010 (*Latin American Weekly Report*, WR-10-32, 1–3). A few days after Santos took office, he and Chávez met, with UNASUR's secretary-general, Néstor Kirchner, serving as mediator. They announced that they would restore diplomatic relations and establish five commissions to deal with the different issues that had originally provoked the bilateral tensions. Chávez's rhetorical strategy of delegitimizing the OAS as a forum in which to deal with the issue had compelled Colombia and its newly elected president to accept UNASUR's role as mediator.

*Analysis.* Because the Venezuelan government did not accept mediation by the OAS in this case, the redundancy of regional organizations did create a bypass in a blockade situation. Thus, the institutional flexibility was helpful. One might call this episode of overlapping a case of negative forum shopping, because the Venezuelan government denied one of the involved organizations the right to mediate, giving the other one predominance. But forum shopping did enable the opponents to reach an agreement.

With regard to normative standards, the outcome was mixed. The Venezuelan government's apparent disregard for the international principle of not tolerating, on a country's own national territory, armed groups that are fighting against the government of a neighboring country was not discussed in regional fora. This might be interpreted as a watering down of normative standards (rule ambiguity). However, the governments involved agreed to discuss the controversial topic bilaterally. The standard as such was not questioned.

### **The Ecuadorian Crisis, 2010**

On Thursday, September 30, 2010, members of Ecuador's national police demonstrated in the streets to pressure Rafael Correa's government to veto a law regarding a public service reform that would affect the interests of the police force. President Correa tried to mediate and to talk to the police on the streets. After a teargas canister exploded near the president, the police brought him to the Police Hospital in Quito, where he was detained. In fact, special police and military forces had to rescue President Correa from the hospital, which was controlled by the dissident police force. Although it is still not clear whether the original intention of the police was to overthrow Correa's government, the president's declarations from the hospital framed the issue as an attempted coup d'état (Ospina 2011; Becker 2016). Thus, the defense of the principles of institutional stability and democracy was the core motivation for external governments to support Correa's government.

External support for the Ecuadorian president came from both the OAS and UNASUR. In fact, Brazil, as regional leader, called for coordinated action by UNASUR, the OAS, and MERCOSUR to maintain the legitimate government and to ensure a peaceful resolution to Ecuador's internal conflict. Yet UNASUR exerted a more visible role as conflict mediator than did the OAS. UNASUR called for an

extraordinary meeting of the heads of its member states, whereas the OAS acted through its Permanent Council, in which the highest diplomatic representatives of each state participated in the elaboration of a resolution, which included a condemnation of the events in Ecuador. The presidents of the UNASUR member states met in Buenos Aires the same day as the Ecuadorian crisis, and they announced concrete measures to prevent the breakdown of democracy, such as closing the borders and interrupting all trade relations with neighboring countries and the other UNASUR member states, with the objective of isolating Ecuador in the event that the coup attempt succeeded.

*Analysis.* In this case, the redundancy of the regional organizations did reinforce President Correa's position. The involvement of both the OAS and UNASUR dissuaded possible coup plotters. There was no stress on human resources because UNASUR worked through the presidents of the member countries and the OAS acted through the diplomatic representatives on its Permanent Council. There was no blockade within any of the regional organizations involved and no forum shopping on the part of the Ecuadorian president. The OAS and UNASUR did not compete directly, but due to the higher visibility and greater agility of presidential diplomacy, UNASUR was perceived as more proactive and decisive in this crisis. The Ecuadorian crisis resulted in the reinforcement of international standards for defending democracy and legitimate governments in South America. As a result of the crisis, the presidents of the UNASUR member states decided to develop a specific democratic clause as an additional protocol to UNASUR's Constitutive Treaty. In this regard, UNASUR emulated the benchmark set by the OAS.

### **The Paraguayan Crisis, 2012**

Under the umbrella of Article 225 of the Paraguayan Constitution, which allows impeachment in the case of "poor performance of duties," the Paraguayan Chamber of Deputies decided, on June 21, 2012, to impeach the country's left-leaning president, Fernando Lugo. (For background see Lambert 2012; Marsteintredet et al. 2013). Ignoring international pressure and rejecting a plea by the foreign ministers of the other MERCOSUR countries to delay the process, the Senate unseated the president the following day.

The case generated immediate international reaction and condemnation. Several South American countries maintained that Lugo's 24 hours to prepare his defense made a mockery of the impeachment and condemned it as an institutional coup. Some countries also withdrew their ambassadors from Asunción. On June 29, during a joint summit of UNASUR and MERCOSUR in Mendoza, Argentina, both organizations decided to suspend Paraguay for having violated the democracy clause of both organizations, but they did not implement further sanctions on the country (*Latin American Brazil and Southern Cone Report* RBS-12-07, 1–3). The suspension was to be upheld until the reestablishment of a legitimate government in Paraguay following the 2013 presidential elections.

The rapid decision by MERCOSUR and UNASUR to suspend Paraguay forced other actors to respond not only to the situation in Paraguay but also to the

South American organizations' assessment of the situation. While UNASUR reacted within a week, the OAS needed more than two weeks to assess the situation and come out against the suspension of Paraguay. The OAS did not sanction the Paraguayan government but instead opted to deploy an observation mission to help the country on its way to the 2013 elections, to foster political dialogue, and to regularly inform the OAS member states about the situation in the country (*Latin American Weekly Report*, WR-12-27, 10–11).

The sanctions of the neighbor countries did not bring Lugo back to power. Therefore, the Paraguayan government remained suspended from UNASUR and MERCOSUR until the election and the transfer of the mandate to a new president. The positive evaluation of the electoral process abroad and the unambiguous result cleared the way for the reintegration of the new Paraguayan government into MERCOSUR and UNASUR.

*Analysis.* During the Paraguayan crisis of 2012, three regional organizations intervened (OAS, UNASUR, and MERCOSUR). There was a clear redundancy of venues. With regard to institutional and human resources, there was no strain. In the case of MERCOSUR and UNASUR, some meetings took place at the same time and in the same location, and there were no blockades within the organizations. The duplication of resources was not harmful, but it did not facilitate finding a solution.

It is more difficult to interpret whether the competition between UNASUR and the OAS raised the normative standards for the defense of democracy or watered them down. In favor of the first interpretation, one might argue that the defense of democracy was broadened beyond a purely institutionalist view. On the other hand, one might also perceive a watering down of standards because what was seen as an infringement of the democracy clause was interpreted quite flexibly. One might also perceive some kind of norm subversion. Norm ambiguity was created by the contradictory interpretations of what had happened in Paraguay on the part of UNASUR and the OAS. This ambiguity created space for forum shopping, because the Paraguayan government gave preferential treatment to the OAS mission. But in the end, the forum shopping had no effect because the forums did not interact. There were no economic sanctions from UNASUR and MERCOSUR, which might have been subverted by other Latin American countries that were not members of UNASUR and MERCOSUR, and the OAS had no mandate to order UNASUR (or MERCOSUR) to revoke the suspension of the Paraguayan government.

### **Venezuela 1, 2013–2015**

The result of the presidential elections in Venezuela on April 14, 2013 was questioned by the opposition (see *Latin American Andean Group Report* RA-14-03, 13–14; RA-14-04, 1–2; RA-14-05, 15; *Latin American Weekly Report* WR-14-10, 3–4). Nicolás Maduro, who had been the acting president since the death of Hugo Chávez, won the election by a small margin of only 1.5 percent. There were acts of violence on the part of both camps, and the opposition did not recognize the legit-

imity of the newly elected president. The Venezuelan Electoral Council had invited several international groups to “accompany” the electoral process. These included a delegation from UNASUR but not one from the OAS (Halvorssen and El-Hage 2013). UNASUR validated the electoral result.

In February 2014, student-led street protests erupted into violence between protestors, security forces, and militant progovernment civilian groups. The protests spread from Caracas to other cities, but the protest movement subsequently lost steam and largely dissipated as a result of government repression and demonstrator fatigue. However, by June 2014, at least 42 people had been killed, more than 800 had been injured, and more than 3,000 had been arrested, including important opposition representatives (see Sullivan 2017, 13).

Following the outbreak and the government’s harsh response to the protest movement, there were several diplomatic attempts to deal with the crisis. The OAS secretary-general repeatedly condemned the violence and called for a broad dialogue between the opposition and the government. Finally, the government of Panama demanded a special meeting of the OAS Permanent Council to discuss the situation. In reaction, the Venezuelan government severed diplomatic relations with Panama, which it accused of meddling in internal Venezuelan affairs. When the OAS Permanent Council met on the issue on March 7, 2014, it approved a resolution condemning the violence and calling for dialogue between the government and the opposition. The resolution was supported by 29 countries; only the United States, Canada, and Panama voted against it (Saiz 2014). Later attempts to raise the issue of the situation in Venezuela again within the OAS were not successful.

Meanwhile, on March 12, 2014, the foreign ministers from UNASUR approved a resolution that expressed support for a dialogue between the Venezuelan government and the opposition. Additionally, at the request of the Venezuelan government, they agreed to create a commission to accompany the process. Later in the month, a UNASUR delegation of nine South American foreign ministers visited the country and held a broad array of meetings with the government, political parties, student representatives, and human rights groups. In April, talks between the government and the opposition were monitored by three foreign ministers from UNASUR (Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador) and a representative from the Vatican. There were several rounds of talks, and three working groups were established. However, the talks soon stalled, and the UNASUR troika of foreign ministers returned to Caracas in May. In the end, though, it was not possible to restore the dialogue, and the troika left Caracas on May 20, having failed to convince the opposition to return to the negotiating table.

The protests against the government and the repression of the opposition both increased again. Therefore, in March 2015, UNASUR once again tried to mediate between the Venezuelan government and the opposition (*Latin American Andean Group Report RA-15-03*, 1–3). A delegation of three foreign ministers (once again from Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador), together with the secretary-general of UNASUR, Ernesto Samper, traveled to Caracas. But the conversations did not resolve the crisis. The opposition took a very critical view of UNASUR and did not

perceive it as a neutral mediator. In an official UNASUR statement, the member states declared that the internal situation in Venezuela had to be resolved by means of democratic mechanisms, as specified in the Venezuelan constitution.

*Analysis.* The Maduro government clearly adopted a strategy of negative forum shopping. While it repudiated the OAS as a mediator, it accepted UNASUR in this role. The redundancy of regional organizations made this option viable. However, it is also questionable whether mediation by the OAS would have been more resolute. When there is no waterproof infringement of the democracy clause—especially if the responsible party is the government—it is quite difficult to find a majority of Latin American governments that will support sanctions against a member country. There have been cases in the past, such as the second presidency of Alberto Fujimori in Peru, in which the OAS did not interfere.

As a conclusion, it is not clear whether Venezuela's forum shopping as a member state of overlapping regional organizations advanced or blocked a multilateral agreement. One might argue that in this episode of overlap of action, the competition between the OAS and UNASUR led to the watering down of international standards with regard to the protection of democracy. For example, the OAS, which had many years of experience in electoral observation, was not invited to monitor the 2014 elections (or the 2015 congressional elections). While UNASUR had no experience in electoral observation, it "accompanied" these electoral processes with a small mission.

### **Venezuela-Colombia, 2015**

On August 19, 2015, members of the Venezuelan armed forces were wounded in an ambush in the Andean border state of Táchira (see *Latin American Security and Strategic Review* SSR-15-08, 1–2; SSR-15-09, 12–13; Mills and Camarco 2015; Perina 2015b). The attack was blamed on Colombian smugglers and paramilitaries. In reaction, the Venezuelan government declared a state of emergency in Táchira and closed the borders, at first for 72 hours and later indefinitely. It also deported approximately 1,100 undocumented Colombians; another 10,000 fled the country, which resulted in humanitarian problems in the Colombian border area. As the mutual recriminations increased, both governments recalled their ambassadors on August 27. The Colombian government proposed discussing the topic in both the OAS and UNASUR. While the Venezuelan government accepted the proposal of UNASUR mediation, it rejected OAS participation.

Venezuela's refusal notwithstanding, the Permanent Mission of Colombia at the OAS requested the convening of a foreign ministers' meeting to consider "the humanitarian situation of Colombian citizens in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in light of the recent deportations, which has been brought about by the way in which those Colombian citizens are being deported from and forced to leave the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela" (OAS 2015c).

The Permanent Council of the OAS met on August 31 to decide on the Colombian government's request. The convening of a foreign ministers' meeting



would have required the support of an absolute majority of the member countries, 18 votes, but it received only 17 votes (Perina 2015b). After the unsuccessful vote, the Colombian government demanded that the UNASUR foreign ministers meet the same week. A meeting had been scheduled for September 3, but it was postponed because the Venezuelan foreign minister was traveling with President Maduro to China and Vietnam and was not willing to interrupt the trip for the planned UNASUR meeting. The Colombian government interpreted this attitude as a demonstration of the Venezuelan government's lack of interest in a swift resolution and announced that it would not participate in a future UNASUR meeting related to this issue. Instead, the Colombian government invited the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to send a mission to the border area on the Colombian side.

The mission visited the border September 10 to 12. It also asked the Venezuelan government for permission to visit the other side of the border but did not get a positive response (OAS 2015b). At the end of September, the secretary-general of UNASUR and the pro tempore presidents of UNASUR and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), Tabaré Vázquez of Uruguay and Rafael Correa of Ecuador, respectively, arranged a bilateral meeting between Colombian president Santos and Venezuelan president Maduro in Quito with the objective of reducing tensions between both countries and securing the progressive normalization of the border.

*Analysis.* This episode of overlapping is a case in which the existence of overlapping regional organizations clearly led to forum shopping, resulting in a blockade and nonagreement. Both parties had a preference with regard to the institutional venue where they believed they would have a better chance of advancing their interests. For Colombia, the OAS was the first choice, because in the OAS the ALBA countries (as supporters of Venezuela) were a minority. Moreover, the Colombian government could expect that the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the majority of Central American countries would support its claims.

This calculation was justified. Without the unexpected abstention of Panama, a meeting of the foreign ministers would have been convened. Venezuela was against a meeting of the OAS and preferred a meeting of UNASUR, where it expected to receive less criticism. In the event that the Colombian request in the OAS had succeeded, the Venezuelan government would have expedited a UNASUR meeting. But after the Colombian request to the OAS was blocked, there was no hurry to proceed in UNASUR, from Venezuela's perspective. From the Colombian government's angle, the potential outcome of a UNASUR meeting was uncertain; and for domestic political reasons, it had no interest in risking another setback in an international forum. Therefore, it preferred to withdraw its proposal for a UNASUR meeting.

In this episode, the existence of a parallel venue and organization increased the risk of a blockade. It is conceivable that without the existence of UNASUR, a majority of countries would have voted in favor of a special meeting of the OAS. But it is also possible that under this constellation as well, Venezuela would have been successful in blocking the Colombian request. The conflict and the humanitarian crisis

at the Colombian-Venezuelan border would have justified an intervention by the OAS (or by UNASUR). The mutual blockade resulted in the watering down of normative standards and in rule ambiguity.

### Venezuela 2, 2015

Because the opposition feared that the government would manipulate the parliamentary elections on December 6, 2015, it lobbied for international observation of the elections (see *Latin American Weekly Report* WR-15-45, 4–5; *Latin American Andean Group Report* RA-15-06, 13–14; RA-15-11, 13–15). In contrast to Hugo Chávez, who was generally quite permissive about international electoral monitoring, the Maduro government took a much more restrictive stance, especially regarding OAS involvement.

Instead, the Venezuelan government again invited a UNASUR mission to “accompany” the elections (*Misión Electoral de Acompañamiento*). But this mission also had a bumpy start as the Maduro government rejected the proposed Brazilian mission leader and Brazil dropped out of the mission as a consequence. Only on November 12, 2015, was an agreement signed between UNASUR and the Venezuelan National Electoral Council. In the meantime, Luis Almagro, the new secretary-general of the OAS, also officially offered to send an electoral observation mission, an offer that the Electoral Council rejected. In reaction, Almagro wrote an 18-page letter (OAS 2015a) to the Electoral Council on November 10, raising alarms about the fairness of the upcoming vote: “there is reason to believe that the conditions in which the people will vote on December 6 will not enjoy the level of transparency and electoral justice that you, at the National Electoral Council, should guarantee.” The letter (as well as two additional messages before the election) put some pressure on the Venezuelan government and may have reduced the risk of flagrant manipulations. In the end, the UNASUR mission of approximately 50 members was also welcomed by the Venezuelan opposition. The elections were transparent, and the opposition won with a clear majority.

*Analysis.* In this case, the “competition” between the OAS and UNASUR, which led to the open letter from Secretary-general Almagro, increased the pressure on the Venezuelan government to respect the electoral verdict. It facilitated the work of the UNASUR mission. Only one organization participated in the observation, which meant that there was no strain on organizational resources. Without UNASUR, there might have been no electoral mission. Therefore, from one perspective, forum shopping might have had a positive effect: it facilitated an agreement on electoral monitoring. However, the standards for electoral monitoring were watered down, because “to observe” implies more than “to accompany”; the latter restricts the mandate and the autonomy of the mission (Closa and Palestini 2015). One might even see norm subversion with regard to the objectives of electoral observation missions.

Moreover, the OAS had more technical experience in monitoring elections, and the decision with regard to the UNASUR mission was taken late. Fortuitously, the election result was clear, and the opposition did not question it. However, after

the electoral mission had left the country, the Supreme Court blocked three MPs from taking office. This meant that the opposition would not have the two-thirds majority in Congress necessary for certain policy changes.

### Venezuela 3, 2016–2017

After President Maduro's government was defeated in the legislative elections of December 2015, the governmental majority in the outgoing Congress enhanced partisan control of the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has since proven to be a tremendous functional instrument serving the executive and disempowering the opposition-dominated Congress, something which has led Venezuela to the brink of a "constitutional coup."

OAS secretary-general Luis Almagro took a clearly critical stance on the antidemocratic practices and exchanged mutual recriminations with the Venezuelan government. On May 5, 2016, the Permanent Council of the OAS held a special meeting at Venezuela's request to receive the country's foreign minister, who defended the government's policy and criticized the external interference. On the same day, President Maduro declared at a public event, "All with UNASUR, nothing with the OAS; this I say, the OAS on the garbage dump of history, a new history with UNASUR."<sup>4</sup>

In the meantime, the secretary-general of UNASUR, Ernesto Samper, supported mediation of the conflict by the former presidents of the Dominican Republic and Panama, Leonel Fernández and Martín Torrijos, as well as the former Spanish prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. However, the opposition did not perceive UNASUR as a neutral mediator; it still tried to involve the OAS. Nevertheless, the mediation effort, which the UNASUR foreign ministers had never sanctioned (OAS 2017, 7) also received unanimous support from the OAS (including the U.S. government).

On June 23, OAS secretary-general Almagro presented his report on the application of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in the case of Venezuela to the Permanent Council of the OAS (OAS 2016). The day before, the Venezuelan government had tried to prevent discussion of the topic, but the proposal was rejected by a vote of 20 to 12 (with two abstentions). The meeting ended without a declaration, which can be interpreted as a success for Venezuela and a setback for Almagro; but the application of the OAS democracy clause against Venezuela was still not entirely off the table, and the OAS was still an actor in the Venezuelan crisis.

Later, in October, in an attempt to revive the dialogue, the Vatican also joined the mediation process.<sup>5</sup> However, after the provincial courts and the National Electoral Council suspended the recall referendum, the dialogue stalled. The government did not show any disposition to make concessions to the opposition. Instead, it took a hardline position. Within the opposition, there was disagreement about which strategy should be used to confront the government. Thus, at the beginning of 2017, the mediation efforts through UNASUR had reached an impasse (Scharfenberg 2017).

On March 14, 2017, OAS secretary-general Almagro presented an updated report on the internal situation in Venezuela to the OAS Permanent Council (OAS 2017), which was discussed on March 28 in an extraordinary meeting (Hoffay and Mustiga 2017). Before the meeting, 14 countries (including the United States, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico) issued a joint declaration on Venezuela, demanding an effective separation of powers and full respect for the rule of law, the release of political prisoners, and the establishment of an electoral calendar. The declaration also mentioned the suspension of a member state, as established in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, as a measure of last resort (U.S. Department of State 2017).

In two decisions issued on the days directly before and after the OAS meeting, the Venezuelan Supreme Court stripped the members of the National Assembly of their parliamentary immunity and assigned parliamentary functions to the court's constitutional chamber (*Latin American Weekly Report*, WR-17-13, 3–5). While the Supreme Court later partly retracted those orders, the OAS Permanent Council adopted a resolution on April 3 asserting that the decisions of the Supreme Court were inconsistent with democratic practices and constituted an alteration of the constitutional order.<sup>6</sup>

*Analysis.* In the current crisis in Venezuela, both OAS and UNASUR are active. While the Venezuelan government still clearly prefers UNASUR, the opposition has been trying to involve the OAS. The government has followed a clear strategy of forum shopping, favoring the organization with the more government-friendly interpretation of the democracy protection norm in the conflict with the opposition. On the one hand, the involvement of both organizations has put more pressure on the Venezuelan actors to negotiate. On the other hand, it has also enabled forum shopping, which has, at least temporarily, had a positive effect on facilitating an agreement on conflict mediation and has had the side effect of opening up an alternative venue for the opposition (which has not received much support from UNASUR). The major involvement of UNASUR (relative to the OAS) in the Venezuelan crisis has led both to a watering down of democratic standards and to norm subversion with regard to the protection of democracy. UNASUR's poor record with regard to democracy protection puts its credibility at risk and may result in a resurgence of the OAS in South America.

## DISCUSSION

The comparison of a limited number of episodes of overlap of action between two organizations, the OAS and UNASUR, produces some interesting results. The increased organizational and human resources available, due to the involvement of two organizations, had a positive effect on conflict mediation in three cases, but in most cases no impact. Latin American presidential diplomacy might have represented an advantage because it is not very cost-intensive in terms of human and organizational resources. Increased resource deployment is generally limited to additional presidential or ministerial meetings or the creation of new ad hoc groups.

Table 1. Episodes of Overlapping Action Between OAS and UNASUR

	Resources		Blockades		Standards		Norms		Forum shopping	
	H1a	H1b	H2a	H2b	H3a	H3b	H4a	H4b	H5a	H5b
Bolivia	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
Colombia	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Col-Ven 1	-	-	+	-	-	(+)	-	-	+	-
Ecuador	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
Paraguay	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-
Venezuela 1	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	(+)
Col-Ven 2	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
Venezuela 2	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	(+)	-
Venezuela 3	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	+	-

+ Hypotheses confirmed, - hypotheses not confirmed, ( ) hypotheses only partially confirmed

In five out of nine episodes, the redundancy of regional organizations helped overcome a blockade in one of the organizations. However, there was also one episode in which redundancy created a blockade. The picture is more mixed with regard to the outcome of competition over norms and standards. In four cases, international standards were raised or reinforced, but also, in at least four or five cases, we can see a watering down of standards and norm subversion. Forum shopping had a negative effect in two cases and a positive effect in four cases. A comparison of episodes of interstate conflict (three) and intrastate conflict (six) does not indicate diverging patterns among the hypotheses (see table 1).

As the case of UNASUR and the OAS demonstrates, nested regional organizations can result in a particular conflict potential: the clash over regional domains. These conflicts are generally about the exclusive right to exercise a certain mandate within such a regional domain. Although the OAS has not been completely replaced, until 2016 it was displaced as the main mediator of conflicts in South America, where, symbolically, the heads of government meet within the framework of UNASUR to exchange ideas and identify South American solutions to what they perceive to be South American problems. The outcome of the ongoing crisis in Venezuela will determine whether this trend will continue or whether the OAS will recover agency in cases of democracy protection.

## CONCLUSIONS

The proliferation of regional organizations increases regional pluralism and leads to overlapping. Overlapping is a special aspect of a pluralistic regional architecture. Regional organizations and member states may react differently to overlapping within such an architecture. Whether or not overlapping leads to problems depends on the strategies of those states that are members of different organizations. The countries and governments engaged in multiple organizations generally do not focus on the problems that the overlapping of regional organizations might create, but are instead more concerned with the strategic options that the plurality of regional organizations might offer.

Is overlapping harmful or beneficial to regional cooperation? Based on the analysis of nine episodes of overlapping, the answer is mixed. In five episodes, the cross-institutional political strategies of regional organizations' member countries helped to overcome blockades; in one case, such a strategy created blockades. With regard to the watering down or raising of normative standards and the implementation or subversion of norms, the results are also ambiguous in terms of a positive or negative effect. However, the number of cases of norm subversion was relatively high, mostly when Venezuela was a key actor. Forum shopping advanced multilateral agreements in slightly more cases than cases when it led to blockades. Because of the type of organizations involved in the episodes studied (weak institutional structures, few resources), there was no strain on the human and administrative resources of organizations and states. In some cases, the redundancy of resources (due to overlapping) facilitated agreements.

## NOTES

This article builds on joint research with Brigitte Weiffen on overlapping regionalism in Latin America. I would like to thank Britta for the constant, fruitful exchange of opinions and ideas.

1. The analysis focuses on the interventions and interactions of OAS and UNASUR in the different crisis constellations. It does not aim to provide an exhaustive description and explanation of each political crisis. The analysis is based on official documents of OAS and UNASUR, secondary sources, newspaper reports, and information services, such as the *Latin American Weekly Report*.

2. Counterfactual questions seem to be especially convenient for evaluating the performance of international organizations, which are influenced by many exogenous factors; for instance, asking "what would the outcome have been absent the IO or with a different institutional arrangement" (Gutner and Thompson 2010, 240).

3. This concept can also be applied to Latin America. Sanahuja (2010, 110) emphasizes the point that the constitutive treaty (Article 13) of UNASUR explicitly opens up the possibility of a variable geometry-type architecture in South America.

4. "Con UNASUR todo, con la OEA nada, así lo digo, la OEA al basural de la historia, la UNASUR a la nueva historia." Agencia EFE 2016.

5. For a critical overview of the different stages of the dialogue between the government and the opposition, see International Crisis Group 2016; Sullivan 2017; and the updated

report on Venezuela from Secretary-General Luis Almagro to the Permanent Council of OAS (OAS 2017).

6. The resolution was backed by 17 states, with four abstentions (13 countries did not participate in the meeting).

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