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Resilience to Crisis and Resistance to Change: A Comparative Analysis of the Determinants of Crisis Outcomes in Latin American Regional Organisations

Introduction

All across the world, regional organisations (hereafter ROs) have repeatedly faced crises. This phenomenon has not gone unnoticed in scholarly literature. The international relations (IR) scholarship on intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) has delivered large-N analyses of the determinants of IGO death¹ and vitality² across extended time periods, but it has not addressed the logics and outcomes of RO crises. The comparative regionalism literature has analysed the impact of exogenous economic and financial crises on regionalism's performance and legitimacy across different regions,³ but it has largely overlooked the endogenous logics of RO crises. On the other hand, the scholarship on European integration has extensively dealt with the endogenous logics of the crises of EU institutions, gaining further prominence in the past few years due to European integration's multidimensional crisis.⁴ However, the insights generated by EU studies have struggled to travel outside Europe.

This article addresses this gap in the literature by focusing on Latin America. Latin American regionalism displays a long history of crises, which have affected almost all ROs across different waves of regionalism.⁵ The literature emphasised the resilience of regionalism in Latin America, showing how crises have traditionally been followed by the reactivation of regional cooperation/integration.⁶ However, the recent breakdown of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) challenges the claim that Latin American ROs are resilient to crises. We investigate this key dimension of Latin American regionalism by conducting the first

comparative analysis of the crises of Latin American ROs across time, tackling the following questions: What have been the outcomes of the crises faced by Latin American ROs? Under what conditions does a crisis result in the survival or breakdown of the affected RO in Latin America? We construct our own definition of an RO crisis, which allows us to identify a universe of eight crises in the history of Latin American regionalism. Drawing from the IR literature on IGO death/vitality, from comparative regionalism, and from EU studies on disintegration, we argue that the outcome of an RO crisis—which we operationalise in a binary fashion as survival versus breakdown—can be determined by three endogenous conditions: (i) the nature of the interstate conflict (distributive or normative); (ii) the availability of majority voting; and (iii) the presence of regional leadership in support of the RO. We formulate a set of hypotheses related to the impact of these conditions on the survival/breakdown of an RO in crisis, which we test through a multi-method approach that combines a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) with a process tracing analysis (PTA).

Our first finding is that Latin American ROs have indeed been resilient to crises. All the crises that we analysed resulted in RO survival, with the sole exception of UNASUR's breakdown. This confirms the resilience of Latin American regionalism identified by the literature, while begging the question as to what factors explain Latin American ROs' survival of crisis. The QCA yields key insights into this puzzle. Firstly, the QCA shows that distributive conflicts among member states result in RO survival, irrespective of a given RO's voting rules or the presence or absence of regional leadership in support of the RO. We argue that this is related to the fact that distributive conflicts affect member states' key material interests, pushing dissatisfied members to either try to negotiate a compromise solution or leave the RO to pursue their economic interests outside the bloc.

Secondly, the QCA shows that the availability of majority voting ensures the survival of Latin American ROs in crisis, irrespective of the nature of the interstate dispute involved, or whether regional leadership in support of the RO is present or not. Majority voting allows a group of member states to overcome preference divergence by outvoting the dissatisfied/challenger member(s) when those are in the minority, forcing them to either compromise or leave the RO. The distributive nature of interstate conflicts and the availability of majority voting are thus both sufficient conditions for Latin American ROs to survive a crisis. Interestingly, regional leadership does not seem to have a decisive impact on the outcomes of crises in Latin American ROs. Where regional leadership in support of the RO was present, its impact was secondary to that of the type of conflict and voting rules involved. On the other hand, our PTA of the outlier case of UNASUR shows that normative conflicts (i.e. those involving the contestation of an RO's core norm) that take place in the absence of majority voting constitute a "perfect storm" configuration that can lead to RO breakdown. Finally, Latin American ROs' tendency to survive crises is associated with the preservation of the status quo in terms of institutional design, which in some cases is achieved through the temporary flexibilisation of existing rules and procedures. Differently from the case of the EU, then, the crises of Latin American ROs have not led to the deepening of regional integration, but rather to institutional inertia. We address this issue in the section devoted to the interpretation of findings and in the conclusion.

The article contributes to the literature on Latin American regionalism by conducting the first comparative analysis of the outcomes of crises in Latin American ROs across time. Although the generalisation scope of our findings is limited to Latin America, the article generates theoretical insights on the endogenous logics of RO crises that may stimulate cross-regional

comparison. The article proceeds as follows. We begin by bridging the gap between the literature on Latin American regionalism, the IR scholarship on IGO death/vitality, and EU studies on disintegration, deriving a new definition of RO crisis. From there, we introduce a theoretical framework composed of three explanatory conditions, providing a set of hypotheses as to how they affect the outcomes of RO crises. After discussing research design and methodology issues, we present the results of the QCA and conduct a PTA of three exemplary cases. We move next to interpret the findings. We conclude with an examination of the article's contributions to the study of RO crises in Latin America and beyond.

RO crises: bridging the gap between Latin American regionalism, IR theory, and EU studies

The topic of RO crises has been marked by a lack of dialogue between regional studies and IR theory. The literature on Latin American regionalism has delivered a variety of single case studies of specific crisis episodes without engaging with the theoretical insights generated by the scholarship on IGO death/vitality and EU studies on disintegration. IR scholars, for their part, have privileged large-N analyses of the determinants of IGO death and vitality across extended time periods,⁷ disregarding the analysis of the logics and outcomes of RO crises within and across world regions. Comparative regionalism has delivered insightful analyses of cross-regional variations in ROs' policy scope and competences,⁸ legal models,⁹ levels of pooling and delegation,¹⁰ and institutional overlap.¹¹ However, this scholarship has largely overlooked the comparative analysis of the endogenous logics of RO crises, focusing instead on the impact of exogenous economic and financial crises on ROs' performance and legitimacy across different regions.¹² On the other hand, EU studies formulated multiple hypotheses as to the endogenous determinants of crisis outcomes in European institutions, but these

insights have struggled to travel outside Europe due to their focus on (dis)integration patterns.¹³

Crises in Latin American regionalism

Crises are a persistent feature of Latin American regionalism.¹⁴ The literature identifies several factors that make Latin American regionalism crisis-prone, such as low economic interdependence,¹⁵ institutional weakness (particularly weak enforcement mechanisms¹⁶), and inter-governmentalism/presidentialism.¹⁷ These features make Latin American ROs vulnerable to exogenous factors like domestic political changes and global financial shocks, which can trigger interstate conflicts that undermine ROs.¹⁸ On the other hand, the literature has emphasised Latin American regionalism's resilience to crises, showing how these have traditionally been followed by a reactivation of regional cooperation.¹⁹ The literature also provides a variety of single-case analyses of specific crisis episodes, such as the late-1960s crisis of the Central American Common Market (CACM),²⁰ the repeated crises of Mercosur,²¹ and UNASUR's breakdown.²² However, little comparative work has been done on the logics and outcomes of Latin American ROs' crises across time. Such a comparative analysis requires us to formulate a definition of RO crisis, which will allow us to identify the universe of cases.

Definitions of crisis in IR scholarship and EU studies

International crises are a recurrent topic in IR scholarship, which has focused on three levels of analysis: global systemic crises, interstate confrontations, and decision-making crises within IGOs. Ikenberry's definition of international crises is a good starting point. He conceptualises a crisis "as a situation in which one or more of four circumstances obtain: (1) a fundamental disagreement breaks out over what at least one side believes is a core interest; (2) a sharp

break occurs in market and social interdependence; (3) an institutional breakdown occurs regarding the rules and norms of process; (4) and/or a breakdown occurs in a sense of community".²³ Two elements of Ikenberry's definition can be fruitfully applied to Latin American ROs: intergovernmental disagreement and institutional breakdown. Levels of interdependence and sense of community, on the other hand, have traditionally been weak in Latin American regionalism, and thus do not yield reliable indicators of crisis.

IR scholars analysed crises also from an organisational perspective, whereby a crisis is defined as a situation that "(1) threatens high-priority values of the organization, (2) presents a restricted amount of time in which a response can be made, and (3) is unexpected or unanticipated by the organization".²⁴ While we agree that crises threaten an organisation's fundamental goals and norms, it is less clear whether time restrictions and unexpectedness are necessary elements of a crisis. The history Latin American regionalism demonstrates that crises can be the result of a gradual process or even be cyclical.

The EU might be seen as providing good examples of cyclical crises, which have unfolded since the early phase of the European integration process. EU integration theories dealt extensively with integration crises, illuminating their logics and consequences from different theoretical perspectives,²⁵ without providing a clear definition of what an RO crisis is. The multidimensional crises that have recently affected the EU stimulated a new body of literature on the characteristics of the crises faced by European institutions.²⁶ Schimmelfennig defines a crisis "as a decision-making-situation with a manifest threat and a perceived significant probability of disintegration", where disintegration refers to "a reduction in the existing level, scope, and membership of integration".²⁷ Webber analyses EU crises by discriminating between horizontal, sectoral, and vertical disintegration, which refer respectively to

reductions in EU membership, in areas of cooperation, and in the competences of supranational bodies.²⁸ The problem with how EU studies conceptualise crises is that they focus on changes in authority delegation and sovereignty pooling patterns typical of European integration. Such a focus on (dis)integration patterns is not necessarily helpful in grasping the logic of different types of crisis, such as those seen in intergovernmental ROs in Latin America.

Bridging the gap: A broader definition of an RO crisis

Drawing from the IR scholarship on crises and EU studies on disintegration, we define an RO crisis as a decision-making situation that calls the functioning or even the survival of an RO into question by confronting member governments with: (1) a manifest threat that one or more member states may leave or be suspended from the RO; (2) an institutional stalemate regarding compliance with the RO's rules and procedures; (3) a decrease in institutionalised cooperation in one or more policy areas; and (4) the contestation of an RO's core objective and/or norm by one or more member states. None of the four crisis indicators is sufficient to define an RO crisis in itself. The withdrawal/suspension of a member state can be the result of the correct functioning of an RO or the outcome of a state's autonomous decision to exit an RO. In both cases, membership reduction might facilitate cooperation among the remaining members. Similarly, a temporary institutional breakdown of an RO's rules and procedures does not necessarily put its functioning or existence into question, inasmuch as member states can continue to pursue the RO's mandates in policy areas that are not affected by the institutional stalemate. Likewise, a decrease in institutionalised cooperation can reduce the RO's importance in member states' foreign policy without threatening its survival, and the contestation of an RO's core norm might lead to the adaptation of said norm through a process of consensus. We argue that an RO is in crisis when at least two crisis symptoms are present:

for instance, an institutional stalemate coupled with the threat of membership disintegration, or the contestation of an RO's core norm coupled with a decrease in institutionalised cooperation. In fact, any combination of two of our four crisis symptoms creates a pressing organisational situation that hampers the RO's functioning and throws its viability into question. This selection benchmark allows us to differentiate between actual crises on the one hand, and on the other, conflicts that are effectively managed within an RO's institutional framework.

The endogenous determinants of the outcomes of RO crisis: A theoretical framework for comparison

This article aims to assess the impact of those endogenous, RO-specific factors that can determine how a crisis plays out in an RO, irrespective of whether the *causes* of such a crisis are endogenous or exogenous. We thus put the impact of exogenous crisis factors²⁹ to one side, and focus on a set of endogenous conditions that are related to member states' interactions within ROs, and to ROs' institutional design. Due to regionalism's low salience for domestic politics in Latin America, we also disregard any analysis of potential bottom-up pressure from member state populations, from civil society and from market actors. These are key explanatory factors in EU (dis)integration theories, but they scarcely apply to strongly intergovernmental ROs characterised by the weak involvement of non-state actors and low levels of regionalisation.³⁰

We argue that three endogenous conditions can determine the survival or the breakdown of a Latin American RO in crisis: (i) the nature of the **interstate conflict**; (ii) the **availability of majority voting**; and (iii) the presence of **regional leadership** in support of the RO. We

formulate a set of hypotheses on the impact of the three conditions, which allows us to cover a wide theoretical spectrum that combines interest-based functionalist explanations with power-centric and institutionalist arguments.

Condition 1: The nature of interstate conflicts

The IR literature analysed the negative impact of interstate conflicts on IGO survival/vitality, but it focused on geopolitical conflicts and militarised disputes among IGO members,³¹ disregarding any analysis of interstate conflicts related to IGO mandates. EU studies have investigated the logic of interstate conflicts within European institutions, addressing both distributive conflicts related to economic integration³² and conflicts related to core elements of the EU's normative order.³³ We posit that an RO crisis can be the result of two types of interstate conflicts: (i) a *distributive conflict* concerning the distribution of the costs and benefits of economic integration; and (ii) a *normative conflict* concerning the contestation/violation of an RO's core norm.

Distributive conflicts are related to what one or more states perceive as an unbalanced distribution of the costs and benefits of regional economic integration. Since member states' material interests are at stake in distributive conflicts, we expect that governments will try to negotiate a solution that allows for compensation in the existing institutional setting. The underlying assumption is that rational member governments will try to minimise their crisis burden, and maximize their gains from crisis outcomes.³⁴ In the absence of a viable compromise, dissatisfied states—particularly smaller and second-tier states—will either back down from their demands or withdraw from the RO to pursue their interests outside the bloc. While the most powerful member states (i.e. those less dependent on intra-regional trade)

can use their bargaining power to threaten to withdraw from an RO in a distributive conflict, they are unlikely to do so inasmuch as they can shape the outcome of interstate negotiations in their favour,³⁵ and they will thus tend to favour striking a bargain.³⁶ We thus derive the following hypothesis:

H1.1 Distributive conflicts among member states do not threaten RO survival.

Normative conflicts involve the contestation and/or violation of an RO's core norm (e.g. democracy protection or free trade) by one or more member states. Normative conflicts are more difficult to solve than distributive conflicts, inasmuch as they undermine the legitimacy and stability of existing institutions.³⁷ Member states can hardly compromise over an RO's core norm when they consider that it either threatens or embodies their key interests and/or beliefs. The IR literature highlights how the strength of the challenger state has a major impact on the subversion of contested norms in institutionalised contexts.³⁸ However, the risk of institutional breakdown increases when normative contestation/violation concerns a norm that is defended by a group of status-quo-oriented members and the challenger(s) is determined to force a normative change in the RO. We thus derive the following hypothesis:

H1.2 Normative conflicts among member states can lead to RO breakdown.

Condition 2: Majority voting

IR scholars have increasingly paid attention to the impact of institutional design on IGO death/vitality.³⁹ We argue that ROs' institutional design has a critical impact on crisis outcomes: it can facilitate the resolution of a crisis or act as a crisis catalyst. We capture the impact of ROs' institutional characteristics on how a crisis unfolds by focusing on the voting

rules pertaining to decision-making:⁴⁰ that is, whether an RO's decision-making system is based on majority voting or consensus/unanimity. Decision-making by consensus or unanimity is potentially conducive to a deadlock in the event of diverging member state preferences, as any member can block a decision by wielding its veto.⁴¹ On the other hand, the possibility for majority voting allows a group of member states to overcome preference divergence by outvoting (or threatening to outvote) the dissatisfied/challenger member(s) when these are in the minority, forcing them to either compromise or leave the RO.⁴² We thus derive the following hypothesis:

H2. The availability of majority voting increases an RO's chances of surviving a crisis.

Condition 3: Regional Leadership

Comparative regionalism scholars investigated how the presence of a state with material, ideational, and entrepreneurial leadership capacities can affect regional governance structures and processes.⁴³ In particular, the presence of a member state capable of exercising political leadership (e.g. mediating intergovernmental conflicts) and/or acting as a paymaster (e.g. addressing distributive conflicts) can alter the course of an RO crisis, shortening its duration and shaping its effects.⁴⁴ However, regional leadership can be absent in a crisis, either because the RO does not include any member with the characteristics of a regional leader, or because the leader is unwilling or unable to engage in crisis resolution due to domestic and/or international constraints.⁴⁵ A regional leader can also use its superior clout to kill an RO whose functioning is not in line with its preferences. For example, by withdrawing from an RO in crisis, a regional leader can push other members to follow, out of fear of a leadership void.⁴⁶ We thus derive the following hypothesis:

H3. The presence of a regional leader willing to exercise its leadership capacities in support of an RO increases the RO's chances of surviving a crisis.

Research design, methods, and data

We conduct a comparative analysis of crises in Latin American ROs across time, exploring under what conditions a crisis results in the survival or breakdown of the affected RO. We argue that the outcome of an RO crisis can be determined by three endogenous conditions: the nature of the interstate conflict, the availability of majority voting, and the presence of regional leadership in support of the RO. We operationalise both the dependent variable and the explanatory conditions in a dichotomous fashion. As pointed out by Gerring, a binary operationalisation of both causes and outcomes is the most appropriate choice in diagnostic case studies aimed at illuminating the causal pathway(s) connecting the explanatory factors of interest to the outcome under investigation.⁴⁷

Operationalisation of the dependent variable

The outcome of an RO crisis can take on two values: **survival** or **breakdown**. An RO survives a crisis when its member states continue to pursue the RO's core mandates and preserve the RO's institutional structure. An RO breaks down when its member states stop pursuing the RO's core mandates (or even withdraw from the RO) and discard the RO's institutional structure (e.g. the secretariat is emptied of human and financial resources or dissolved), rendering it a "dead" RO.⁴⁸ We explored the possibility of adopting a continuous operationalisation of the dependent variable to include the crisis outcome "institutional change/transformation." However, our in-depth analysis of the cases revealed that in the only

case where institutional changes were introduced after a crisis (Mercosur's 2001-2002 crisis), these were not the result of the crisis but of domestic political changes in key member states (i.e. an exogenous factor). Some of our cases display a temporary flexibilisation of ROs' rules and procedures, which member states exploited as a crisis management tool (we explore this issue in the 'Discussion of findings' section). Such flexibilisation can thus hardly be considered an institutional change. That being said, we do not dismiss the possibility that with a larger universe of cases, from different world regions, a continuous operationalisation of the dependent variable could be more advantageous than a dichotomous survival-versus-breakdown operationalisation.

Operationalisation of the explanatory conditions

The condition *type of interstate conflict* can be either **distributive** or **normative**, depending on whether the conflict concerns the distribution of the costs and benefits of regional economic integration, or the contestation of an RO's core norm. Although we acknowledge that the conflict underlying an RO crisis can include both distributive and normative elements, we focus on what we consider to be the dominant nature of each conflict, under the assumption that the logic governing member states' action in a crisis is determined by whether the conflict is framed in normative or distributive terms. Such dichotomous operationalisation allows us to grasp the impact of a given conflict's nature on the outcomes of an RO crisis, providing valuable insights into our research puzzle.

The condition *majority voting* can take on the following values: **present** or **absent**. The former applies to those ROs in which the number of votes required to make a decision is less than the total number of votes granted to all member states, and more than half of that number. We

count as majority voting consensus-minus-one provisions, which allow member states to take action against a member that is violating an RO's core norm, depriving the "challenger" of its veto power. The latter applies to those ROs that require that no member state oppose a given course of action (i.e. consensus), or that all members explicitly vote in favour of a given course of action (i.e. unanimity) in order to make a decision. The condition *regional leadership in support of the RO* can take on the following values: **present** or **absent**. In the former case, a powerful member state exercises its leadership capacities to facilitate the resolution of a crisis and preserve the RO. In the latter case, either no member state is able or willing to exercise regional leadership in support of the RO in crisis, or the regional leader uses its clout to kill the RO.

The universe of cases

Our universe of cases is composed of eight crises of Latin American ROs that unfolded in different historical moments and followed distinct causal pathways (see Table 1). To identify the universe, we applied a specific definition of an RO crisis whereby a given episode qualifies as a crisis when it complies with at least two of our four crisis criteria.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Our selection benchmark allows us to distinguish actual crises from interstate disputes that are managed effectively within ROs' institutional frameworks. This was the case with Paraguay's suspension from MERCOSUR and UNASUR in 2012. The majority of South American governments perceived the Paraguayan Congress' decision to impeach President Fernando Lugo as a democratic breakdown, and responded by activating the democratic clauses of MERCOSUR and UNASUR.⁴⁹ The case of Paraguay complies only with one of our crisis criteria:

the threat of membership reduction. Both ROs applied their rules and experienced neither institutional stalemate, nor a decrease in institutionalised cooperation, nor the contestation of core norms.⁵⁰

Alternative/complementary explanations and control variables

We excluded from our theoretical framework a set of potential confounding variables addressed by the literature on IGO death/vitality and EU studies on integration crises, because those variables take on similar values across our universe of cases. The first confounding variable is that of ROs' policy scope. The literature shows that multi-purpose IGOs are more likely to survive than single-task IGOs. Additionally, the literature reveals how IGOs focused on security issues (and to a lesser extent on trade) are more likely to be terminated than technical IGOs.⁵¹ All the Latin American ROs included in our universe of cases are multi-purpose IGOs that combine technical mandates and "high-politics" mandates related to security, domestic regime stability and/or trade issues.⁵²

A second confounding variable relates to the agency of supranational institutions. The literature argues that IGOs equipped with autonomous and resourceful supranational bureaucracies are more likely to live longer,⁵³ display higher levels of vitality,⁵⁴ and advance towards deeper regional integration.⁵⁵ All the Latin American ROs included in our universe are intergovernmental ROs with small and underfinanced regional bureaucracies, to which member states do not delegate substantial authority over policy-making or enforcement, or dispute settlement,⁵⁶ with the partial exception of the Andean Pact/Andean Community (CAN).⁵⁷ This makes hypotheses on supranational entrepreneurship inapplicable to our universe of cases. The literature also argues that older IGOs are more likely to survive.⁵⁸ All

the RO crises analysed in this article took place in the early phase (often within the first decade) of the life-cycles of the ROs in question, with the exception of the 1992-1997 Andean Pact crisis. As such, RO age does not seem to be a determinant of RO crisis outcomes in Latin America.

Finally, for methodological reasons we excluded from our theoretical framework a potential confounding variable relating to the strength of regional elite identity. To trace the true impact of elite identity on regionalism, one would have to investigate the deep changes in actors' self-understanding caused by their involvement in ROs' activities.⁵⁹ This would pose huge methodological challenges that could hardly be addressed in a comparative analysis of the kind we are performing here.⁶⁰

Methods

To identify the causal paths toward survival taken by Latin American ROs in crisis, we conducted a QCA of the seven cases of RO survival. The UNASUR crisis being the only case that resulted in an RO breakdown, we did not perform a QCA for the "negative outcome", which we analysed through process tracing instead. QCA is a set-theory-based method that uses Boolean algebra to identify configurations of conditions that can account for a certain outcome, and to explore the relations of necessity and/or sufficiency between explanatory conditions and the outcome in question.⁶¹ This method is well suited to dealing with outcomes that can be explained by more than one causal pathway (a phenomenon known as equifinality). We adopt a crisp set variety of QCA (hereafter csQCA), in which both the explanatory conditions and the outcome take on dichotomous values. We calibrated the outcome by assigning 1 to the cases of RO **survival**, and 0 to those of RO **breakdown**. We calibrated the condition *nature of the interstate conflict* by assigning 1 to the crises marked by

a distributive conflict, and 0 to those provoked by a normative conflict. (In the Truth Table we considered the absence of distributive conflict equivalent to the presence of a normative conflict—see online appendix). The condition *majority voting* was calibrated by assigning 1 to the RO crises in which majority voting was available, and 0 to those in which the voting rule was consensus or unanimity. (In the Truth Table we considered the absence of majority voting equivalent to consensus/unanimity voting—see online appendix). Finally, we calibrated the condition *regional leadership* by assigning 1 to the crises in which regional leadership in support of the RO was present, and 0 to those in which it was absent.

To conduct the QCA, we constructed a Truth Table based on the data matrix (both are available in the online appendix), which presents all combinations of explanatory conditions, including those without empirical cases ('logical remainders'). Subsequently, we performed 'Boolean minimisation' in order to obtain a more parsimonious solution by eliminating redundant conditions. We conducted the analysis of sufficient conditions by using an intermediate solution, which allows for parsimony without over-simplifying the results, through the use of only certain logical remainders.⁶² As regards coverage and consistency scores (see Table 2), the former shows the share of cases with the outcome of interest that the solution can account for, while the latter indicates the number of cases covered by the solution. The analyses of sufficiency/necessity and of logic minimisation were conducted using the fsQCA software.

Following a multi-method approach,⁶³ we complement the QCA with a PTA of three emblematic cases in order to shed light on the two causal paths to RO survival identified by the QCA, and to explore the configuration that led to the only case of RO breakdown in our universe. The PTA reconstructs the intervening causal process that leads to a particular

outcome in a particular context,⁶⁴ which allows us to enrich the static picture provided by QCA, and advance our understanding of the occurrence or non-occurrence of the outcome in a given case.

Data

The rich secondary literature on specific crises of Latin American ROs provided the bulk of the article's empirical evidence. As such, the article does not create new empirical evidence, but rather exploits the evidence generated by the existing literature to conduct an innovative cross-case comparative analysis. Official documents issued by national and regional institutions, as well as specialised media coverage, provided additional sources of information, which served the purposes of filling information gaps and testing the reliability of the evidence gathered from the survey of the literature.

Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

In this section we use QCA to identify the causal pathways to the **survival** of Latin American ROs in crisis. Interestingly, the QCA shows that two explanatory conditions can independently explain RO survival: the presence of a **distributive conflict** and the availability of **majority voting**. To use Boolean language: the two conditions are sufficient to explain Latin American ROs' survival of crisis. More specifically, the QCA yields the following two pathways to the outcome separated by a disjunction, which in Boolean logic is represented by the symbol (+):

| |
|--|
| Distributive conflict + Majority voting → RO survival |
|--|

The first path has only one condition: the **distributive nature** of the interstate conflict underlying an RO crisis. This finding confirms our theoretical expectation that distributive conflicts do not threaten RO survival (H1.1), inasmuch as they push dissatisfied/challenger members to either try to negotiate a compromise solution that accommodates their preferences, or else exit the RO in order to pursue their economic interests outside the bloc. In three cases (Andean Pact/CAN 1992-1997; Mercosur 1999-2000 and 2001-2002) out of the four covered by this path (see Table 2), member states forged ad hoc compromises that led dissatisfied states to back down from their challenges to the status quo. In one case (CACM 1969-1972), dissatisfied states first tried to challenge the status quo, but in the absence of a viable compromise either backed down (Nicaragua) or withdrew from the RO (Honduras).

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The second causal path to RO survival confirms theoretical expectations as to the presence of **majority voting** increasing ROs' chances of surviving a crisis (H2). In all four cases covered by this path (see Table 2), majority voting allowed a group of member states to overcome preference divergence by outvoting or threatening to outvote the dissenting member(s), forcing them to either compromise or leave the RO. In three cases (Andean Pact 1976, CAN 2006, Mercosur 2016) out of four, a group of member states used majority voting rules to overcome a severe normative conflict, either pushing the dissatisfied members toward withdrawal from the RO (e.g. Chile's exit from the Andean Pact in 1976 and Venezuela's exit from CAN in 2006), or simply suspending them (e.g. Venezuela's suspension from Mercosur in 2016). In the only case (Andean pact/CAN 1992-1997) where majority voting was present alongside a distributive conflict, the dissenting member (Peru) accepted a compromise solution and remained in the RO.⁶⁵

Interestingly, the results of the QCA indicate that regional leadership in support of the RO is a 'redundant' condition: that is, it does not have an impact on ROs' crisis survival. This finding disproves theoretical expectations regarding regional leadership as a determinant of RO survival (H3). That being said, we argue that the apparent irrelevance of regional leadership to Latin American ROs' crisis survival requires further investigation through PTA, which allows us to fill in the gaps of the QCA's logical minimisation.

Process tracing analysis (PTA)

We now turn to PTA to generate deeper within-case knowledge concerning the causal pathways to the survival or breakdown of Latin American ROs in crisis. We conduct a PTA of two exemplary cases of the pathways to RO survival identified by QCA: Mercosur's 1999-2000 and 2016 crises. Additionally, we conduct a PTA of the UNASUR crisis, which allows us to explore the "perfect storm" configuration that led to the only case of breakdown experienced by a Latin American RO in the face of crisis.

The 1999-2000 crisis of Mercosur

Mercosur is a regional economic bloc composed of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela (which became a full member in 2012 and was suspended in 2016), which was created in 1991 as a result of bilateral policy convergence between Argentina and Brazil. At the outset, Mercosur experienced an increase in intra-regional trade thanks to the liberalisation efforts undertaken by its member states. However, growing trade interdependence was not matched by equal progress in implementing common macroeconomic policies, which left the RO vulnerable to external financial shocks.

Additionally, Mercosur has suffered from member states' lack of compliance with agreed measures,⁶⁶ which made the bloc an imperfect customs union prone to trade disputes.⁶⁷

The 1999-2000 crisis was triggered by the Asian financial crisis, an exogenous event that caused a recession in Brazil, and created incentives to take back control of trade policy through unilateral measures that violated Mercosur's rules. In January 1999, the Brazilian government unilaterally devaluated its national currency by 40%. Brazil's devaluation caused significant tensions with neighbouring states (particularly Argentina), who complained of the flooding of their markets with cheap Brazilian products, which exacerbated trade imbalances within Mercosur. The devaluation hurt key sectors in Argentina as well as in smaller member states, leading the governments of Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay to denounce the violation of the bloc's trade rules, and to ask for compensatory measures.⁶⁸ Brazil's resistance to compensation led the Argentine government to retaliate by imposing unilateral restrictions on bilateral trade with Brazil, affecting products such as iron, textiles, steel and sugar. Brazil responded by imposing unilateral restrictions on Argentine products, which pushed Argentina to threaten to make use of the Latin American Integration Association's safeguard mechanism.⁶⁹ In July 1999, the government of Brazil suspended all negotiations in retaliation for Argentina's provocative move, and initiated a separate negotiation with CAN.⁷⁰ Brazil's Foreign Affairs Minister would go on to declare that the government seriously considered the possibility of dissolving Mercosur.⁷¹

Mercosur's 1999-2000 crisis complies with two of our crisis indicators: there was a manifest threat that a member (Brazil) could leave the RO, and an institutional stalemate occurred over compliance with the bloc's trade rules. The conflict underlying the crisis was related to the costs that Brazil's devaluation imposed on the other members, which led Argentina to breach

the free trade agreement. The RO's consensus voting rule did not allow the member states to impose a majoritarian solution on the conflict caused by Brazil's devaluation. That is, the other members could not force Brazil to change its policy and compensate its partners. Nonetheless, the limitations of Mercosur's institutional design did not prevent members from reaching a compromise through inter-presidential diplomacy⁷² and the flexibilisation of existing institutional arrangements.⁷³ Eventually, Brazil negotiated an ad hoc solution to the trade dispute based on compensatory measures. Additionally, the heads of state of Argentina and Brazil signed a bilateral agreement in which they stated their commitment to rescuing Mercosur from the most serious crisis since its creation.⁷⁴ The combination of Brazil's compensatory measures and bilateral interpresidential diplomacy paved the way for a positive resolution of the crisis.

One might argue that Brazil's regional leadership had an impact on the resolution of the crisis. Brazil's foreign policy executive (i.e. the president and the foreign minister) imposed its priorities over the domestic interests of various sectors, public and private, which opposed concessions to Argentina. This reaffirmed the country's strategic interest in Mercosur on the basis of a cost-benefit calculation.⁷⁵ The external threats posed by the US-led Free Trade Area of the Americas, the stagnation of multilateral trade liberalisation in the WTO, and the need to advance as a bloc in trade negotiations with the EU, made the Brazilian government realise that preserving Mercosur was worth the economic concessions required by the other members.⁷⁶ While Brazil eventually exercised its leadership capacities to preserve Mercosur, it was also the originator of the dispute and the "challenger" in the crisis. Nonetheless, the distributive nature of the conflict paved the way for a compromise solution through Brazil's concessions to its partners (e.g. a voluntary export agreement with Argentina). The decision

of the Argentine and Brazilian governments to seek a bilateral compromise responded to cost-benefit calculations related to the potential domestic losses from Mercosur's breakdown. Hence, while Brazil ultimately exercised leadership in support of Mercosur to resolve the crisis, the impact of such leadership was secondary to the impact of the distributive nature of the interstate conflict.

The crisis outcome was the survival of Mercosur. Along with ad hoc compensatory measures, Brazil proposed a "relaunch" agenda aimed at turning Mercosur into a genuine customs union.⁷⁷ However, the agenda did not generate tangible commitments to reform the RO's institutional structure and address the thorny issues of exchange rate coordination and intra-regional asymmetries.⁷⁸ As a consequence, a new distributive conflict would break out in the first quarter of 2001, sending the bloc into a new crisis (Mercosur's 2001-2002 crisis).

The 2016-2017 crisis of Mercosur

Mercosur's 2016-2017 crisis was triggered by the erosion of democracy in Venezuela, which had become a full member of the RO in 2012. Since 2015, interstate tensions had been growing due to Venezuela's severe economic crisis, combined with the authoritarian drift of the government of Nicolás Maduro. Preference divergence among Mercosur's members was exacerbated by the coming to power of right-of-centre governments in Argentina and Brazil, which adopted a critical stance vis-à-vis Venezuela's human rights situation.⁷⁹

The crisis broke out in July 2016, when Venezuela was expected to take over Mercosur's pro tempore presidency (PTP) from Uruguay. The opposition of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay caused an interstate dispute that forced the government of Uruguay to suspend a Mercosur presidential summit. Two meetings of the Common Market Council (CMC) (the bloc's highest

decision-making body) were also cancelled due to the preference divergence among member governments.⁸⁰ Uruguay favoured the transfer of the PTP to Venezuela, in order to avoid institutional paralysis and the isolation of the Maduro government.⁸¹ The Uruguayan government eventually handed the PTP over to Venezuela, a move rejected by the other members, who argued that Venezuela was not fit to assume the PTP due to its failure to comply with the bloc's trade rules and to ratify the Protocol of Human Rights.⁸² The Venezuelan government took over the PTP against the opposition of three of Mercosur's founding members, which plunged the RO into an institutional paralysis.

The worsening of the political crisis in Venezuela—where the executive stripped the National Assembly (controlled by the opposition) of its powers with the support of a Supreme Court dominated by pro-government judges—pushed the founding members to take further action. The governments of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, this time with Uruguay's support, gave Venezuela four months to comply with the RO's membership rules and avoid suspension. In December 2016, once the deadline expired, the founding members temporarily suspended Venezuela for not incorporating Mercosur's membership rules, invoking a violation of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.⁸³ Throughout 2017, Venezuela's domestic situation further deteriorated due to the government's decision to call for the election of a new constituent assembly. The opposition boycotted the process, which allowed the government to take control of the constituent assembly and deepen its authoritarian grip over the Venezuelan state. This caused massive protests across the country, which the government violently cracked down on. The member governments of Mercosur vocally denounced the authoritarian drift of President Maduro.⁸⁴ In August 2017, the foreign ministers of Argentina,

Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay announced their decision to indefinitely suspend Venezuela by activating the RO's democratic clause.⁸⁵

This crisis complies with all four criteria of our definition of an RO crisis. There was: (i) a manifest threat that a member state (Venezuela) could be suspended from the RO; (ii) an institutional stalemate regarding the implementation of the RO's rules and procedures; (iii) a decrease in institutionalised cooperation at the political level; and (iv) the violation of the democratic standards enshrined in the bloc's democracy protection clause. The institutional design of Mercosur's democratic clause played a key role in providing a way out of the crisis, allowing the other members to suspend Venezuela for violating the bloc's democratic standards. Unlike UNASUR's democratic clause, Mercosur's clause does not require the consent of the targeted state to be activated, but only the consensual approval of the other member states. The democratic clause's consensus-minus-one provision thus represented de facto majority voting, and this allowed for Mercosur's institutional paralysis to be overcome. The governments of Argentina and Brazil exercised regional leadership in support of the RO by condemning the Venezuelan government's authoritarian drift, and advocating the activation of Mercosur's democratic clause. Nonetheless, it was the presence of majority voting that allowed the founding members to suspend Venezuela and rescue Mercosur from the risk of breakdown. The crisis outcome was Mercosur's survival, which was achieved through the lawful suspension of the "challenger" state.

The breakdown of UNASUR (2017-2019)

In 2008 all twelve South American states created UNASUR, an intergovernmental RO in which decisions at all levels were made by consensus. Between 2012 and 2018, the RO had its own

general secretariat, which ran on a limited budget and exercised an administrative function in support of intergovernmental decision-making. UNASUR's crisis was triggered by events exogenous to the RO. Domestic political changes in several member states led to intergovernmental preference divergence, which resulted in a severe normative conflict. After the Venezuelan opposition won the 2015 election to the National Congress, the Maduro government started to transition from an illiberal democracy to an authoritarian regime⁸⁶. Meanwhile, national elections (in Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador) and the impeachment of a president (in Brazil) brought right-of-centre governments to power in several South American states. The new governments took a critical stance vis-à-vis Venezuela, accusing Maduro of violating the democratic standards enshrined in UNASUR's democratic clause.⁸⁷

The crisis became manifest when member states failed to elect the bloc's new secretary general.⁸⁸ The mandate of former secretary Ernesto Samper expired in January 2017; yet the governments of Venezuela, Bolivia and Suriname opposed the only official candidate, former Argentinean senator José Octavio Bordón.⁸⁹ The situation evolved into an overt institutional paralysis when six member states (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru) suspended their participation in and contributions to UNASUR in response to the deadlock caused by Venezuela and its allies. As a consequence, UNASUR took on the status of a "dead" RO: the RO's headquarters were stripped of human and financial resources, and both political and sectoral cooperation activities stopped.⁹⁰ In August 2018, the new Colombian government of Iván Duque announced its decision to withdraw from UNASUR. Following Colombia, the governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay

also announced their decision to withdraw from the RO, prompting a disintegration process unprecedented in the history of Latin American ROs.

The case of UNASUR complies with all four criteria of our definition of an RO crisis: (i) several members threatened to leave; (ii) an institutional stalemate occurred; (iii) political/sectoral cooperation decreased drastically; and (iv) the bloc's democratic standards were violated by Venezuela. The crisis was the result of a "perfect storm" scenario that combined all the conditions conducive to breakdown. Firstly, the crisis was triggered by a normative conflict related to Venezuela's violation of UNASUR's democratic standards. The normative nature of the conflict hampered any possibility of a compromise between Venezuela (and its allies) and the other members, inasmuch as the two parties could not find a common ground regarding the respect of a core norm of the RO. Secondly, UNASUR's consensus voting rule exacerbated the crisis by preventing the election of a new secretary general⁹¹ and the activation of the bloc's democratic clause.⁹² Differently from Mercosur, UNASUR's democratic clause requires the consensus of the affected member state to be activated.⁹³ The combination of a severe normative conflict and the absence of majority voting plunged UNASUR into an institutional paralysis in which the majority of members could not legally impose a solution on the "challenger", which used the RO as a diplomatic battleground for challenging the democracy protection norm.

The third condition of the "perfect storm" configuration was the absence of regional leadership in support of the RO. Brazil was the only actor endowed with the leadership capacities for facilitating a negotiated solution to the crisis. However, Brazil's foreign policy experienced a paralysis during and after the 2016 impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, which tipped the South American giant into a phase of political and institutional instability.⁹⁴

Additionally, the transitional government that emerged from the impeachment adopted a critical stance against UNASUR, which was accused of undue interference in Brazil's domestic affairs.⁹⁵ The newly elected president, Jair Bolsonaro, exacerbated Brazil's hostility toward UNASUR by formalising its decision to leave the bloc, which gave the finishing blow to the RO's survival chances.

In sum, UNASUR's breakdown resulted from a "perfect storm" configuration composed of a normative conflict that took place in the absence of majority voting and of regional leadership in support of the RO in crisis. However, we argue that the key component of the perfect storm that hit UNASUR was the combination of a normative conflict (over the core norm of democracy protection) and consensus decision-making. The absence of regional leadership in support of UNASUR exacerbated the crisis, yet even a proactive Brazil could hardly have persuaded the contending parties to find a compromise over Venezuela's blatant violation of UNASUR's democratic standards.

Discussion of findings

The empirical evidence generated by the QCA and the PTA provides a set of relevant insights into the logics of crisis in Latin American ROs. The findings tell us that in spite of the high frequency of RO crises in Latin America, the most recurrent outcome (seven cases out of eight) of said crises is RO survival. This confirms the resilience of Latin American regionalism,⁹⁶ while begging the question as to what factors explain Latin American ROs' crisis survival. Our analysis shows that the distributive nature of interstate conflicts and the availability of majority voting are both sufficient conditions for RO survival, which confirms our theoretical expectations (H1.1 and H2). We posit that the fact that distributive conflicts result in the survival of ROs is

related to the rational cost-benefit calculations of dissatisfied/challenger states, which lead them to either accept a compromise solution or leave the RO to pursue their economic interests outside the bloc. Findings also show that the availability of majority voting allows a group of member states to overcome preference divergence, irrespective of the nature of the interstate conflict, and ensure RO survival. The relevance of majority voting illustrates how sovereignty pooling increases the viability of regionalism also in strongly intergovernmental ROs like Latin American ones.

The only case of breakdown of a Latin American RO as a result of a crisis (UNASUR) displays a “perfect-storm” combination of a normative conflict taking place in a decision-making system based on consensus, which further confirms the significance of majority voting as a determinant of RO crisis outcomes. On the other hand, the case of UNASUR allows us to refine our theoretical expectation as to normative conflicts’ impact on crisis outcomes. We expected the risk of an RO breakdown to be higher in the event of a normative conflict (H1.2). However, the UNASUR crisis was the only case in which a normative conflict resulted in an RO breakdown. In Mercosur’s 2016-2017 crisis, the availability of a consensus-minus-one provision for the activation of the bloc’s democratic clause allowed the four founding member states to overcome a normative conflict related to Venezuela’s democratic backsliding by suspending Venezuela. Similarly, the availability of majority voting allowed the normative conflicts that hit the Andean Pact (1976) and CAN (2006) to be overcome, by enabling a group of member states to outvote (or threaten to outvote) the dissatisfied/challenger members (respectively Chile and Venezuela), which pushed them to leave the RO. This shows that normative conflicts are more likely to lead to an RO breakdown in the absence of majority voting.

Finally, the QCA indicates that regional leadership in support of the RO in crisis is not a key determinant of RO survival in Latin America, which disproves theoretical expectations as to regional leadership's impact on crisis outcomes (H3). The PTA of Mercosur's 1999-2000 and 2016-2017 crises clarifies this finding by showing that the impact of Brazil's leadership in support of Mercosur was secondary to the impact of the distributive nature of interstate conflicts (in the 1999-2000 crisis), and of the availability of majority voting (in the 2016 crisis). Similarly, the PTA of the UNASUR crisis reveals how Brazil's lack of support for the RO was not a key determinant of the RO's breakdown, but rather catalysed the impact of the "perfect storm" combination of a normative conflict taking place in the absence of majority voting.

Interestingly, in four of the seven cases of RO survival, the challenger(s) either left (Honduras/CACM in 1970, Chile/Andean Pact in 1976, Venezuela/CAN in 2006) or got suspended (Venezuela/Mercosur in 2016). The recurrence of changes in RO membership poses an interesting paradox concerning the resilience of Latin American ROs, which often survive crises through horizontal disintegration. The UNASUR crisis is an exception to this trend, inasmuch as the challenger (Venezuela) managed to stay in the RO, pushing nine member states to leave and provoking the RO's breakdown. One may argue that as the number of dissatisfied members increases, the chances of RO survival diminish. Additionally, the presence of overlapping ROs in Latin America⁹⁷ might have played a role in the breakdown of UNASUR, whose member states were also members of other ROs such as Mercosur, CAN and the Pacific Alliance. This might have reduced the costs of exit, facilitating UNASUR's disintegration. It is also worth noting that UNASUR was the only RO that did not deal with trade, which may have reduced the economic costs of withdrawal. As we have only one case of breakdown in our universe, we cannot test these alternative hypotheses as to the impact

of the number of dissatisfied states, the presence of overlapping ROs, and the levels of economic interdependence. Testing such hypotheses will require further investigation on a larger universe of RO crises from different world regions.

Finally, Latin American ROs' tendency to survive crises is associated with the preservation of the status quo in terms of institutional design. In all the cases of RO survival, member states overcame the crisis by applying existing rules or forging ad hoc compromises based on the temporary flexibilisation of existing rules (particularly in the Andean Pact/CAN and Mercosur),⁹⁸ rather than by addressing the deeper roots of the crisis through institutional reform. This shows how Latin American ROs have been not only resilient to crises but also resistant to change. In some cases (e.g. CACM and CAN), surviving ROs became zombie ROs that "maintain a level of semi-regular operation, but output in terms of progress on their goals falls below expectations".⁹⁹ The resilience of Latin American ROs thus does not seem to stem from their vitality, but rather from their capacity to weather the storms provoked by intergovernmental conflicts, neither moving forward nor backward. This might be related to the institutional flexibility of Latin American ROs, in the form of institutional designs that admit non-compliance and allow for ad hoc flexibilisation of existing rules and procedures. Such flexibility allows member states to cope with preference divergence by derogating from the implementation of the ROs' existing rules and procedures,¹⁰⁰ providing a valuable crisis management tool.

Overall, our findings confirm the hard-to-die tendency of IGOs identified by the IR literature.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, Latin American ROs' propensity for institutional inertia¹⁰² and inconsequential endurance¹⁰³ shows that in Latin America there is no room for the "functional optimism" of EU integration theories. Unlike the crises of the EU, Latin American ROs' crises

have not led to the deepening of regional integration, but rather to the preservation of the status quo, at times associated with a “zombie” status.

Conclusions

This article investigated the outcomes of the multiple crises that have affected Latin American ROs across time, uncovering the causal pathways to the survival or breakdown of ROs in crisis. To do so, we formulated a definition of RO crisis that allowed us to define a universe of eight crises, and tested a set of hypotheses as to the impact of three endogenous conditions on ROs' crisis outcomes. We conducted a QCA of the cases of RO crisis survival (seven cases out of eight), which we complemented with the PTA of two emblematic cases of the pathways to RO survival identified by the QCA, and of the one outlier case of UNASUR, which shows RO breakdown rather than survival.

Our findings provide a set of insights into the logic of crisis in Latin American regionalism. Firstly, Latin American ROs are highly resilient to crises. In fact, they hardly ever die. Our analysis shows that the most prevalent outcome of Latin American ROs' crises is the survival of the affected ROs and the preservation of their status quo in terms of institutional design. Differently from the case of the EU, the crises of Latin American ROs do not seem to lead to the deepening of regional integration, but rather to ROs' institutional inertia,¹⁰⁴ which in some cases is accompanied by the temporary flexibilisation of existing rules and procedures.¹⁰⁵ The UNASUR case stands out as an outlier in the history of Latin American regionalism, inasmuch as it is the only crisis that resulted in an RO breakdown. Secondly, our findings show that the nature of interstate conflicts and the voting rules for decision-making are the key determinants of the outcomes of RO crises in Latin America. The availability of majority voting

and the distributive nature of interstate conflicts is positively correlated with RO survival. Interestingly, regional leadership does not seem to play a decisive role in Latin American ROs' crisis survival.

This article contributes to the literature on Latin American regionalism and the comparative regionalism research agenda. It sheds light on the logics of crises in Latin American regionalism by conducting the first comparative analysis of the outcomes of Latin American ROs' crises across time. In so doing, the article fuels the dialogue between Latin American studies, the IR scholarship on IGO death/vitality, and EU studies on disintegration, advancing our understanding of the endogenous determinants of RO crisis outcomes. The generalisation scope of our findings is limited to Latin America. Future research will have to demonstrate whether our crisis taxonomy and theoretical framework can be applied to RO crises in other world regions, and whether our findings can find confirmation outside Latin America.

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