

# Social Group Dynamics and Patterns of Latin American Integration Processes\*

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**ABSTRACT** | This article proposes to incorporate social psychology elements with mainstream political science and international relations theories to help understand the contradictions related to the integration processes in Latin America. Through a theoretical analysis, it contributes to the challenge proposed by Dabène (2009) to explain the “resilience” of the Latin American regional integration process in spite of its “instability and crises.” Our main proposition calls for considering Latin America as a community and its regional organizations as “social groups.” In conclusion, three phenomena from the field of social psychology and particularly social group dynamics shed light on these contradictory patterns: the value of the group and the emotional bond, groupthink, and cognitive dissonance.

**KEYWORDS** | Regionalism, social psychology, international relations, Latin America (Thesaurus); Latin American Community, integration, social group dynamics (Author)

## Dinámicas de grupos sociales y procesos de integración en América Latina

**RESUMEN** | Este artículo propone incorporar elementos de la psicología social a las perspectivas tradicionales de la ciencia política y de las relaciones internacionales para explicar las dinámicas contradictorias de los procesos de la integración latinoamericana. Mediante un análisis teórico, responde al desafío planteado por Dabène (2009) para explicar la “resiliencia” de la agenda integracionista en la región a pesar de su “inestabilidad y crisis”. El principal argumento consiste en considerar a Latinoamérica como una comunidad, y sus organizaciones regionales, como “grupos sociales”. Como conclusión, se plantea que tres fenómenos definidos por la psicología social, específicamente por la psicología social de grupos, permiten esclarecer estos patrones contradictorios: el valor del grupo y el vínculo emocional; el pensamiento grupal; y la disonancia cognitiva.

**PALABRAS CLAVE** | Regionalismo, integración, psicología social, relaciones internacionales, América Latina (Thesaurus); comunidad latinoamericana, dinámicas de grupos sociales (Autor).

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## Dinâmicas de grupos sociais e processos de integração na América Latina

**RESUMO** | Este artigo propõe incorporar elementos da psicologia social às perspectivas tradicionais da ciência política e das relações internacionais para explicar as dinâmicas contraditórias dos processos de integração latino-americana. Mediante uma análise teórica, responde ao desafio proposto por Dabène (2009) para explicar a “resiliência” da agenda integracionista na região apesar da sua “instabilidade e crise”. O principal argumento consiste em considerar a América Latina como uma comunidade e suas organizações regionais como “grupos sociais”. Como conclusão, propõem-se que três fenômenos definidos pela psicologia social, particularmente pela psicologia social de grupos, permitem esclarecer essas contradições: o valor do grupo e a vinculação emocional; o pensamento grupal e a dissonância cognitiva.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** | América Latina, psicologia social, integração, relações internacionais (Thesaurus); regionalismo, comunidade latino-americana, dinâmicas de grupos sociais (Autor)

### Introduction

Latin American international relations are characterized by an active diplomatic agenda involving leaders frequently meeting –very frequently– at summits to stimulate the political and economic integration of the region or to create new organizations. Nevertheless, the balance of the integration process in Latin America has been considered at best limited and at worst a failure. In this context, this intense diplomatic activity, the multiplication of organizations with no real power and independence, and the participation in multilateral organizations that do not fulfill their goals are hard to understand from traditional political or economic perspectives. That is, these interrelated dynamics challenge institutional, structural and rational choice explanations, to mention some leading analytical approaches used in the study of Latin American integration (Oyarzún 2008).

This article offers a complementary explanation of these dynamics of contradictions from a social psychology perspective. Concretely, it suggests a set of arguments explaining the contradictory aspect of Latin American integration processes, relating it to the existence of a “community” of Latin American countries in which regional organizations are treated as “social groups.” Our main argument is that the existence of this community, easily observable in the discourse of authorities and the principles of various regional organizations and treaties, affects the decision-making processes regarding regional integration. In this sense, the proposed theoretical contribution applies the logic that Kaarbo (2008, 58) develops when she suggests that we “bring together research from social psychology on group processes and from political science on political institutions and foreign policy decision making.” Therefore, our claim is twofold. We suggest that Kaarbo’s theoretical proposition to understand coalition government dynamics applies to the Latin

American integration processes and we believe that this theoretical perspective allows highlighting the social component of integration in the region.

The first section of the article presents and illustrates in broader details the contradictions in the behaviors and the discourses mentioned above. The second section analyzes them from a social psychology perspective, describing and applying key dynamics of social groups. Since this article seeks to contribute to the discussion launched by Dabène on the resilience of Latin American integration processes –explained in the next section– we use that author’s definition of regional integration. According to Dabène (2009, 10-11), regional integration is a “historical process of increased levels of interaction between political units (subnational, national, or transnational), provided by actors sharing common ideas, setting objectives, and defining methods to achieve them, and by so doing contributing to building a region.” This definition allows us to consider not only the largest regional organizations such as the Celac (Community of Latin American and Caribbean Countries) and the Unasur (Union of South American Nations), but the five major sub-regional organizations such as the Mercosur (Common Market of South America) and the CAN (Andean Community of Nations) as well. It also allows us to consider the existing and increasing “myriad of bilateral and multilateral agreements” (Dabène 2009, 4).

### A Region of Constant Contradictions

For decades, the Latin American integration processes have been characterized by a set of contradictory tendencies and inconsistencies among behaviors, foreign policy decisions, discourses and empirical results of the numerous organizations and treaties created. A few years ago, Dabène resumed the general

historical dynamics of the process since the 1960s in this double contradiction: “consistency despite instability” and “resilience despite crises” (2009, 5).

Concretely, among the particularities that best describe the broad dynamics of the agenda of regional integration since the creation of the ALADI (Latin American Association of Integration) in 1960, it is easy to observe: 1) the numerous individual critiques regarding the achievements of existing treaties and organizations; 2) the constant tendencies to create new organizations rather than to consolidate the existing ones; 3) the intense diplomatic agenda of the region’s heads of state meeting in integration organizations and using a collective public discourse of constant progress at each summit; 4) the frequent reference to common identity, history and culture in both discourses and treaties; and 5) the constant attraction to regional organizations and the fact that countries basically never leave them, in spite of their frustrations.

### Frustrations and Critiques

From a political point of view, one of the most illustrative descriptions of the reality of regional integration processes in Latin America is arguably a critique made by Uruguayan president Tabaré Vázquez after his first term (2005-2010). After a first mandate that was marked by a long conflict with Argentina over a papermill on the banks of the Uruguay River that brought both countries to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Vázquez (2013) made the following remarks:

More vocation than the Latin American to integrate, there is none in the whole world. But more inefficiency for integration either since for that reason, there are so many regional integration processes. Because until now, none of them has offered solutions to the real problems of our people.<sup>1</sup>

In the South American context, recent years have also been characterized by critiques from Mercosur members against what is arguably the most successful integration agreement of the region (Cason 2011, 2). Just to cite a few examples, it is possible to recall Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff’s calls to “make flexible” the internal norms of the Mercosur (“Rousseff defiende ‘flexibilidad’” 2015); Uruguay’s accusations against Argentina’s measures blocking integration (“Argentina considera ‘injustas’ críticas de Mujica por Mercosur” 2015); or Paraguayan authorities’ criticisms of the instability in applying the organization’s rules (“Paraguay critica el permanente ‘cambio de criterio’ de sus socios del Mercosur” 2013).

### Multiplication of Organizations rather than Consolidation of Existing Ones

It is interesting to observe a particular phenomenon involving Latin America when it comes to the “vocation for integration” described by Tabaré Vázquez. Usually, dissatisfaction with the rhythm or the results of the integration process has not led to a deepening or consolidation of the existing treaties and organizations, but rather to the constant creation of new initiatives. An interesting example illustrating this fact is the opinion and behavior of former Chilean President Sebastián Piñera (2010-2014). On the one hand, Piñera criticized the large number of meetings and organizations promoting integration, claiming “[w]e have the Mercosur, the Unasur, the ALBA,<sup>2</sup> the MCCA,<sup>3</sup> the Andean Community, the Mercosur Parliament, the Andean Parliament [...] and our problems remain and we lack further integration” (“Presidente Piñera pide acelerar integración” 2011). On the other hand, Piñera maintained the Chilean policy of limited involvement in the Mercosur and in 2011, he enthusiastically participated in the foundation of the Pacific Alliance (PA), an organization created after the stalling Pacific Arch, launched only four years before (Briceño 2010).

The rapid transformation of the Pacific Arch into the PA is, nevertheless, an anomaly in the region in the sense that organizations are not often replaced or transformed. When Latin American countries lose interest in an organization, their leaders usually alienate themselves from it but not to the point of abandoning the organization or eliminating it. The example given by Parthenay regarding the Central American Integration System (SICA) is illustrative of that dynamics. In SICA, the author argues, “some presidents have pragmatically distanced themselves from presidential summits, thus creating a vicious circle detrimental to regional integration” (Parthenay 2016, 3129).

One of the most important consequences of the above-mentioned dynamic is a complex logic of leaders multiplying organizations and refusing to consolidate and institutionalize the existing ones. This tendency leads to “overlapping,” or a situation in which a large number of organizations share the same interests and objectives. Even though there is no consensus on the nature and level of the impact of overlapping on the general dynamics of Latin American integration (see Nolte and Comini 2016, 547-549), authors such as Malamud and Gardini (2012) and Portales (2016) claim that it causes divisions and serious problems of coordination. In the same vein, Altmann argues that “Latin America is not only fragmented, but also fractured and weakened

1 Free translation by the authors of the article.

2 “ALBA” stands for Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America.

3 “MCCA” stands for “Central American Common Market.”

by an oversupply of integration processes [...]causing] pressures on the leaders' agenda, a lack of coordination, convergence problems and weak institutionalization explained by the leaders' refusal to transfer powers to supranational entities" (Altmann 2011, 213).<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, where some see institutional weakness, others see flexibility. For example, rather than focus on these supposed consequences of overlapping, Nolte and Comini propose the argument according to which an organization such as the Unasur was created because its member countries "wanted it to happen." The organization also has "institutional flexibility" because it is what South American governments "wanted it to be" (2016, 546). In this sense, the institutional dynamics of Latin American integration is a product of the decisions and preferences of leaders. And the absence of strong, consolidated, autonomous or rigid regional institutions is a deliberate choice of decision-makers.

This idea of deliberate choice is also observable in Cason's analysis of the Mercosur. According to said author, the reluctance of leaders to strengthen the regional institutions is a "self-conscious" strategy designed "to increase the flexibility in the process by *not*<sup>5</sup> tying the hands of the integration partners, since they know unexpected shocks present themselves" (Cason 2011, 13). Along the same lines, for the Chilean diplomat Carlos Portales, the combination of the three different dynamics—the multiplication of organizations, the overlapping on issues, and the problems of coordination—explains the "erosion of [member states'] commitment to realize the goals they have agreed on." Portales also suggests that this organizational context contributes to cynicism when he relates it to the example of former Uruguayan President José Mujica's answer to a journalist asking him about the decisions taken at a Mercosur summit. "I do not know... We agree on a statement," said the Uruguayan leader (Portales 2016, 5023).

### **Intense Diplomatic Activity and the Impossibility of Being Against Integration**

This last quote from Portales is directly related to a striking fact also revealed by the diplomat: "[t]he total number of summits among countries in the region increased from 31 between 1947 and 1989 to 303 from 1990 to 2012" (Portales 2016, 4944). That is, during the Cold War era, Latin American leaders met in different kinds of summits on an average of once every twenty months, but since the end of the Cold War, they have attended summits approximately thirteen times a year,

mostly in regular meetings of organizations intended to promote cooperation and regional integration.

Even though Latin American leaders frequently criticize the organizations, they constantly meet and the summits "typically end with a communiqué, a group photo, and the assurance that the meeting has been quite useful and extremely productive" (Mace *et al.* 2016a, 5031). That is, the official discourse of the leaders is highly optimistic when they are together and in public. Nevertheless, Mace *et al.* add that behind these official discourses, there usually is "a wide gap between the objectives laid out in summit communiqués and concrete results."

The inconsistencies between empirical results and official discourses, and the heavy diplomatic activity resulting from the multiplication of organizations have two consequences in the regional diplomatic practices. To relate them to social psychology, both of these consequences highlight the existence of a Latin American community, an idea that will be developed in the second section of this article. The first consequence is illustrated by Jenne and Schenoni (2015) in a recent investigation in which the authors analyze Latin American leaders' speeches before the United Nations General Assembly between 1994 and 2014. The authors make this significant assertion: "it is remarkable that governments have thought it necessary to make an average of more than four allusions to the region in each of the[ir] speeches" (Jenne and Schenoni 2015, 2). For these authors, the combination of the discourses laying out the importance of regional cooperation with the setbacks of the integration processes makes them conclude with the existence of a "declaratory regionalism in Latin America." By declaratory regionalism, they mean an "act of discursively referring to regional organizations, regional identities and/or the macro- and micro-regions the Latin American countries see themselves as being part of" (Jenne and Schenoni 2015, 1).

The second consequence of the gap between the speeches and the results of integration processes follows the same perspective, but this time from a more qualitative focus. According to Rivera (2014, 13-14), the logic of the existence of repeated discourses referring to regional cooperation makes it highly difficult for Latin American leaders to oppose regional integration publicly. In the end, in spite of their dissatisfaction and their frustrations with regional cooperation, Latin American leaders meet often, constantly refer to their unity, and tend to adopt a collective discourse highlighting the progress of the political and economic integration processes.

4 Free translation by the authors of this article.

5 Emphasis in the original text.

## Frequent References to Common Identity in both Speeches and Treaties

The generalized pro-integration tone of the public speeches is also observable in the declaration of principles of various multilateral regional organizations, explicitly illustrating the idea of an existing community of Latin American countries, as will be further described in the second part of this article. References to a common history, common culture and the brotherhood of Latin American countries are frequent and also motivated the creation of the Celac, a regional organization whose principal characteristic is arguably that of including all the countries of the hemisphere, except for Canada and the United States. What is theoretically fundamental for the argument about the complementary contribution of social psychology to the study of Latin American integration processes is the fact that the community existed prior to the foundation of regional organizations in this region (Rivarola and Briceño 2013; Rivera 2014). Therefore, leaders' speeches tend to present regional integration as a natural outcome. This is a paramount difference with respect to an organization or treaty generated precisely to create a new community with common identities and values —a logic observable in the transformation of the European Economic Community into the European Union, for example.

The existence of a Latin American community can also explain another fundamental fact about the history of international relations in the region. Even though the region has historically experienced a large number of boundary disputes and high levels of social and political violence, interstate relations have traditionally been very peaceful, especially when compared to other regions of the world (Domínguez and Covarrubias 2015, 1).

According to Domínguez *et al.* (2004), a major factor explaining the capacity to avoid the militarization of disputes has been, precisely, the sense of belonging to a social group of Latin American countries. As the authors claim:

An important ideological innovation in Latin America at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century contributed to interstate peace. The majority of the Hispano-American elites accepted the idea that they were all part of a broader cultural and potentially political entity. Thus, their nations should not fight one another. As was correctly observed by Miguel Ángel Centeno, there was no “complex discourse on international hatred,” but the basic idea that the neighbor country was not my enemy. (2004, 370)<sup>6</sup>

## Countries Fundamentally Never Leave Underachieving Regional Organizations

Latin American countries have initiated a great number of treaties and organizations, which explains the intense diplomatic agenda they maintain. An interesting fact about these organizations is that even in the case of the most criticized ones; exiting from them never seems to be an option. From a general point of view, it can be said that the organizations are never institutionalized, they are constantly criticized, they arguably do not fulfill their goals completely, they may be weakened by leaders, but they are basically never abandoned nor formally broken down. Chile's exit from the Andean Pact in 1978 and Venezuela's exit from the Andean Community of Nations in 2006 to join the Mercosur are the only examples of abandonment of a multilateral organization by a full-member country in half a century of regional integration processes in Latin America. Even though they have expressed concerns, dissatisfaction, and threats of abandoning the Mercosur for years, Paraguay and Uruguay have never come anywhere close to actually leaving the organization to gain more independence for their commercial policies.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that countries have abandoned political, judicial or diplomatic treaties and organizations such as the Inter-American Human Rights Court (IHR) or the Bogota Pact on certain occasions. However, these decisions always bring them heavy criticism, as was the case when the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez announced his country was leaving the IHR in 2012 (“Críticas a Venezuela por salida de la Corte IDH” 2012).

## Contradictions and Theoretical Difficulties in Explaining Them

The differences between the leaders' behaviors, the collective official discourses, the personal criticisms, on the one hand, and the concrete results of Latin American integration processes on the other, pose a serious challenge to traditional theoretical perspectives on cooperation and integration. For that reason, we agree with Dabène when the author claims “[a]ll these ups and downs [in the Latin American integration processes] make the exercise of theorization and prediction very risky and are an invitation to modesty” (2009, 5). According to that same author, they also show the limitations of traditional and mainstream European theoretical frameworks when applied to the Latin American reality.

Among the limitations of traditional theories of integration when it comes to explaining the contradictions of Latin American processes, four examples are illustrative. We agree with Dabène (2009) and Rivarola and Briceño (2013) that institutions matter and that the

6 Free translation by the authors of the article.

accumulated experience from history and contexts of decision-making processes are essential. But we believe that this perspective hardly helps to understand the multiplication of organizations and the survival of underachieving ones. From the constructivist position, we agree with Duina that an integration project, such as a free trade agreement, “is a social endeavor” (2006, 3). Nevertheless, this perspective can hardly offer explanations regarding the underachievement of the organizations created, the leaders’ reluctance to create real supranational regional organizations with effective powers, as well as their frequent lack of compliance. The same logic can also be applied to the limitations of traditional game theory models in the sense that repetition through time should facilitate cooperation, trust, and compliance (Axelrod 1986, 31). Latin American integration processes have a long history and leaders meet many times each year, but the results are weak and compliance is limited at best. Other traditional perspectives such as transnationalism or intergovernmentalism also have their limitations when observers of Latin American integration dynamics wish to explain the existence of weak institutions or the signing of agreements that are not applied and end in a state of inertia.

Our theoretical claim regarding the contribution of social psychology and social group dynamics to explain the contradictions in Latin American integration processes can be resumed in two main assertions. First, Latin American countries share enough cultural assets through many regional multilateral organizations to refer to the region as a community. Second, in this context, socialization takes on special importance and organizations promoting integration can be analyzed, in their broad dynamics, on the basis of the fact that they are “social groups.”

### **Social Group Dynamics and the Resilience of the Latin American Integration Processes**

How does this idea of Latin America as a community help to understand the decision-making processes and the contradictions regarding countries’ behavior in regional organizations? To answer this question, it is necessary to start considering step-by-step some central concepts from the subfield of the social psychology of groups in order to guide the analysis of the dynamics of formation and continuity of regional organizations and the decision-making processes of the region’s political leaders.

#### **The Definition of a Social Group Is and the Purpose of Group Formation**

The first element to start with, although it might seem trivial, is the definition of the concept of “group” and whether or not it fits with the regional dynamics of

international organizations in Latin America. That is, from a social psychology perspective, are regional organizations social groups? Is it therefore possible to speak of group behavior?

Following the ideas of social psychologist Henri Tajfel (1982, 2), a group can be defined on the basis of external and/or internal criteria. On the one hand, external criteria are designations from the outside, i.e., from individuals who do not belong to the “group,” like “college students” for professors and “college professors” for students. Internal criteria, on the other hand, relate to “group identification.” In order to achieve the level of identification, Tajfel claims that three kinds of elements are necessary: 1) a *cognitive* one in the sense of membership awareness; 2) an *evaluative* one in the sense that this awareness is related to value connotations; and 3) an *emotional investment* in the awareness and evaluation. These three elements can be found in the discourse of Latin American leaders and in various constitutive treaties of regional organizations. For example, the preamble of the foundational treaty of the Unasur mentions the existence of a “shared history and solidarity of our nations [...] that fought for emancipation and the South American unity,” and also a “determination to the construction of a South American identity and citizenship” (Unasur 2008).

The combination of cognitive, evaluative and commitment elements is also observable in declarations made at meetings of the Celac. During its 2016 annual meeting in Ecuador, the 33 heads of state attending adopted a declaration with a clear affirmation of a sense of belonging to a particular group. The official declaration of the organization’s summit starts by saying: “We, the heads of state and government of the Celac [...]; We reaffirm our decision to consolidate our unity and advance towards Latin American and Caribbean integration, based on profound historical roots, in the heritage of the Community [...], sharing values and related interests, and propose to achieve the well-being of our peoples” (Celac 2016).

In the same line of analysis, Tajfel and Turner (1986) point out that the essential criteria to belong to a group are that individuals define themselves and are defined by others as members of the group. In this sense, a group is defined as “a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership in it” (Tajfel and Turner 1986, 15). Here again, the origin and goals of the Celac, the first organization of countries including all, and only, Latin American and Caribbean countries, follow this logic. According to these authors, categorization is a cognitive tool to sort and classify the environment and generate identification, which results in social

identity. To claim that Latin American countries form a unique and distinct community echoes this categorization issue.

After labeling regional organizations as groups, the next question relates to the general purpose of group formation. Why do Latin American countries form groups? Following Bandura's logic (2000), we consider that countries, just like individuals, do not live their "lives" independently. For that matter, there are many results that can only be obtained through interdependent efforts. In the same vein, Lawler, Thye and Yoon (2000, 616) refer to the idea of social exchange as a joint activity, in which two or more players attempt to produce benefits that they would not receive if they were alone. In this regard, the commitment of people to a group has two important elements: the reduction of uncertainty and the production of positive emotions related to individual-group exchange.

In the historical context of Latin American integration processes, one clear example that serves to illustrate the need to form a group to obtain benefits that are unattainable individually is the process leading to the formation of the Mercosur between 1985 and 1994. The founding treaty served three major goals related to security and development that each of the member states felt unsure of attaining individually: the consolidation of democracy (Fournier 1999), the need to cooperate in a period of formation of regional blocks (Tulchin and Espach 2001) after the failure of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations, and the need to stabilize the economy after the decade of debt crisis (Edwards 1995). Since economic crises and threats to democratic stability are elements that produce great uncertainty for states, the Mercosur clearly illustrates the two benefits that group formation brings to partners: positive emotions and reduction of uncertainty (Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2000).

Furthermore, according to Lawler, Thye and Yoon (2000, 642), constant exchange reduces uncertainty; actors learn more about others, become more predictable, and may infer and confirm their orientations. These elements are considered to be benefits of commitment, as individuals tend to avoid uncontrollable and unpredictable contexts. From a political and diplomatic point of view, this constant exchange can be observed in the socialization function of the summits and numerous meetings involving Latin American leaders (Mace *et al.* 2016b). The more leaders meet, the more they start forming a group in which others' behavior becomes predictable and uncertainty is reduced. In that sense, not being part of the group, or leaving it, opens the door for unpredictable behavior and for greater uncertainty among the countries of the region.

## Group Dynamics and Decision-Making Processes

After describing some general characteristics and benefits of group formation, the next step is to contribute to the explanation of the resilience of the regional organizations. Two questions guide our analysis in this next section. First, why are Latin American organizations and treaties maintained over time if they apparently do not achieve the objectives for which they were created? Second, why do members accept decisions with which they may not feel comfortable? The argument here is that three group dynamics affect the decision-making processes regarding permanence in regional organizations. They are: 1) the value of the group itself, 2) groupthink, and 3) cognitive dissonance.

### The Value of the Group Itself and the Emotional Bond

Lawler, Thye and Yoon (2000, 623) argue that through a repetitive exchange, groups become social objects that have a cognitive and subjective reality for their members, and groups thus begin to have value of their own. This fact goes beyond the instrumental explanation; groups become objects of intrinsic value given the positive emotions that the exchange generates. Lawler and Yoon (1996, 105) also suggest that, unlike what rational choice theory may claim, the analysis of the group dynamics should focus on endogenous processes. That is, the decision to stay in a group is produced endogenously through relational cohesion, which reflects the fact that exchange has become an object of value in itself. In concrete political and diplomatic terms, this logic can explain why dissatisfied countries may threaten to leave an organization but rarely end up doing so. Here, the examples of Uruguay remaining in the Mercosur despite repeated conflicts with its neighbors, or Costa Rica remaining in the SICA in spite of major difficulties with Nicaragua, are illustrations of this phenomenon.

In this regard, Hudson (2007, 77) suggests that when a group is formed, two forces come into play: 1) a decision-making process aimed at solving the problem that motivated the group's formation; and 2) the motivation to continue functioning as a group. This is fundamental when the different waves of integration are directly related to crises or critical junctures (Dabène 2009, 27-28). In addition to this, group cohesion is a source of emotional support for the group since it decreases stress. However, when small groups are maintained over time, stress can be generated by fear of ostracism (Hudson 2007, 77). In this sense, Hudson's argument is that the fear originally generated by failure to meet the group's goals is compensated by the emotional support the group provides.

The emotional bond the group generates increases the costs of leaving it or of adopting a deviant behavior in the context of the “Latin American community” because of the negative reactions this behavior may provoke. The consequent fear of ostracism, the possibility of being held responsible for failure, and the distress that loss of emotional support generates seem to explain foreign policy decision-making dynamics when it comes to Latin American integration processes. One illustrative example is the decision of Chilean authorities to remain in the Pact of Bogota—until now—, fearing to be seen as a bad neighbor in a context of tense relations with Peru and Bolivia over border issues that have been brought to the International Court of Justice (Álvarez 2016).

### Groupthink

What is *groupthink* and how can it be linked to Latin American international relations and foreign policy decision-making regarding integration processes? The groupthink phenomenon in foreign policy decision-making has been analyzed by Janis (1982), who tries to explain some critical US foreign policy decisions. According to said author, groupthink is related to the deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from peer pressure. This occurs in highly cohesive groups where the need for unanimity exceeds the motivation to analyze new courses of action realistically. For Janis (1982, 7), policy-making groups are exposed to different types of pressures; members tend to develop informal norms to maintain friendly intragroup relations, and these become part of the hidden agenda at their meetings. In the case of regional organizations, the efforts and resources invested in integration processes over the years, plus the numerous speeches that different leaders have given extolling their importance, are elements that can generate the pressure needed to cause the emergence of groupthink in deciding whether or not to continue as members of a regional organization. That is, if the decision to be made relates to remaining or leaving the organization, the pressure experienced by group members can generate any of the flaws indicated by Janis.<sup>7</sup> The same logic of peer pressure and the adoption of suboptimal group decisions is even more likely to happen when decisions are taken on the basis of unanimity, as is the case with most of the Latin American organizations.

7 Janis (1982) identifies seven flaws in decision-making that affect problem-solving: 1) the group decision is limited to few alternatives; 2) the group does not discuss the goals and values involved in their decision; 3) the group fails to reexamine the initially chosen course of action; 4) members do not review courses of action initially assessed as negative; 5) they do not try to obtain information from experts; 6) there is a selective bias in terms of how the group reacts to specific information; 7) they do not have contingency plans to address any problems that arise.

Another concept that can be linked to the groupthink phenomenon regarding both the need for unanimity and the existence of peer pressure is the “black sheep effect.” Once a group is formed, a process of intergroup differentiation takes place. In addition to this separation, it is possible to distinguish in-group disparities as well. In this case each Latin American country has a specific role and a particular way of operating. According to Hogg (2001, 66), there are differences within the group in terms of how much members do or do not subscribe to the group prototype. The author brings up the concept of prototypical gradient; some people within the group are closer to the group’s prototype than others, and this can provide an understanding of group deviation phenomena. Hogg (2001, 68) also suggests that group members who do not seem to match the prototype attract negative reactions and are considered pathological and threatening. This is known as the “black sheep” phenomenon, in which reactions towards group members who deviate from the group prototype are even more negative than those towards people from other groups. Deviant behavior is thus seriously punished by group members.

In this regard, Marques *et al.* (2001, 408) indicate that when group members perceive that deviation affects the validity of the norm, it becomes a critical issue due to possible damages to group distinctiveness. The authors also note that this phenomenon may affect decision-making processes since it generates intolerance to different opinions, censorship, self-censorship and rejection of deviant members. Therefore, the black sheep effect may generate the flaws described by Janis (1982) and affect the decision-making process in terms of limiting the decision to a just few alternatives and biasing the reaction to information. Here again, Chile may represent an illustrative case of the black sheep effect as it tries to maintain its autonomy from regional organizations but cannot leave them, especially when it receives constant criticism from its neighbors (“Morales rechaza ‘chantajes’” 2015).

### Cognitive Dissonance

Furthermore, the groupthink phenomenon can also be linked to the concept of cognitive dissonance, which was originally proposed by Festinger (1957). According to that author, cognitive dissonance refers to the existence of inconsistent cognitions, i.e., two cognitive elements that do not fit together. Applied to the Latin American case, dissonance can be observed in the inconsistency between the motivations to create and stay in an organization aimed at generating integration and the fact that regional projects have not achieved the goals that catalyzed their formation.

Regarding cognitive dissonance, Festinger (1957) highlights two additional elements: 1) it generates a feeling of discomfort that motivates people to try to



reduce it and achieve consistency; 2) and when a dissonance occurs, people will actively try to avoid situations and information that tend to increase it. According to Festinger (1957), dissonance can be eliminated through different strategies.

The first strategy would be to change a behavioral cognitive element: when dissonance between an environmental element—knowledge of a certain situation—and a behavioral element occurs, it can be eliminated by changing the behavioral element to make it consistent with the environment. In the Latin American case, countries can change their behavior and withdraw from the organizations. However, as we have seen, this has consequences in terms of rejection by the group, in addition to the loss of the emotional bond. It is therefore easier and less costly for states to keep on participating in meetings and signing the final declarations, which typically emphasize that “the meeting has been quite useful and extremely productive” (Mace *et al.* 2016a, 5044).

The second available strategy is to change an environmental cognitive element, “by changing the situation to which the element corresponds” (Festinger 1957, 19). However, the possibilities of manipulating the environment are highly limited. Environments can be modified by changing social reality with the means of gaining the agreement and support of other people. In the Latin American case, and at the risk of extending this definition, one could hypothesize that new groups are generated as a way of changing environmental circumstances—rather than modifying countries’ behavior and withdrawing from the organization. This would help explain the historical tendency to create new organizations rather than to reform existing ones. The abovementioned example of the creation of the Pacific Alliance and its plan to avoid creating political institutions at some point illustrates this strategy.

The third strategy that can be adopted to reduce cognitive dissonance is to add new cognitive elements. In this situation, different cognitive elements may be added to achieve consistency; a person may actively seek information to reduce dissonance and decide to avoid new information that increases it (Festinger 1957, 21). In the Latin American case, there are a variety of possibilities for adding new cognitive elements. For example, countries can insist that everything is working well, that integration projects are moving forward, and simply publicly ignore information that does not fit with that impression.

According to Festinger (1957, 24), cognitive dissonance is linked to resistance to change; otherwise, it would not last. In this vein, Jervis (1976, 387) points out that to reduce dissonance, people alter their beliefs and evaluations, a strategy that affects future decisions, actions, and perceptions. One of the most important implica-

tions of this conduct is linked to the force that dissonance adds to the power of inertia. Based on cognitive dissonance theory, Jervis (1976, 387) indicates two possible explanations as to why policies are maintained. The first suggests that after taking a decision, a person will not only minimize or misinterpret discrepant information, but will also seek information that is consistent with her ideas—selective exposure. The second hypothesis is linked to the purpose and effect of reducing dissonance, namely to produce a separation of the post-decision alternatives. After taking a decision, individuals feel they have chosen correctly, even when prior to that decision the policy obviously did not seem to be the best. In this regard, Tindale *et al.* (2001, 10) indicate that after a discussion, the shared preference tends to increase, regardless of whether all members agree or not with the choice. In this sense, shared preferences in a group both influence and are influenced by group decision-making.

Finally, Jervis (1976, 387) adds that separation of alternatives generates inertia because decision-makers increase the amount of discrepant information necessary to reverse the policy. Moreover, dissonance reduction indirectly alters the decision-making process since it increases the tendency to employ principles or values used in previous behaviors, which are thus reinforced. Another important issue for Jervis is that expenditure of resources increases the pressure of dissonance and reinforces the belief that a policy is being successful; when a policy has high costs, decision-makers are more likely to believe that they have achieved something that was worth the sacrifice. Two manifestations of this effect are the tendency to overestimate what has been achieved and to perceive failures as successes. Here again, these two manifestations can help to explain the intense diplomatic agenda regarding Latin American integration processes, the multiplication of organizations and meetings that come with them and, finally, the constant discourses of progress and success of each organization.

## Conclusions

This paper has looked at social psychology and theories of social group formation to complement traditional theories of cooperation and integration developed mostly in political science and international relations literature. We believe that these theories have important limitations when it comes to explaining contradictory behaviors, discourses, and decisions related to Latin American integration. Why do leaders spend so much time and resources participating in organizations and treaties? Especially when history teaches them that they will not agree on institutionalizing these organizations and that the latter will hardly meet their goals? And also, why do leaders keep creating new organizations, attending their frequent meetings and signing

declarations proclaiming a success in which they do not always believe? A few possible explanations for these contradictions and the phenomenon of persistence of regional grouping over time have been presented from a social psychology perspective. In Latin America, organizations are social groups that tend to become an end in themselves, groupthink affects behavior, and states try to avoid cognitive dissonance when it comes to integration processes. We believe that these different dynamics generate inertia and finally contribute to the resilience and understanding of regional integration in Latin America.

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