



The World Is Not Enough

**Political Networks and Struggles
for Democracy in Latin America**

Fernando Pedrosa

Number 12

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FUNDACIÓN KONRAD ADENAUER
Plaza Independencia 749, of. 201, Montevideo, Uruguay
Tel.: (598) 2902 0943/ -3974
E-mail: info.montevideo@kas.de
www.kas.de/uruguay
@KASMontevideo

Director

Sebastian Grundberger

Editorial Coordinator

Ángel Arellano

Correction

Alejandro Coto

English translation

Mirtha Tovar

Cover image

Shutterstock

Design and setup

ESTUDIO DI CANDIA
Obligado 1181, Montevideo, Uruguay
estudiodicandia.com

ISBN 978-9915-9490-5-5

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The World Is Not Enough

Political Networks and Struggles for Democracy in Latin America

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Summary

This document elucidates the transnational universe (state, governmental, parastatal, and non-governmental) within which politicians and activism are organized and operate worldwide, with particular emphasis on Latin America. Its approach prioritizes the relationship between these transnational political forms and the national political objectives of those who practice them, within a context of democratic regression and the rise of new authoritarian projects. Ultimately, what is observed is a heterogeneous, fragmented map in constant tension.

1. Introduction

Since the early 1970s, politicians have faced global dilemmas that have questioned the capabilities of national states, whose competencies seemed to diminish day by day. This situation was not transient but intensified, becoming a fundamental and enduring issue from the late 20th century, with multiple consequences for the governance of nations.

The central change can be summarized as a significant portion of a country's most critical internal problems, especially in underdeveloped ones, having their origins in events and circumstances external to their own borders. These manifest in the form of regional or global crises, be it financial, war-related, climatic, in the actions

of international terrorism or organized crime, and forced migrations, among other examples.

What justifies the idea of governance crisis is that the repercussions of these regional or global problems emerge within national borders, where states hold the utmost responsibility and authority in terms of governance, yet lack the tools to efficiently resolve them.

The ways in which this affected national politics were diverse, including a growing and persistent crisis of representation. National states couldn't resolve what was no longer within their direct reach, yet they were still held accountable for it amid increasing demands from their citizenry.

This, coupled with other issues, led to a detachment from democracy, paving the way for various types of authoritarian projects and a continued discontent with politics and politicians. However, seen in perspective, it also represented an opportunity to revitalize political activity (both governmental and non-governmental) and extend it beyond its immediate domains.

The aim of this work is to delve deeper into that transnational universe (state, governmental, parastatal, and non-governmental) and its evolution in Latin America. The intention is to approach it from a perspective that prioritizes the relationship between these transnational political forms and the national political objectives of those who practice them, within a context of democratic regression and the rise of new authoritarian projects.

The text is structured as follows: firstly, it characterizes the situation in theoretical and historical terms. Secondly, it addresses these transnational networks by dividing them into three main groups: the governmental ones, understanding them as spaces used to consolidate the power of leaders and particular political and ideological projects, beyond the formal functions they are supposed to fulfill, and perhaps do fulfill. Then, it analyzes transnational political networks (split into activism networks and party networks), and finally, informal transnational political networks. Lastly, some conclusions are presented.

2. Globalization and politics

In various ways, national states (encompassing their governments, bureaucracies, traditional political sectors, and the diverse corporations protecting their interests) understood that they needed to implement strategies to confront an era of change that challenged their existence.

Across the world, there were different responses. Some decided to bet on the formation of supranational actors, including the delegation of sovereignty, as seen in the classic European model. Others, like modern entrepreneurs,

For a long time, there was a kind of prejudice that narrowed down international politics to what states, their leaders, and governmental international bodies engaged in

formed associations to maximize their power and gain markets without losing control over their own *hinterland*, exemplified by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). A more recent and cross-continental attempt is the BRICS, which brings together Brazilians, Chinese, Russians, and South Africans, combining economic considerations with geopolitical visions and projects.

The responses of states weren't always collective, meaning, through partnerships with other states. Some countries chose to become global actors on their own (such as Chile, Panama, or Singapore, among others), thereby leveraging the new opportunities that the globalized system presented to them.

However, not all reactions were of openness. Some countries chose conservative and authoritarian strategies, for instance, maintaining single-party socialist systems and disregarding any form of democracy. Though, unlike the old and failed Soviet model, they incorporated forms of capitalism with the State as the sole and undisputed actor; this is evident in the cases of China and Vietnam.

Other countries also opted to confront changes by isolating themselves from competition in the global market but without relinquishing their participation in it. Primarily, they did so to safeguard the benefits of certain elites clinging to a State that protected their business interests while simultaneously becoming the hegemonic actor in

These networks become significant instruments in enabling the involvement of national actors in the international system and vice versa

national life. This situation was notably observed in the case of Venezuela and the Chavista dictatorship.

Cuba either did not accept (or couldn't) incorporate itself into that logic of socialism and state capitalism. Instead, it maintained a strategy of aligning with the anti-Western powers of the moment. In this way, it attempted to retain some of the —low— living standards of its citizens and the privileges of its elites. Simultaneously, it continued to deploy its intense and effective transnational activism in the quest to maintain the regime's legitimacy and influence in Latin America, which it achieved hand in hand with the erratic U.S. foreign policy.

However, the economy wasn't the only thing to globalize; politics did as well, and this wasn't necessarily groundbreaking. In Latin America, political relationships that crossed national boundaries weren't a novelty of this century. On the contrary, these types of connections were common since the very national independence movements, within networks where politicians, military figures, states, monarchs, epistolary exchanges, trade, armies, exiles, travelers, lodges, and diverse ideologies circulated and interacted.

However, for a long time, there was a sort of prejudice that reduced the study of international politics to what states, their leaders, and governmental international bodies engaged in (Erdem, 2015). This hindered the interest in analyzing the strategies of other actors, such as politicians and party activists, and even more so, about the networks and organizations they formed, associating

themselves with other politicians and organizations worldwide.

With the systematic application of the concept of *transnational politics* (Nye and Keohane, 1971), this underwent a radical change, and more complex perspectives began to emerge. States were no longer the *sole protagonists*, and the domestic and external environments, rather than being considered opposing and exclusive, were seen to relate mutually and simultaneously in intricate and diverse ways.¹

In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, new problems and challenges necessitate and enable alternative forms of political action. In this trajectory, the emergence of global social movements in the late 20th century highlighted this change, which was further amplified by the rise of the Internet and digital technologies, and even more so, by social media.

Entering the 21st century, transnational activism (now more commonly termed as activism) became a key player globally, particularly in Latin American politics, due to its social impact, capacity to influence media and national/international institutions, mobilizing material and symbolic resources, setting agendas, narratives, and more.

Transnational political networks (governmental and non-governmental, formal and informal) offer incentives that are of interest to politicians, their organizations, activists, militants, and voters, as well as those who have specific management responsibilities in states and governments. Moreover, these networks become significant instruments in enabling the involvement of national actors in the international system and vice versa.²

- ¹ Subsequent works, such as those by Keck and Sikkink (2000), further refined the analytical capacity of these phenomena, emphasizing the power of networks and the ways in which activists use diverse strategies to influence global and national policies.
- ² To do this, it's crucial to revisit the concept of the *boomerang effect* (Keck and Sikkink, 2000; De Almagro, 2018), which describes the phenomenon whereby activists can influence the national politics of a country by mobilizing transnational networks.

While the concept of transnational activism holds a significant place in academic studies, approaches to the topic haven't always addressed its facets connected to the struggle for power within national states and within certain ideological projects. Often, these approaches have focused more on its nominal and immediate objectives.

Considering all mentioned, it becomes necessary to delve into transnational political activity in Latin America in a more detailed and precise manner. It's fundamental to move beyond the objectives merely stated by the actors themselves or simplistic and celebratory views. This will allow us to place them in the context of the struggle for political power and the regional and global ideological dispute. This becomes even more relevant amidst the current democratic regression affecting both the world in general and the region in particular.

2. 1. Some preliminary ideas for addressing a less-studied phenomenon

The first idea to be addressed in the following pages is that contemporary political transnationalism has been redefined by leaders and movements, especially those affiliated with the so-called pink tide, the 21st-century left, the new Latin American left, or populist left, and their successors.³

This new phenomenon is characterized by constructing a narrative based on heterogeneous—sometimes contradictory—premises, yet it ultimately forms as a sort of *supranational nationalism* easily embraced across the various forms assumed by regional left-wing movements, their organizations, and activists in each Latin American country.

³ These terms will be used interchangeably to refer to the left-leaning movements that came to power at the end of the 20th century and into the early 21st century up to the present day. Despite acknowledging their notable differences, the aim is to group as many of these movements as possible, avoiding debates about the specific implications of each concept or label, as this is not the concern of this work.

This discourse, articulated within the realms of politics, academia, and culture, intertwines contemporary elements with those from the 20th century alongside the tradition of *patriagrande*, widely present in the region's political history since the 19th century. Added to this are elements stemming from the classic socialist discourse propagated by one of the most important and traditional nodes in the network, Cuba.

This model of regional nationalism, serving as the foundation for a renewed national political activism, revisits some classic elements in these types of movements: a confrontational view of politics, anti-liberal ideas, and an anti-imperialist narrative. However, it's also conservative as it focuses on supposedly original, mythical stages preceding the division by the powers that "split us" into the various countries now comprising the region.

Patriagrande unites from both the right and the left. But it also separates, much like any nationalism taken to extremes. The problems begin with the very designation of the region: Latin America, South America, Pan America, Central America, South America, North America, Ibero-America, Hispano-America, Indo-America, the Caribbean (Anglo and Francophone), the Southern Cone, the Andean world, the global South, Iberophony, or the Luso-Hispanic world. The truth is, there are too many names for a region fixated on an identity that, like all nationalist identities, aims to be homogeneous.

In Latin America, it's challenging to pinpoint a moment or a name behind this supposedly united front we are said to have had. Francisco de Miranda, Simón Bolívar and the Congress of Panama (known as the Amphictyonic Congress), José de San Martín, the lodges, or even less mundane aspects, such as the British interests of merchants, are part of the explanations for the course of Latin American independence—between what was (reality) and what could not be (nationalistic fiction).

Reality, as often happens, follows and has followed very different paths from mythical narratives. What defines the region is its diversity, the

What defines the region is diversity, the heterogeneous nature rooted in varied traditions and common histories

heterogeneity rooted in various traditions and shared histories. The renewed transnational activism of the Latin American left seeks to address this “inconvenience” by presenting a homogeneous narrative, defensive yet personified in its main references.

This will also be achieved through the systematic inclusion of all identities, demands, and ideologies that claim representation within a common collective. The management of states at all levels and resources, especially those of the most powerful states like Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela, was crucial for this. If leftist groups couldn't gain that control in other countries, they then appealed to funds from international organizations, global NGOs, Nordic governments, or directly from informal financing.

The second idea that will structure this text, then, is that this erosion of the traditional figure of states as providers and owners of what happens within their territories did not immediately render them obsolete and powerless. Despite facing threats, crises, and internal challenges, nation-states continued to be decisive actors in the socio-political life of their countries. This was intertwined with this renewed nationalist discourse, novel leadership, and a favorable world that also reconsiders its political or geopolitical order. Moreover, it was further reinforced by the rise in commodity prices. In many cases, these processes were accompanied by a strong increase in authoritarianism and intervention in civil society. The pro-democratic climate of the 1980s and 1990s gave way to a new authoritarian backlash (Huntington, 1991).

While both approaches (*patriagrandismo* and state empowerment) have been enthusiastically embraced by both left-wing and right-wing forces in their political and ideological programs and discourses, it was the governments and leaders emerging within the context of the new left (and their successors) who systematically put them into practice. This has made this strategy an unavoidable (and unmistakable) part of their political repertoire.

2. 2. The Activist World

The purpose behind the intense transnational activism of each organization is starting to transcend the immediate cause they pursue and the nominal objectives that conceived them. These interconnected organizations strive to become protagonists in a new political project and find their place in the attempt to sustain and protect the regimes or national leaders who have included and supported them in unprecedented ways, be it materially or in rhetoric.

This support from social organizations is crucial at the national level because the authoritarian practices that society begins to perceive and suffer from these populist leaderships generate numerous internal and external rejections. The mobilization networks of officialist followers serve electoral and symbolic functions, but also serve as a means of control and pressure over dissident citizens.

This activism also plays a role beyond borders, using its prestige to shield its allied governments. Additionally, it aims to amplify the narrative about the leader's role abroad within the country or maximize the prestige of the joint activities of leaders from various countries. This creates a sense of belonging to a more powerful regional movement.

At the same time, on a symbolic level, the regional activism of political figures (as well as the public policies they seek to implement in their countries) aims to integrate and legitimize themselves into the narratives of the historical traditions of left-wing, anti-imperialist, and populist movements in

Latin America. To achieve this, they reintroduce reinterpretations of figures such as Simón Bolívar, José Martí, Augusto Sandino, Juan Domingo Perón, Salvador Allende, and even Fidel Castro, among others.

However, it's not just about endorsing one's own. These networks and their activism have also proven to be very useful in weakening and striking against governments that don't belong to the left-wing collective and its allies. They thus become tools to legitimize and foster internal conflicts, increase opposition mobilization, and discredit the rulers in the eyes of national and international public opinion. Much of this activity is informal, through illegal funding, diverse counseling, and logistics.

This renewed transnational arena has raised several questions that analysts and academics have extensively worked on. However, most of these debates have been conducted with a moralistic or biased perspective, aiming to legitimize the symbolic or material world of the left, or more or less consciously accepting its basic premises.⁴ This was most evident during social conflict situations experienced by Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador in recent times.

Hence, there are still many aspects to analyze when it comes to answering how, why, and who is responsible for this activism, what their agendas entail, the nature of these organizations, how they interact with their peers and governments, how they impact political careers (not just within parties), and what benefits they derive from it.

3. International Governmental Networks

The transnational activism of governments and their representatives is one of the peculiarities of politics in the region for a long time. Often, it manifests through the figure of presidential lead-

ers, but also as a formal institutionality that has experienced continuous growth since the 1990s, although it existed long before.

The so-called *regional integration*, especially since the so-called new regionalism, has multiplied and systematized the activity of a series of institutions that, together with those from previous stages, traverse the entire map of the region. These institutions take the form of intergovernmental organizations of diverse levels, formats, and objectives, whether they are for cooperation, management, representation, or consultation.

Latin America has been prolific in these types of institutions. From the long-standing Organization of American States (OAS, 1948) to the traditional Latin American Integration Association (ALADI, 1980), the more recent Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC, 2010), or the novel (and short-lived) Forum for the Progress of South America, better known as Prosur, founded to replace the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in 2019.

International governmental institutions can have very general objectives (such as the mentioned OAS) or be designed for very specific issues like the multi-state television channel Telesur. They can also be legislative, like the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino), ideological, like the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), or take particular forms of public management, such as the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (BCIE).

The Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) is particularly dedicated to education, science, and culture, while the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) was focused on economic matters. The mentioned UNASUR, on the other hand, included regional defense and military coordination as particular features, which were not widely addressed before.

International intergovernmental institutions can be spaces that involve a large number of members (such as the Summits of the Americas or the Ibero-American Summits), or they can

⁴ To delve deeper into this, refer specifically to Chaguaceda and Pedrosa (2021).

gather smaller groups of countries based on their regional location or to make specific agreements.⁵ At the same time, this renewed state activism beyond their countries' borders can include national or subnational states, as seen in *Mercociudades*, a network that integrates cities throughout South America.

At times, it's the very government of a country that "colonizes" intergovernmental spaces with its activists or supporters, with the expectation, if necessary, of appealing to them for political advantages, especially if they were to find themselves in the opposition in the future. This has been a practice repeatedly carried out by certain governments of the 21st-century left.⁶

The mentioned intergovernmental action can manifest in multilateral summits, regular bureaucratic functioning spaces, or various types of meetings and agreements. Furthermore, the formal activity of States beyond their borders isn't solely limited to their highest national authorities. It can also involve regularly convening entities or officials of secondary and tertiary levels, specialists in specific issues, or corporate representatives of diverse interests (businesspeople, labor unions, artists, etc.).

The proliferation of regional parliaments and parliamentary assemblies within this governmental framework is notable, especially due to the absence of any form of supranational powers in their functioning. Perhaps it's this lack that prompts Latin American populist leaders, who resist controls from their own parliaments, to

support the activity of these structures beyond their countries.

In this field, there's a range of organizations, from the traditional Parlatino to the Parlasur of Mercosur, Unasur's Parliament, the Central American Parliament, the Interparliamentary Commission of the Pacific Alliance, the Andean Parliament, the Amazonian Parliament, and the Indigenous Parliament.

Additionally, there's ParlAmericas, encompassing congresses throughout the region, and the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA), bringing together all other Parliamentary Assemblies, regional Parliaments, and inter-parliamentary organizations in the Americas.

Lastly, Latin American legislators also engage with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (a global organization), the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat), and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), where they form part of the Geopolitical Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GruLaC).

These networks of formal, governmental, or state institutions, like others mentioned later on, also serve as arenas where leaders or their affiliated groups settle scores or intervene with and against those outside the bloc of left-wing and progressive presidents who, despite their differences, act in a coordinated manner.

This was observed, for instance, during the first wave of left-wing governments, amidst the impeachment of then Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo. On that occasion, Paraguay was temporarily suspended from Mercosur and its parliamentary assembly, Parlasur (for which Paraguayans had been the only ones to hold general elections).

Meanwhile, governments allied with Chavismo took advantage of Paraguay's absence, which they themselves had provoked, to allow Venezuela to join Mercosur as a full member. This occurred despite the association's regulations explicitly stating that the inclusion of a new full

5 In that sense, well-known entities include the Southern Common Market (Mercosur), the Andean Community, the Central American Integration System, the Caribbean Community (Caricom), or the highly successful North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, the United States, and Mexico (NAFTA). Some of the organizations that constitute Latin American states also accept participants from other regions or make agreements with them, such as Celac with China.

6 In the Argentine case, the activity of Judge Eugenio Zaffaroni from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights during the government of Mauricio Macri is more than clarifying in this kind of political *boomerang effect* (Keck and Sikkink, 2000).

member requires the unanimous approval of the remaining countries. This approval still lacked the endorsement of the Paraguayan Parliament, which did not seem easily attainable.

The Unasur also has a history of direct intervention in national affairs to assist its members in trouble. This was evident in legitimizing the fraudulent Venezuelan elections of 2013, amplifying minor crises in Ecuador to benefit Rafael Correa's authoritarian project, involvement in the dispute between the Santa Cruz de la Sierra government and then-President Evo Morales, and the conflict between Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), among others.

As the transnational sphere becomes more political, there's an increased possibility of coordination among different national leaders. At the Summit of the Union of Latin America and the Caribbean, a consultative forum that no longer operates, held concurrently with the Rio Group, the presidents of twenty-five countries decided to create a new organization without the presence of the United States and Canada. This was the birth of CELAC, which envisioned Latin America as a united (and imagined) community capable of engaging in privileged dialogue with other countries and regional groups without American oversight.⁷

The unity among transnational leaderships is not an unbreakable law. When real power is at stake, alliances become more strained, as was the case during the election of the president of the Inter-American Development Bank, where the presidents of Argentina and Mexico confronted each other until the very last minute (Lejtman, 2022a).

The tension can also arise when national circumstances don't leave room for leaders to play as armchair revolutionaries, as seen in the latest summit of presidents held in Brazil. During this

The so-called regional integration, especially since the emergence of the so-called new regionalism, has multiplied and systematized the activity of a series of institutions that traverse the entire map of the region

event, Chilean President Gabriel Boric publicly challenged his Brazilian counterpart, *Lula da Silva*, for his explicit support of Nicolas Maduro's government (Infobae América, 2023).

The transnational stage isn't solely useful for influencing at a local level and in the eyes of compatriots. For some of the leaderships that emerged in the 21st century, such as Hugo Chávez, Lula, or even José Pepe Mujica, transnational networks served as a platform to create and sustain a regional, even global, leadership.

Despite the proliferation of organizations, bodies, institutions, and networks, the outcomes have been very unsatisfactory, except for academic specialists, analysts, and diplomats who have turned regional integration and its formal representations into a lucrative business. Hence, one of the increasing criticisms aimed at these types of organizations is their bureaucratization and high expenditure in contrast to their meager outcomes and the poverty of the countries that support them.

The aim of the previous pages wasn't to provide an exhaustive assessment of the spaces for political action, cooperation, economic integration, or international diplomacy in the region. Neither was it to delve deeply into their functions. Countless papers and bytes have been dedicated to that.

⁷ The Rio Group is a forum for consultation among Latin American governments established in 1986 to continue the work initiated by the Contadora Group (Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama) and the Support Group for Contadora (Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay), often referred to as the Lima Group or the Group of Eight.

This approach implies not understanding them solely as isolated institutions or dedicated solely to their specific purposes but considering them as an interconnected set based on their ideological political use.⁸

By challenging that formalistic view, the aim is to focus on the dense network they form, the resources they manage (both material and symbolic), and a series of strategies generated by Latin American political leaders, particularly those associated with the left. This was particularly evident in the first wave of the *pink tide* when, alongside commodities, they solidified a close, and in some cases, emotional relationship.⁹

These strategies, both formal and informal, are sustained by the continuous use of regional institutionalism as a political stage that amplifies the role of the national leader in front of their fellow citizens and the world. It's a way of actively utilizing these institutions, transcending the purposes for which they were initially established.

4. Transnational Political Networks

The origins of transnational political activity are rooted in non-governmental and non-partisan initiatives, dating back quite some time. In the

International intergovernmental institutions can either encompass a large number of members or bring together smaller groups of countries based on their regional location or to negotiate specific agreements

context of this discussion, the contemporary development of political internationalization was primarily driven by the left, through what are known as *workers' internationals*, a process extensively studied by historians, stemming from the emergence and spread of Marxist ideas.

It wasn't until the Second International that political parties, more or less similar to how we understand them today, emerged significantly onto the scene. This transnational organizational type distinguished the development of the left, including the so-called Third International, composed of communist parties, the Fourth International of a Trotskyist nature, and the Socialist International, which, from 1951 to the present day, brings together social-democratic parties.

This network of institutions and formal as well as informal spaces began expanding across Latin America from the late 19th century, but it took on a new dimension with the rise to power of the 21st-century left. What they introduced (aside from a vast array of material resources) was a combination of Latin American nationalism tradition with a renewed leftist discourse (various versions of the so-called *socialism of the 21st century*). This discourse was associated with the new demands propelled by social movements linked to environmentalism, feminism, indigenous peoples, direct democracy, new forms of fighting against capitalism, and so forth.

8 The numerous occasions when presidents and other leaders gather and appear together become part of the political capital of populist left-wing movements. During these gatherings, whether they are multilateral, bilateral, formal, or informal, the presidential role is aesthetically and discursively highlighted as the ultimate authority and representative of national interests, impacting both domestic politics and international leadership. One day they may attend the Ibero-American Summit, engaging in disputes with King Juan Carlos or mediating between Álvaro Uribe and Chávez. The next day, they may convene with UNASUR to assist Rafael Correa with his internal issues, and the day after, they might travel together to join the Argentine president in celebrating the country's bicentennial.

9 «In this context, [Lula] explained that he hardly knew Boric and Lacalle Pou, and that this summit served to create closeness and trust. [Lula] compared the situation with his first two terms (2003-2010) and mentioned that he had 'a brotherhood' with presidents of that time. There was a brotherhood that no longer exists» (Penner, 2023).

The politics and politicians of each country, which have largely driven these extensive intergovernmental networks mentioned earlier, have also fostered or encouraged the activity of non-governmental transnational political networks. These networks constitute collective political spaces where states and governments are not the central protagonists, although they may exert varying degrees of influence, not always in a public manner.

These transnational networks aim to complement and address the lack of responses, inefficiency, or very limited objectives of formal international institutions. Additionally, these types of international institutions are highly sensitive to changes in national cycles and policies diverging from those of the populist or progressive left.¹⁰

To organize the information, the following divides this universe into three parts: first, addressing transnational activism networks; second, partisan activism networks; and finally, informal transnational networks. The latter two are less known and studied, hence they will receive more attention, calling for increased interest in their study.

4. 1. Transnational Activism Networks

This transnational activism comes to the aid of the network of formal international institutions to provide them with more stability, and at times, conversely, to pressure them when they fall into the hands of groups that do not belong to the left, as a result of changes in government at the national level, which are very common in Latin American politics. The constant challenges to the current OAS (Organization of American States) President, Luis Almagro, can be seen as an example of this.

¹⁰ The best example of this was the abandonment of numerous countries from UNASUR and the creation of another short-lived organization in its place, PROSUR, or the suspension of Venezuela from MERCOSUR in 2017, amidst a significant setback for left-leaning options in the governments of the region.

One of the advantages that the left-leaning groups have when developing strategies beyond national borders is that internationalism is part of their political identity. This holds true for complex organizations in the most developed countries as well as for smaller, less empowered groups of activists scattered in isolated or remote areas away from urban centers.

Internationalism is an inseparable part of left-wing activism. Despite their multiple, sometimes radical or violent disagreements, it constitutes a common tradition with icons, heroes, and symbols that allow them to identify with each other, even amidst their differences. This shared tradition enables easier coordination, particularly in response to events or groups that do not belong to that tradition, as witnessed in the social conflicts across Latin America in recent years.

Moreover, the transnational networks of the left were not solely party-political; they also encompassed intellectuals, artists, labor unions, religious groups, and even armed factions, such as those rallying around Cuba. These networks were highly influential, and their relationships were particularly intense between the 1960s and 1980s.¹¹

The second advantage for the left in this transnational space lies in its flexibility to integrate heterogeneous groups, both ideologically and in their political forms and practices, using this platform to resolve disputes and enhance joint activities.

Lastly, a third advantage stems from historical learning. These organizations serve not only to bring together individuals, groups, or organizations but also function as tools for disseminating

¹¹ Furthermore, these networks extended beyond continental borders, as seen in the tricontinental conferences held in Havana in 1966, 1969, and 1979. It was during these conferences that the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America was established in 1966, followed by the better-known Latin American Solidarity Organization (OLAS) a year later. OLAS was a network that included some of the most significant guerrilla groups in the region.

propaganda and political reference points for adherents and activists who share their ideology.

They serve as networks and tools for circulating information, resolving conflicts, articulating actors and interests, but also as spaces for ideological promotion and dissemination.

The workers' internationals enjoyed a prestige that extended even to the most ardent socialist sympathizers, who saw that space as their own. A similar situation existed for the Socialist International during part of its history. Today, this position is held by the São Paulo Forum, which serves as a guide for its own militants and activists, whether they are directly involved in the organization or not.

The Grupo de Puebla represents one of the latest developments in this trajectory, demonstrating the left's political innovation and its ability to act collectively among its leaders, despite their differences. This entity brings together former presidents and leaders who are not at the peak of their popularity or public favor in their respective countries but are still functional to supranational projects, where they reshape their careers.

This new form of activism rejuvenates these leaders before an international audience that may be unfamiliar with their national histories but recognizes them as significant figures due to their past responsibilities. Thus, the Grupo de Puebla re-engages them in collective space and regional geopolitics. Simultaneously, it grants their followers and activists a renewed sense of belonging to a larger and more influential space.

States and governments play a pivotal role in these transnational activism networks. Often, they cannot directly engage due to institutional constraints, but their influence and presence are felt through logistics, financing, and the participation of presidents or high-ranking officials.

Frequently, these presidents participate in these networks, such as the São Paulo Forum, but they do so representing different capacities, such as a party authority or an international political body,

or by hosting delegates as national authorities if the meeting occurs in their own country.

State support is crucial for organizing trips, events, accommodations, and also through the activities of institutions like government-backed foundations, public publishing houses, or state-controlled media outlets like Telesur and other organizations (such as Argentina's Télam). Additionally, states might contribute through initiatives like establishing a university, such as the Caracas International University of Communications (in Spanish, Universidad Internacional de las Comunicaciones), which offers education and certifications to the forum's supporters and activists.

Ideas and strategies underpinning transnational activism

The strategies of the left in the new century were markedly different from those before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The strategy centered around privileging class struggle as the organizer of political activity and conflict became anachronistic with the end of real socialism. Numerous heterogeneous claims and identities surfaced after the collapse, challenging this approach.

At that moment, the intellectual contributions of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe revitalized leftist thinking, adapting it to the new situation and paving the way for a political reconciliation with Latin American nationalism, Christianity—particularly Catholicism—and redefining the battered idea of populism.

Hence, the left was able to create a framework expansive enough to encompass all ideas, demands, claims, and proposals that showed some resistance to the dominant liberal and representative democratic model following the collapse of Soviet socialism.

The contribution of Laclau and Mouffe was fundamental because it provided a theoretical framework for the 21st-century left that was lacking in such reflections and could no longer rely solely

One of the growing criticisms directed at these types of organizations is their bureaucratization and high expenditure compared to their limited outcomes, particularly in light of the poverty of the countries that sustain them

on a literal interpretation of Karl Marx's work. Simultaneously, the theoretical proposal of these two authors also became a guiding principle for political practice.

This aspect is key to understand the development of the left's transnational policies when undertaking the path of activism and to comprehend the logic behind the prevailing political constructs in Latin America today.

It is crucial to emphasize that the repertoire of actions and the organization of contemporary left-wing movements stem from intellectual reflection. Thus, the cultural imprint of this activism holds significance, especially as it echoes the ideas on hegemony of the Italian Antonio Gramsci. Paradoxically, within this cultural, academic, and artistic sphere, the strengthening of populist left-wing ideologies has encountered less opposition and competition and has garnered limited interest among its adversaries.

The new political framework of the left, unlike classical socialism, is conceived from Latin American perspectives and acknowledges the reality experienced by its proponents. It also offers a more precise diagnosis than its predecessors and a menu of more flexible strategies.

Unlike historical Marxism, which is primarily grounded in conceptual theory and seeks profound and structural changes through revolutions, this new approach attempts to establish a connection between theory and practice. However, this practice isn't as complex as striving for an anti-capitalist revolution and the construction of a socialist regime. Nor is it as utopian. On the contrary, it can yield short-term results and doesn't necessitate significant social cataclysms, which are difficult to organize and, above all, to lead.

The articulation of various social, ethnic, gender identities, of diverse ideologies, and social responses to capitalism converge behind a project homogenized by the idea of *seizing power* and aiming to dethrone the elites dominating society.

In this context, the ultimate goal is no longer revolution. What unites these disparate groups is the *immediate* pursuit of power within the structure they are contesting, whether it's a school's student council, a small local NGO, a country's government, or the leadership of regional organizations like UNASUR.

This explains their potency and the surprising effectiveness they've displayed in mobilization, creating political spaces, and co-opting some that already exist. The articulation of a highly heterogeneous whole into a coherent entity in the struggle for power beyond national borders, where informal relationships play a central role, is the recipe the left has adeptly utilized in these times.

Thus, in Latin America, there are tens of thousands of organizations, ranging from small and recently established ones to large and traditional entities spread across the region. They interact on specific issues, connect with each other, and achieve a *boomerang effect* against the States at all levels, especially where the left does not govern.

This transnational activism, on the other hand, has achieved a very complex task of reclaiming and appropriating part of the classical liberal ideology linked to universalistic themes and claims, but draining them of their original content. At the

same time, it uses its prestige to undermine Latin American democracies that do not align with the populist model, employing this concept in its *Laclavian* form.

Another aspect of the transnational web of left-wing activism is related to the academic and scientific world. Inheriting from the original Enlightenment ideals of the left, this new populist version relies on the supposed scientific nature of its proposals and the academic prestige of its spokespersons to gain new legitimacy in the credibility of its political positions.¹²

The Latin American Council of Social Sciences, commonly known as Clacso (for its Spanish acronym), successfully steered academic agendas towards the terrains favored by political left, while becoming the academic voice that legitimized the state discourses of left-wing governments in the 21st century.

In this path, Clacso has become a space where funding, support, and academic legitimacy have been generated for their narratives and activists turned academics or publicists. But it has also changed the meaning of an organization that was initially created by democratic Latin American exiles to intellectually support the transitions that the countries were undergoing in the 1980s (and that is why it continues to be funded by international organizations and cooperation agencies from some Nordic countries).

In this realm, the São Paulo Forum (SPF) has drawn the most attention and has become a sort of *deus ex machina of evil* in the mouths of analysts, journalists, and specialists opposed to the left. This space is envisioned as a kind of *politburo* where the action of the regional left is directed, but it is a much more complex, heterogeneous, and important entity than the caricatured version circulating on social media and websites.

¹² This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, used to advocate for the restrictive policies of their governments and in what's been termed *vaccine geopolitics*.

The São Paulo Forum is far from being that dark and conspiratorial command center that is denounced, yet at the same time, it is a highly significant organization and possibly the main coordinator of this diverse left-wing space. It becomes especially vital when the Brazilian Workers' Party is in power.

There are several reasons for this, but primarily because it emerged as the first offensive policy following the fall of the Berlin Wall, being founded in 1990. It was created as a space for reflection and the quest for new alternatives to regain the offensive of the region's left.¹³

Furthermore, it's a space where governments, opposition groups, parties, social movements, artists, intellectuals, press, and a spectrum of factions ranging from moderate and democratic left to the most radical and revolutionary participate and interact. Within this space, agendas are agreed upon, leaderships and strategies are contested, differences are resolved or merely discussed. However, by the end of the day, there's a mutual recognition of sharing and being part of a common collective.¹⁴

At this point, it's important to note that there isn't a similar space within right-wing, center-right,

¹³ In organizational terms, it's one of the largest organizations of its kind, comprising over 120 parties from nearly 30 countries. It's structured with three regional secretariats: Southern Cone, based in Uruguay; Andean-Amazonian, headquartered in Colombia; and Mesoamerican-Caribbean, situated in El Salvador. Additionally, it has an executive secretariat handling operational tasks based in São Paulo.

¹⁴ Therefore, the São Paulo Forum is a key space, and there's no need to create another international organization to address "the existing contradiction between some European and Latin American parties, which, despite being part of the same ideological family, are at odds on various issues of the current juncture. That's why proposals to create a new international are so unappealing, whether it's a progressive international, as some dissatisfied social democratic sectors propose due to the current situation of the Socialist International, or a revolutionary anti-capitalist international [...]. Nor are we interested in adopting the position of leftist groups and their internationally unrepresentative internationals, which confuse strategy with ideology. For all these reasons, to articulate the left in our region with the left in other parts, we must strengthen the São Paulo Forum, our Latin American and Caribbean international" (Translation of Pomar, 2012, pp. 19-20, for this article).

In Latin America, there are tens of thousands of organizations, ranging from small recently established ones to large and traditional entities spread across the region interacting on specific issues, connecting with each other, and achieving a boomerang effect against the States at all levels

liberal, or democratic sectors where the majority of trends, groups, and leaderships sharing those ideas can converge. There's no direct participation for their militants or activists, nor does it provide their followers with an integrative symbolic framework. Perhaps, in this amalgamation of factors lies the true power of the Forum.

The Forum of Madrid, a mirror of the São Paulo Forum, has sought to establish itself as a unifying and disseminating space for right-wing ideas concerning the Ibero-American world. However, it has faced difficulties in doing so because, unlike the achievements of the São Paulo Forum, it hasn't managed to integrate different factions or competing organizations.

4.2. Political Party Networks

A somewhat naive perspective on transnational activism overwhelmingly focused its interest on organizations dedicated to human rights, women, indigenous peoples, and agendas related to the environment, among others, but without delving into other objectives that go beyond what is formally and publicly declared by this activism.

One of the renewed forms taken by the new transnational activism is the party-centric form. Evolving into spaces where information, influence, material and symbolic resources circulate — often conveniently distant from strict legal or electoral controls — these transnational party organizations (*Organizaciones Transnacionales de Partidos* -OTP for their Spanish acronym) are one of the predominant forms that politics assumes beyond national borders.

On the other hand, unlike transnational activism spaces, they have a much more direct link to the State, as those who make up these organizations are parties, often in government, but also in opposition, of varying size and power, with parliamentary or subnational representations. OTPs have not been thoroughly analyzed or studied, except for very specific cases.

The origins of Transnational Party Networks

Despite being fragmented and unstable, relationships between parties and leaders across geographical spaces have existed since an early period. In Western Europe, this primarily involved the so-called *workers' internationals* from the mid-19th to the early 20th century (where Latin American organizations and leaders were already involved). Additionally, in 1925, the first international meeting and the establishment of a secretariat for Christian-oriented parties were recorded.

Transnational party networks, especially socialist and Marxist ones, were active participants in European politics until the onset of World War II. With the war's end, Christian democratic activities increased, and liberal parties joined in creating their own OTP, the Liberal International, in 1947.

The global phase that began in 1973 with the so-called oil crisis did not go unnoticed by leaders of the time. Consequently, in those years, a highly intense period of transnational, political, and party-related activities began. This involved organizations of different ideologies, although it was primarily led by social democrats, who were electorally affected by the social changes occurring in Europe (Merkel, 1994).

The international stage has traditionally been a key arena for politicians when planning their careers. Particularly, governmental and inter-parliamentary international organizations have been among the most chosen. This is especially true for those who have completed political cycles in their countries (though not necessarily biological ones) or sought new momentum to return strengthened to compete for national positions.¹⁵

The phase of political action beyond national borders, although still common today, can be situated within the realm of individual career decisions and strategies. However, for this study,

¹⁵ For example, Kurt Waldheim unsuccessfully attempted to access the presidency of Austria in 1971. That same year, he assumed the position of Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), where he remained until 1981. Later, in 1986, he ran for and was elected President of his country. Romano Prodi used his role in the European Union to ascend to the presidency of Italy. Conversely, José Manuel Durão Barroso resigned as Prime Minister of Portugal to take up the presidency of the European Commission, a position also held by the French socialist Jacques Delors. António Guterres served as the Prime Minister of Portugal and later became Secretary-General of the UN. Former Argentine President Néstor Kirchner sought to expand his power from the presidency of Unasur. Luis Almagro, part of the Uruguayan government, later became head of the Organization of American States (OAS). Horst Köhler similarly leveraged his position as President of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to attain the presidency of Germany. Michelle Bachelet, after her initial presidential term in Chile, served as the Executive Director of UN Women, then resumed the presidency of her country. Following her second presidential term, she became the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Spanish socialist Josep Borrell currently serves as the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs. Norwegian socialist Jens Stoltenberg is the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 2023, Dilma Rousseff was appointed President of the New Development Bank of the BRICS nations. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the current Director-General of the World Health Organization, held various positions in the Ethiopian government, including that of Foreign Minister. However, there are cases where this transition was not as successful. Laura Chinchilla, former President of Costa Rica, attempted to revive her career with a candidacy for the presidency of the Inter-American Development Bank, which did not prosper. José Miguel Insulza unsuccessfully sought the presidency of Chile from his role in the OAS. Similarly, the Spanish Rodrigo Rato and the Frenchman Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who sought top positions in their respective countries after presiding over the IMF. Even non-governmental spaces can be appealing: after completing a presidential term, former Argentine President Mauricio Macri joined the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) as an executive.

They serve as networks and tools for circulating information, resolving conflicts, articulating actors and interests, but also as spaces for ideological promotion and dissemination

greater significance lies in actions that are part of broader collective, organizational, or ideological projects.

Permanently, political leaders and organizations generate discourses and actions regarding international affairs, which can have strong implications for their strategies, internal stability, and public positioning. Additionally, within party structures, there are spaces dedicated to international relations or included in the responsibilities assigned to certain leadership positions, especially in Latin American parties.

Through research conducted for this work, 50 active OTPs were identified, a much larger and more significant universe than is commonly considered. This illustrates the importance politicians give to these organizations and highlights how little they have been studied.

Table 1 presents the OTPs with recorded activity in the last five years or those that have not formally dissolved. The number of parties comprising them is approximate due to the complexity of obtaining official information, and furthermore, these organizations experience fluid membership dynamics, especially the ideologically stricter ones or those with a more informal structure. Some of these OTPs are not permanently operational and are activated according to the circumstances.

Reviewing the list of members of the different OTPs, it can be said that the vast majority of the

world's political parties are incorporated into some OTP, ranging from the largest parties with millions of members, the most traditional ones, or those with a unique historical significance in their countries, to the smaller or recently emerging ones competing in the political arena.

It can be added that the OTPs established from the 2000s onwards no longer follow the model of a large transnational organization, a classic structure from the 20th century that relied on the quantity of members it encompassed. This could also be associated with the transformations experienced by the old mass integration parties. The new OTPs are smaller, with stricter admission criteria, more precise ideologies, and specific territorial locations.

This type of organization involves establishing networks with fewer but more homogeneous members, and even accepting parties that may not hold significant weight in their respective countries but represent the ideology upheld by the OTP. Simultaneously, these organizations are easier to manage, requiring less bureaucracy and financial investment from their members.¹⁶

Politicians and the OTPs

OTP fulfill various functions that politicians consider crucial when planning their strategies. They go to the extent of creating these organizations, committing to sustaining their operations, providing them with structure and financing, as well as investing time in regular meetings and vying for leadership positions within them.

OTP membership can serve leaders in maintaining or gaining power, whether as governing

figures or opposition leaders.¹⁷ Similarly, it can be instrumental in strengthening positions for disputes within the same political space.¹⁸ At times, involvement in transnational party structures offers a more accessible opportunity for second or third-tier leaders seeking a form of projection that they might not achieve within their own countries or more conventional international governmental organizations.

These organizations can serve as instruments to create and maintain contacts (and later advertise them in their home countries) with leaders who would otherwise be difficult to access. Some OTPs even include parties from countries not formally recognized by the international community, thereby also conveying a political stance.¹⁹ Some OTPs even include parties from countries not formally recognized by the international community, thereby also conveying a political stance.²⁰

¹⁶ This increased organizational selectivity can be linked not only to a growing specificity in the objectives of the OTPs but also to the emergence of new political groups and families seeking to project themselves onto the global stage while maintaining their identity. For instance, pirates, Esperanto advocates, animal rights activists, libertarians, the far-right, and the only two OTPs of an ethnic nature (the Arab Social Democratic Forum and the Arab Liberal Federation).

¹⁷ José Aznar presided over the International Democratic Center while still serving as the Prime Minister of Spain, just as the International Democratic Union (IDU) was led by the then Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard. Since 2022, the Prime Minister of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, holds the presidency of the Socialist International. Viktor Orbán, the current Prime Minister of Hungary, and Guillermo Lasso, President of Ecuador, serve as vice presidents of the Christian Democratic International.

¹⁸ The then leader of the National Action Party of Mexico, Manuel Espino, chaired the Christian Democratic Organization of America in 2006 amid his confrontation with the then-President Felipe Calderón (from his same party). Espino sought an international title since his scope of action within Calderón's government was limited. Additionally, Vicente Fox, Calderón's predecessor and also his rival, served as the President of the International Democratic Center. Another case was Pierre Ferdinando Cassini, who also sought the presidency of the International Democratic Center to strengthen his position in negotiations with Silvio Berlusconi in the formation of the Italian center-right alliance.

¹⁹ «The president of the opposition Democratic Turnhalle Alliance of Namibia, Katuutire Kaura, will attend the Republican National Convention to be held in New York from August 29 to September 3. The Convention is expected to designate US President George W. Bush as the presidential candidate of the Republican Party. Kaura will attend the meeting invited by the International Democratic Union, which will also cover the travel expenses.»—*The Namibian*, August 25, 2004 (in-house translation).

²⁰ This is the case of parties from Taiwan, Gibraltar, the Polisario Front of Western Sahara, the Republican Turkish Party from the northern Republic of Cyprus, the Justice and Welfare Party of Somaliland, and Tibet.

Table 1. OTPs with activity records or not dissolved in the last five years

	Organization	Number of members	Number of countries	Year of foundation
1	SAMAK Co-operation Committee of the Nordic Social Democratic parties.	13	9	1886
2	Liberal International (LI)	78	61	1947
3	Organización Demócrata Cristiana de América (ODCA)	30	27	1947
4	Socialist International (SI)	135	124	1951
5	Centrist Democrat International/Christian Democrat International (CDI)	94	73	1961
6	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDEP)	67	43	1976
7	Conferencia Permanente de Partidos Políticos de América Latina y el Caribe (COPPPAL)	72	24	1979
8	European Free Alliance (EFA)	46	19	1981
9	Asia Pacific Democratic Union (APDU)	15	15	1982
10	International Democrat Union (IDU)	74	63	1983
11	European People's Party (EPP)	50	21	1983
12	Coordinación Socialista Latinoamericana (CSL)	15	12	1986
13	Caribbean Democrat Union (CDU)	9	9	1986
14	São Paulo Forum (SPF)	113	27	1989
15	Humanist Party International (HPI)	24/	24	1989
16	Party of European Socialists (PES)	33	30	1992
17	Unión de Partidos Latinoamericanos (UPLA)	29	19	1992
18	Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD)	9	9	1993
19	Democrat Union of Africa (DUA)	18	16	1997
20	Federación de Partidos Verdes de las Américas (FPVA)	12	12	1997
21	International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties (IMCWP)	104	74	1998
22	International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP)	352	52	2000
23	Global Green Federations (GF)	81	76	2001
24	European Christian Political Movement (ECPM)	23	20	2002

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	Organization	Number of members	Number of countries	Year of foundation
25	Council of African Political Parties (CAPP)	83	48	2003
26	African Liberal Network (ALN)	47	30	2003
27	Europe-Democracy-Esperanto/2003 (EDE)	20	20	2003
28	World Ecological Parties	12	11	2003
29	Red Liberal de América Latina (RELIAL)	3	3	2003
30	European Green Party (EGP)	37	33	2004
31	Party of the European Left (PEL)	26	22	2004
32	European Democratic Party (EDP)	17	14	2004
33	Nordic Green Left Alliance (NGLA)	6	5	2004
34	Asia-Pacific Greens Federation (APGF)	16	13	2005
35	Liberal Southeast European Network (LSEEN)	15	11	2008
36	Arab Liberal Federation (ALF)	11	7	2008
37	European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECRP)	42	37	2009
38	Alliance of European National Movements	10	10	2009
39	Pirate Parties International (PPI)	38	36	2010
40	African Greens Federation (AGF)	22	22	2010
41	Progressive Alliance (PA)	116	95	2013
42	Initiative of Communist and Workers' Parties (ICWP)	30	27	2013
43	Arab Social Democratic Forum (ASDF)	13	12	2013
44	European Party for Individual Liberty (EPIL)	4	4	2013
45	European Pirate Party (EPP)	21	21	2014
46	Network of Social Democracy in Asia (NSDA)	12	13	2014
47	Animal Politics EU (APEU)	11	11	2014
48	International Alliance of Libertarian Parties (IALP)	21	21	2015
49	Alliance for Peace and Freedom (APF)	13	9	2015
50	Identity and Democracy Party (IDP)	12	11	2019

Source: Self-generated

OTPs can serve leaders in maintaining or gaining power, whether as governing figures or opposition leaders

Fighting for a position in an OTP—much like in the aforementioned international organizations—can also be a strategic move for politicians.²¹ Participation in OTPs can be a part of politicians' careers,²² or a final step in long trajectories that are worth fighting for, as seen in the cases of German Willy Brandt and Greek Yorgos Papandreu in the Socialist International, Colombian Andrés Pastrana, current president of the Centrist Democrat International, and Canadian Stephen Harper in the International Democratic Union.

Among the various activities that parties undertake in this realm, they have offices and members in third countries and develop strategies to secure the votes of citizens residing outside their home country. More than a hundred countries across five continents allow their citizens to vote abroad, often involving inter-party collaboration when migrations occur between neighboring countries and emigrants must return to cast their votes (Mersenson, 2015).

In certain cases—such as Italy or Spain—emigrants have elected representatives in Parlia-

ment. Organizing party activities beyond national borders to reach voters is a growing trend both quantitatively and qualitatively. There's a significant body of literature on this subject (Rashkova and Van Der Staak, 2020).

It's also common for youth members of political parties to travel and participate in collective instances, where they build networks they can leverage in the future, much like women's collectives, university groups, or legislators. Similarly, there's a proliferation of international training spaces for leaders, executives, and activists.

Some parties have established foundations that operate in other countries, aiming to influence local politicians through various plans and projects. At times, political leaders act as observers in elections, summoned by a multitude of organizations, including OTPs or parties with which they maintain historical relationships or similar strategies.

The vast majority of OTPs exclusively accept full membership from political parties, but there are cases—such as the Latin American Liberal Network (*Red Liberal de América Latina*)—that also include think tanks and academic centers. Additionally, the previously mentioned The Forum of São Paulo gives as much importance to social movements as it does to political parties.²³

Latin America and the OTPs

Latin America stands out, much like Europe, due to the transnational activism of some of its political parties dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For instance, parties like the socialist parties in Argentina and Uruguay maintained ties and were part of the Second International. Exiles of leaders and politicians during authoritarian governments, coup d'états, or revolutions were a constant in the region, fostering ties between political actors beyond borders.

21 «Senegal's Democratic Party (SDP) fully embraced a liberal ideology, at least rhetorically. The party joined the Liberal International in 1980 and established international contacts, for instance, with the German Liberal Party. This international recognition, particularly that of Aboulaye Wade (sometimes referred to as *the father of African liberalism*), might have contributed to the party's increasing self-identification with liberalism.» (Osei, 2013, p. 93) (in-house translation).

22 «Through the Popular [Spanish] Party and with the collaboration of the Foundation for Analysis and Social Studies, we send two or three individuals to the European Parliament to acquire knowledge about European politics. These young people then return to become candidates for councilors, mayors, and obviously, future candidates at the national level.» Interview conducted with the International Secretary of the International Democratic Union (IDU) by the Conservative Party of Nicaragua, María Esther Trejos, on May 7, 2014.

23 A significant group of OTPs (Pirate Parties International, African Liberal Net, Global Greens, Europe-Democracy-Esperanto, Liberal International, and OTPs officially recognized by the EU) accept individual memberships, although each implement this in diverse ways.

Table 2. OTPs composed of American organizations

OTPs exclusively integrated by American organizations	Global OTPs also integrated by American organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian Democratic Organization of America • São Paulo Forum • Federation of Green Parties of the Americas • Latin American Socialist Coordination • Caribbean Democrat Union • Permanent Conference of Political Parties of Latin America and the Caribbean • Union of Latin American Parties • Latin American Liberal Network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialist International • Progressive Alliance • Centrist Democrat International / Christian Democrat International • International Humanist Party • Global Green Federations • Liberal International • International Alliance of Libertarian Parties • International Democratic Union • International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties • Pirate Parties • Asia Pacific Democratic Union
8 organizations	11 organizations

Source: Self-generation.

There are eight OTPs exclusively comprised of American organizations. Among them, only one, the Federation of Green Parties of the Americas, includes organizations from North America, while another, the Caribbean Democrat Union, focuses solely on the Caribbean. The remaining organizations consist solely of Latin American parties.

The São Paulo Forum is the largest, alongside the Permanent Conference of Political Parties of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPPPAL), founded by various parties with strong nationalist traditions, primarily the Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party and the Argentine Peronism, to counteract the growing power of classical internationals in the 1970s.

Simultaneously, Latin American parties participate in eleven other OTPs that bring together organizations from different regions, showcasing the broad engagement of Latin American transnational party activism.

OTP spaces are highly valued by leaders and activists, paradoxically serving as places where

dictatorships, totalitarian systems, or single-party systems participate to attain a certain democratic legitimacy. In Latin America, this is evident with the presence of the Cuban Communist Party and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela in various OTPs like COPPPAL, the São Paulo Forum, and the CSL.²⁴

Cuba has numerous parties integrated into the OTP system, despite being unable to participate in any way in Cuba's political system. This might appear striking, but it reaffirms that the OTP space is a tool capable of producing what's known as the *boomerang effect* (De Almagro, 2018).

The leadership of OTPs is typically elected through assemblies comprising all their full

²⁴ Even the Chinese government, following the 18th Congress of the Communist Party held in 2012, acknowledged the significance of these transnational political party organizations. It systematically planned political activities alongside them, not just with those it was a member of due to ideological or regional affiliations (Xiaotong, 2021).

members.²⁵ When examining the nationality of the top authorities in global OTPs, it's notable that they are currently led, or have a significant presence in the leadership, by politicians from Latin America.

Unlike transnational activism, in this organizational realm, the left not only lacks a monopoly but also hasn't excelled in innovation. Thus, various liberal, conservative, and right-wing groups and leaders have established robust, highly active organizations that have formalized networks yielding positive outcomes for their objectives.

OTPs represent one of the strategies political parties have employed to maximize their power, in a way to confront the consequences of globalization while addressing the crisis of representation they face. However, this isn't the sole form of transnational activity among politicians.

Informal Political Networks

International governmental organizations and transnational political organizations are formal spaces. In other words, they are legally established, have authorities, recognized operating mechanisms, and generally some form of oversight that governs and evaluates their functioning. This is more evident in governmental-type organizations, but it also applies to transnational activist organizations and OTPs.

In addition to governmental activism in international institutions and transnational political activism in various (non-governmental) organizations discussed on previous pages, there is a third type of network: the informal network. This entails a series of informal links, strategies, and actions that should not be underestimated. These informal networks are more challenging to

understand and study precisely because of their informality.

In Latin America, the formal and informal realms often intertwine to the extent that distinguishing between the two, and determining which one prevails, becomes challenging (O'Donnell, 1996). Faced with inefficiency and a lack of impact from formal institutions, highly institutionalized informality is on the rise.

This means that behaviors, resources, strategies, and actions, while not regulated or defined by norms or written documents, are widely used, known, and shared among different actors.

It's crucial to note that informal actions are not less valued or practiced by politicians and activists. These informal transnational networks consist of personal relationships, connections, and agendas that aren't formally documented, including practices that may even be illegal.²⁶

Two countries are the axis of this network in Latin America: one is the enduring Cuban government, which has been involved in every clandestine organization, irregular financing, and political consultancy that has existed from the seventies until now (Yanes Quintero, 2005).²⁷

Cuba's influence extends to the Vietnam War, Yasser Arafat's Palestine, Angola, Libya, Lebanon, Namibia, and other distant places from Latin America. These informal networks, and the experience of sustaining much of their politics from there, are assets that were significantly revalued in the new phase following the fall of the Soviet

25 The Humanist International is the only organization where authorities are elected through direct votes from individual members via their website. Europe-Democracy-Esperanto allows, as per its statutes, debates and assemblies to be conducted online due to the financial constraints of members for attending physical meetings. Asia-Pacific Greens have a Coordinating Committee (an executive council) that regularly convenes via phone or the internet.

26 «The revelation by Hugo Pollo Carvajal, former head of intelligence under Hugo Chávez, regarding the transfer of tens of millions of dollars to the governments of Néstor Kirchner, Evo Morales, Lula da Silva, and Fernando Lugo, among others, revived the case of Venezuelan Alejandro Antonini Wilson, who is still awaiting a trial in Argentina» (Infobae, 2021).

27 Jorge Castañeda (1993) recounts the path taken by the money resulting from the kidnapping of businessman Jorge Born, which amounted to 60 million dollars in the early 1970s and ended up in Cuba before being distributed to other revolutionary groups.

When examining the nationality of the top authorities in global OTPs, it's notable that they are currently led, or have a significant presence in the leadership, by politicians from Latin America

Union and especially after the emergence of the Chavista phenomenon.

Numerous pieces of literature have detailed the functioning of these informal networks that spanned the globe and, besides providing information and resources, served as spaces connecting numerous political leaders from early times, forging bonds that remain relevant to this day.

In 1980, during the meeting in Managua to celebrate the first anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution, names like Manuel Zelaya, Alan García, Daniel Ortega, or even Lula appeared, and in several cases, they remained protagonists of 21st-century Latin American politics (Pedrosa, 2012).²⁸

The networks of exiles were also pivotal for the circulation of resources, information transmission, protection, and for building political careers that were otherwise impossible to establish in

their home countries (Markarian, 2004; Pedrosa, 2012). During the 60s and 70s, the networks formed around the communist parties of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union provided information, financed travels, and even recruited spies or informants (Andrew y Mitrokhin, 1999; López D'Alessandro, 2019).

These networks held significant value for the left in the first half of the 20th century, starting with Spanish socialist and republican groups exiled from Franco's regime in Latin America. Their importance resurfaced in the latter half of the 20th century when almost the entire region was under military dictatorships that systematically utilized exile as a political tool.

In this century, the Venezuelan government (supported by the Cuban government) has revisited this transnational know-how and combined it with informal diplomacy to support movements aligned with its agenda outside Venezuela's borders. To achieve this, they didn't hesitate to utilize their embassies and governmental institutions for purposes not formally intended, now partnering with new associates such as organized crime, Hezbollah, and the governments of Russia, China, and Iran (Lejtman, 2022b).

The significance of these informal networks is enhanced as they constitute the third pillar of a triangle alongside governmental networks and transnational activism. In fact, they are one of the main facilitators of the dynamism within the network of populist left-wing movements in Latin America.

5. Conclusions

States have firsthand experienced the shift in logic within the global system dating back to 1973. This crisis of the welfare state (as per Ralf Dahrendorf [1983], marking the end of the social democratic century) closed the cycle of expansion that began with the end of the Second World War and placed globalization and its effects at the center stage, simultaneously ejecting nation-states from this sphere.

²⁸ The networks of democratic left-wing groups also used these informal relationships not only to influence elections in the region but also to circulate money, influence, and resources. For instance, they facilitated healthcare for leaders, such as funding medical treatments for individuals like Jaime Paz Zamora after he was targeted in an attack. They advocated for the release of imprisoned leaders, organized meetings between political figures, arranged training programs, and exchanged information. This information served multiple purposes, from procuring arms to fostering dialogue among actors with divergent interests or ideologies.

Faced with inefficiency and a lack of impact from formal institutions, highly institutionalized informality is on the rise

However, this didn't imply that states were left in a token position, passively accepting a fate that would render them mere ornaments, tethered to the old and glorious times of the latter half of the 20th century. Quite the opposite. Today's landscape has changed in comparison to 1973 and even with respect to the 1990s.

Particularly in Latin America, nation-states continue to be central actors in national life, even wielding increased levels of power and acting as the axis of contention for access to power among different elites and social and political groups. Paradoxically, and simultaneously, the national state still struggles to solve problems originating in the global agenda, often exacerbating them significantly (as seen in various lockdown measures during the pandemic).

In a bid to strengthen their power and influence, states have deepened their transnational activism, taking on various forms and representations. This has resulted in an expanding network of governmental and non-governmental institutions, both formal and informal, aimed at exerting influence beyond the countries' borders (yet often manifesting within national boundaries).

Following this, international governmental institutionalism ceased to hold intrinsic value. In other words, its efficiency or nominal goal achievement mattered less. This governmental ensemble became just another part of the stage where politicians, with or without public office, reaffirmed their leadership. Additionally,

activists and experts used these institutions to advance their agendas and compete in the multiple political struggles that characterize countries and the region.

The overlap of these three networks (governmental, non-governmental, and informal) described here lends the international system a legitimacy and an idea of efficiency it did not previously possess, and it's inherently political. Perhaps, the renowned Mar del Plata Summit in Argentina in 2005, where the extension of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was frustrated, stands as one of the most symbolic moments in the collective functioning of these networks.

The great success of these overlapping networks lies in the fact that the concept of a *patria grande* was finally personalized in the presidents of the new left who adeptly maneuvered within this maze of international and transnational institutions and organizations.

This wave of transnational activism and politics was well utilized by proponents of authoritarian, illiberal, even antidemocratic projects, and it emptied the internationalist movement of its traditional liberal influence based on cosmopolitan ideas or the internationalization of democracy.

At the same time, it should be noted that populist left-wing groups do not have it all their way. The practical implementation of this supranational nationalist discourse has never been easy and has been influenced by changes in governments, regional and global circumstances, as well as the contradictory pathologies, ideas, and ambitions of leaders. Of course, historical currents supporting freedom in the continent have also been present since the very processes of independence.

In this regard, it's important to mention the political actions of leaders and activists working towards defensive projects or opposing specific projects of populist left-wing movements. However, these efforts have shown more effectiveness in blocking than in building strategies and networks that can support and sustain their own agenda.

The role of OTPs should also be highlighted. Not only due to their large number, history, and diversity but also for their assembly of key tools

for democracies, such as political parties. These OTPs become fundamental instruments for constructing a democratic future and countering the strategies of authoritarian sectors and their sustained unique discourses rooted in renewed supranational nationalist ideas.

The truth is that, rather than integration into a homogeneous whole, what we see in Latin America is a fragmented and tense landscape. Far from the grandiose patriotic imagination of unification (*patriagrandismo*). And, considering the concrete results obtained from this extensive deployment, it's been quite inefficient.

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Fernando Pedrosa

Historian from the University of Buenos Aires. Master's in Latin American Studies. Doctorate in Contemporary Political Processes from the University of Salamanca. Professor and researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires, where he coordinates the Asia and Latin America Studies Group at the Institute of Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Director of the Asia/Latin America Magazine. Researcher at Government and Political Analysis AC (GAPAC).

Twitter: @fpedrosaz

