

Belo Horizonte and Bangalore:
A Regional Comparison of Latin America and South Asia
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Introduction

At first glance, the regions of South Asia and Latin America could not be more different on a demographic level- different languages, major religions, values, and ways of life. Latin America comprises Central and South America, where Spanish and Portuguese are the primary languages spoken. South Asia is generally known to be made up of the countries of Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. Latin America has a significantly larger land mass than South Asia and subsequently has a larger, but less dense, population. Latin America and the Caribbean has a population density of 33 people per square kilometer, while South Asia has 389 people per square kilometer (World Bank Group, 2021). This difference in population density has many health and wealth implications. However, these regions have more in common than meets the eye in the political and economic realms. South Asia and Latin America are regions with rich cultures that have been heavily influenced by colonialism and nearby global superpowers. When examined holistically, a pattern of development emerges between the two regions. Using the Dependency Theory, South Asia is moving towards a transition from the periphery to the semi-periphery. Latin America has also made this transition, now existing in the semi-periphery group. This holistic approach to a regional comparison provides a broad overview of a variety of factors that could contribute to the potential growth and development of a region outside of politics or economics. By comparing factors individually, a deeper understanding of patterns of development emerges. Using political,

social, and economic trends, the regions of South Asia and Latin America will be compared using this holistic method, ending with a case study comparison of India and Brazil.

Political and Social Dynamics

In both regions, a history of colonialism has shaped political dynamics between and within countries. Both regions have had problems with creating stable regimes- either democratic or autocratic; while there are some countries that act as pillars of stability in the areas, the overall level of regime stability in both regions has been historically low. Since both areas have had militant leaders, a similar path to democracy is seen, shaped by protests and democratic movements. In Latin America, these protests include the Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo protests in the 1970s and '80s against the Argentine regime responsible for disappearing members of their opposition (Meade, 2016). In South Asia, these protests look like the 'Kisaan Protests' by farmers advocating against three farm bills that would destabilize the agrarian sector of the economy and put farmers at risk. These ongoing protests have caused cracks to show in India's democracy through the crackdown on nonviolent protests and press censorship (Mawani, 2021). These protests are just two examples of the many which have led to changes in the political regimes.

Political Change

Colonialism-derived instability found in both regions can be attributed specifically to Western interventionism. India and Pakistan were under the rule of the British monarchy until 1947, which makes them relatively new independent countries; Bangladesh achieved its independence in 1971. In Latin America, the United States has been heavily involved in regime changes that further its endeavors as an imperialist state seeking new economic prospects,

especially in the late 1800s to early 1900s, but continuing today. Interventionism can make regime stability a challenge, regardless of what regime type is in place. While democracy is not a requirement for a stable regime, it can help to ensure relatively easy transitions of power between governments. Both regions have made great strides towards democratization, with Latin America being mostly, if not fully, democratized and South Asia slowly moving in that direction as well. However, democracy will not be achieved without the use of free and fair elections, which neither region has mastered yet.

Until the 1980s, Latin America's civilian and militaristic dictatorships caused democracy to struggle to survive in the region. This was largely due to United States' interventionism through the Cold War, wherein the United States would support authoritarian leaders to prevent the spread of communism (Schenoni and Mainwing, 2019). With the exception of Costa Rica, nearly every Latin American country has had an experience with a United States-sponsored dictator (McSherry, 2012). The New Left movement, a leftist-communist movement in the 1960s and '70s, and Pink Tide, a perceived transition toward leftist governments in the 21st century, shaped the region's recent political dynamics. Today, Latin America has some unrest due to economic factors, particularly in South America. Among Latin American countries, there is little conflict, most of which stems from internal political factions. While the political dynamics of Latin America have stayed relatively stable since the 1980s, internal political change abounds in this region. In 2019, there were several overhauls in the governments of South American countries, such as in Chile where major protests occurred in response to the increased price of living. Increased privatization of industries has had profound consequences on economic inequality in the country, and metro fares have increased, inciting mass protest across the country

in response. Venezuela has also had much political upheaval, as inflation has increased immensely in the last few years and Venezuelan *bolivar fuerte* became the least-valued circulating currency in the world based on official exchange rates in 2018 after inflating 80,000 % (“Banco Central de Venezuela”, 2018). Much political change in the region has been due to the United States’ interventionism. Historically, many left-wing leaders have been democratically elected in the region, but the United States has backed many coups to put right-wing or authoritarian leaders in place to prevent the rise of socialism and communism, as has been the case in Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, and other countries.

The Fragile States Index (FSI) measures several indicators of state stability including cohesion, economic, social, and political indicators. According to the FSI, Latin America has had little change except for two outliers- Brazil and Venezuela. Brazil’s stability has worsened significantly in the last five years with all four indicator groups declining; the indicator with the strongest rate of decline was human rights (The Fund for Peace, 2021). Venezuela’s struggles largely stem from the crumbling economy, but like Brazil, all of the indicator groups declined in the last five years significantly (The Fund for Peace, 2021).

South Asia’s FSI scores have improved over the last five years, but this is subject to change, especially for Afghanistan and India. Many outside actors have attempted to create a democratic state in Afghanistan, but none have been successful. In 2014, Afghanistan had its first democratic transition of power in the country’s history. In 2021, the United States ended its involvement in Afghanistan and the Taliban’s authoritarian regime returned to power in August 2021 as they had in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Doherty, 2021). India, on the other hand, has had a relatively stable democracy, but the current president Norendra Modi is pushing for a

strong Hindi authoritarian government, threatening its democratic stability (Repucci and Slipowitz, 2021).

Status of Women

According to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2018 (World Economic Forum), both Latin America and South Asia have yet to close their gender gaps. Latin America has made strides, but South Asia is moving at a more rapid pace to reach full gender equality. Predictions estimate South Asia will achieve gender equality in 70 years versus Latin America's anticipated 74 years.

In Latin America, women are more likely to be literate than men, and more women are currently in school. Historically, women have been heavily involved in political change such as the Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo protest in Argentina from 1977 to 2006. In both regions, women are typically required to fulfill traditional roles of the wife, mother, and homemaker but there have been movements to allow women to move beyond these gendered roles into spaces of business, politics, and finance that were typically reserved only for men. This ideal for women is called *marianismo* in Latin America, just as the ideal man is characterized by *machismo* (Zimmerman, 3).

Microfinance has helped empower women in South Asia in recent years. As women have been more involved in their own financial decisions and leading their own lives outside of the traditional social structure, the fertility rate has dropped from 6 children to 2.3 children per woman (World Bank Group, 2021). This has profound impacts on the quality of life for both the woman and the child because it reduces the economic stress placed on the mother and allows for further economic growth, and provides a better quality of life for the child. However, regime

changes have caused the women to lose some of their rights in Afghanistan specifically (Barr, 2021).

Education

In both regions, education has been lacking when compared to the rest of the developed world. However, there is a global movement to improve access to education. In Latin America, the rate of progression to secondary school is around 95%, and has been stable since the late 1990s (World Bank Group, 2021). In South Asia, this figure is slightly lower at 91%, following a steep increase in the late 1980s through the 1990s (World Bank Group, 2021). Since Latin America is generally more stable and economically developed, it has had more resources to devote to public services such as public education and public health as previously mentioned.

More than half of low income children or children in rural areas of Latin America fail to complete nine years of education. Among children who are of lower secondary school age, 7.2% are out of school. The number triples to 23% when analyzing children of upper secondary school age who are out of school (UNICEF, 2021). Improvements in education have been made in the region in recent decades, but there are still improvements to be made in regards to the rural areas of the region and giving indigenous children access to education.

The report by the World Bank noted that many governments in South Asia- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka- had invested heavily in education to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education for all children by 2015. This investment resulted in an increase in the enrollment rate in South Asia's primary schools to 89% from 2000 to 2010, bringing the region closer to the enrollment rates in Latin America and the Caribbean (Dundar et al. 2016). This comparative trend shows promise

for potential improvements in education in Latin America. Providing children with access to education in rural Latin American areas will strengthen the country overall, and it can be done as seen in South Asia.

Public Health

Health outcomes in these two regions are indicative of the political and economic state these regions are in. For each of these, I will identify key health indicators and compare them across the two regions. The indicators are infant mortality, life expectancy, and rates of malnutrition.

Infant mortality can be an indicator of the ability of a country to provide basic health services to pregnant people and infants. The global trend for infant mortality has been trending downward, and these regions follow this trend as well. South Asia's infant mortality rate per 1000 births is higher than Latin America's (World Bank Group, 2021), further indicating the disparities in access to healthcare and economic welfare.

Life expectancy at birth can be an indicator of access to medical care throughout a person's life as well as likelihood of exposure to communicable diseases. The life expectancy at birth can also indicate rising living standards, improved lifestyle and better education (OECD). The life expectancy in Latin America and the Caribbean is around 75 years- slightly over the global average- while South Asia's is slightly lower at 69 years (World Bank, 2021). The life expectancy at birth has been steadily increasing in both regions, with Latin America increasing marginally faster.

Malnutrition is an indication of a family's ability to provide for their children economically, the accessibility of food, and the nutrition of accessible foods. In South Asia,

malnutrition has been a problem for decades, but there are signs of progress. From 1990 to 2005, the percentage of the population who was malnourished fell from 25% to 21%, but the number of malnourished people increased from 283 million people to 314 million people. This could be due to India's booming population which skews numbers in the region as a whole. India has more severely malnourished citizens than the entirety of sub-Saharan Africa (Haté & Gannon, 2010, 6).

Latin America has unique malnutrition problems because it has low rates of acute malnutrition, but high rates of stunted growth and obesity. The problem in this region is not undernourishment as in South Asia, it is lack of access to nutritious foods. Food insecurity is on the rise in the region, increasing from 7.6% of people experiencing food insecurity in 2016 to 9.8% in 2017 according to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (2018). Latin America and the Caribbean have the second highest percentage of overweight children in the world with 7.3%, which is equivalent to 3.9 million girls and boys; one in four inhabitants total have obesity (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2018).

These malnutrition statistics are key to understanding food injustice in both of these regions. Lack of access to food is the primary cause of malnutrition in South Asia; in Latin America, the problem is lack of access to nutritious food specifically. However, neither of these should be the case. 70% of India's rural households are involved in the agricultural sector and India produces much of the global food supply, yet there is still a food access issue in South Asia even in close proximity to such food wealth (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2021). The lack of access to food is driven by global markets and economic inequity in

the region. Latin America, especially Brazil, produces many fruits so access to healthy foods should be simple; again, the lack of access is driven by the same factors of inequity.

Economic Dynamics

There are many economic similarities between Latin America and South Asia such as heavy reliance on agriculture and dependence on other countries for economic success. However, one key difference is that there is only one main economic power in South Asia, India, while Latin America has several significant economic players such as Mexico and Brazil. Latin America has had more economic development than South Asia, but has also had more stability allowing such growth.

Historically, Latin America has relied on too few crops, creating monocrop economies which have little opportunity to adapt to changing markets; therefore, the overall economy of Latin America has fluctuated heavily with changes in global demand for 'cash crops,' goods such as coffee and sugar. Since the 1950s, Latin America as a whole has moved to become a more industrial economy, but some countries still rely heavily on agriculture and extractive industries because the region is a major source of raw materials and has sub-par infrastructure outside of major cities (Karpowicz, 2016). Movement to industrial economies has been hindered by a lack of research and development and has been focused on cheaply remaking goods through import substitution industrialization. Some economies in Latin America, such as the economy of Venezuela mentioned previously, are suffering due to high rates of inflation leading to hyperinflation. Many economies in the region are closely tied to the US economy, causing fluctuations in gross domestic product as the United States has fluctuations in its own economy. The per capita gross domestic product of Latin America and the Caribbean is US\$7202.58,

significantly higher than that of South Asia's gross domestic product of US\$1804.92 (World Bank Group, 2021). This difference in gross domestic product exemplifies the great variance in economic situations in both regions.

South Asia makes up 25% of the global population, but only 5% of the global gross domestic product with India dominating the South Asian economic sphere (United Nations, 2019). Some countries in the region have built economies on cheap labor in a similar manner to Latin America and are now transitioning into import substitution industrialization, wherein imported goods are made cheaply within the country limiting needs for export and causing growth in industrial sectors. These jobs, often in the service sector, can be done cheaply and efficiently while also keeping up with demand for employment, providing sources of income for many in South Asia.

Interactions with World Powers

Due to the presence of natural resources, especially oil, and their strategic geographic positions, these regions have been influenced by other countries for reasons both economic and political. The United States, due to its proximity, has had historic relations with Latin America since the colonization of the western hemisphere. Conversely, interactions with another global superpower, China, in the region are relatively new, but are becoming increasingly important. This situation is reversed in South Asia, where China has had much historical economic and political influence, and the United States is now becoming more involved in the region.

China

China has unique interactions with both regions, stemming from a desire to be the dominant trading power. One example of this is the formation of the BRICS agreement involving

Latin American and South Asian countries with economic and political power- Brazil and India- for the mutual economic benefit of all countries involved (Lopes, Jr., 2015).

China is Latin America's second largest trade partner after the United States, and has been seen as an alternative to the United States and Europe by Latin American nations for support in the international community, for funding of infrastructure and humanitarian aid, and for creating economic growth. The number of high-level meetings between Chinese and Latin American officials has rapidly increased and have been accompanied by several bilateral agreements (Koleski, 2017). Direct investment from China is primarily in extractive industries such as mining, and most of the exports from Latin America to China are raw materials and commodities (Congressional Research Service, 2021, 1).

China has a big role in the economies and politics of South Asia due to its proximity. With India preoccupied with trying to stabilize and control their economy and political arena, China can dominate foreign relations with the smaller countries in South Asia with little to no resistance from India or Pakistan (Curtis, 2016). It has been giving out sizable loans to South Asian countries with weak economies. Sri Lanka received nearly \$5 billion in loans from China in 2020, and the Maldives received around \$1 billion (Pal, 2021). These loans expand Chinese influence in the region where India has been the primary economic player. India still has the stronghold against Chinese influence; as China's economic and political power expands in the region, this is subject to change.

The United States

The United States is one of the largest trade partners for both of these regions. However there has been a long history of interventionism in both regions beginning in the early 1900s. In

both regions, the United States was primarily focused on preventing the spread of communism. This came to a head in the 1960s and 1970s when both regions were used as Cold War proxy battlefields (Williams, 2017).

The United States' relationship with Latin America has been close knit since the foundation of the country. The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 became the primary aspect of United States diplomacy in the region and established the 'big brother' ideal of the United States toward Latin America, wherein the United States would not tolerate further colonization in the Western Hemisphere. In the 1820s, many Latin American countries had just won their independence from colonizers and the United States wanted to control how Latin America would continue to interact with Europe (United States Department of the State, 2016). This mentality of protectionism in Latin America has continued to today, where the United States strongly influences elections across the region.

In South Asia, the US involvement in the Bangladesh genocide in 1971 wherein the United States supported the suppression of the Bengali people. The United States saw West Pakistan- now Pakistan- as a Cold War ally and was complicit in the genocide of the Bengali people through downplaying its severity and supporting arms shipments to Pakistan from Iran, Turkey, and Jordan (Black, 2007, 756). The United States has had a strong presence in Afghanistan, where it has fought against the Taliban since the 1990s. However, involvement there has ended as of August 2021.

In both of the regions, the United States has played a key role in trade and development leading to its increased influence in politics and social settings as well. It further shows how the United States' involvement can both help and hinder the development of the regions. Throughout

time, the United States has wielded influence and power; however, this could be changing with the growing influence of other global superpowers.

Case Study- India and Brazil

India and Brazil are very similar countries socially, politically, and economically. India is densely populated, heavily urbanized, is considered democratic, and has a relatively strong economy compared to other countries in the region. India is in the middle of a political battle, and has been downgraded from a free democracy to a partially free democracy by Freedom House, an organization analysing democracy around the globe. This is partially due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his allies' crackdown on critics in light of the COVID-19 pandemic which has been seen as authoritarian. In the broader sense, Modi represents the larger Hindu nationalist movement in the Indian government calling for violence and discrimination against Muslims and dissenters (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2021).

Brazil is similar to India in that it is the most powerful country in its region due to its size, population, and strong economy. It is considered free according to Freedom House, but its democracy is threatened by its leader, Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro, known for being extremely conservative and divisive in his politics. Like Modi of India, he has promoted political violence and has, throughout his political career, made several admiring comments about former U.S.- supported Brazilian military dictatorships. Also like Modi, Bolsonaro has been dismissive of the COVID-19 pandemic; in October 2021, a Brazilian senate committee approved a report calling for Bolsonaro to face criminal charges, including crimes against humanity, for his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic (Brito, 2021).

These countries are also similar economically, as they are both members in the BRICS bloc, a group of countries with emerging economies and increasing political influence in their regions. This bloc of countries comprises five emerging economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (Miller, 2021). Both countries have strong agrarian sectors, but are experiencing increases in the service sector. India is especially seeing a rise in technology, while Brazil is growing in its natural resources sector.

It is clear that India and Brazil are on similar paths, with India's democracy currently collapsing and Brazil's being threatened both by their leaders. This pattern is dangerous because both countries are economic and political leaders in their regions and their democratic downfall could have massive implications. As the economic leaders of each region, these countries provide the framework in which region-wide patterns can be explored.

Discussion and Conclusion

Latin America and South Asia are on similar paths as evidenced by the indicators explored in the previous sections. Each of the metrics are important to understanding the social, political, and economic structures of the regions and provide a basis of knowledge for the theory being presented. In this case, Latin America serves as a preview to development in South Asia. This idea of patterns of development can be overlaid on to other developing regions. Latin America went through long periods with many countries being run by authoritarian regimes. Eventually the region made the hard transition into democracy. South Asia still has countries which have not transitioned to democracy, as well as some that were democratic at one point but are now under different regimes. South Asia is behind Latin America in terms of economic development, but is becoming more important in the economic sphere.

If viewed through the lens of Dependency Theory in which there are periphery, semi-periphery, and core countries, Latin America is in a different group than South Asia. South Asia is a peripheral country supplying resources and cheap labor to core developed countries, and Latin America is in the semi-periphery, slowly moving toward the core. However, we can see South Asia transitioning to a more industry and service based economy. Latin America has moved past solely supplying cheap labor and resources to core countries, now mimicking core countries through import substitution industrialization. The whole region of South Asia is transitioning away from large agricultural sectors to service and industry based economies in a very similar pattern to Latin America in the 1990s and early 2000s. In India especially, import substitution industrialization is becoming more prevalent. These regions have many similarities, and South Asia can and most likely will develop over time into a region much like Latin America today- lagging behind the ‘superpowers’ of China and the United States but still powerful in its own right.

Comparing regions in this way may also have broader implications for comparative politics. By comparing regions and identifying patterns rather than comparing singular countries, a broader understanding of political, economic, and social development can be achieved. Future research in this field could include developing a statistical model for the comparison of various regions.

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