

# The Amazon rainforest and the global–regional politics of ecosystem governance

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In 2019, wildfires put the Amazon rainforest once again in the global spotlight and prompted criticism from several leaders. French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted: ‘Our house is burning. Literally. The Amazon rain forest—the lungs which produce 20% of our planet’s oxygen—is on fire. It is an international crisis. Members of the G7 Summit, let’s discuss this emergency first order in two days!’<sup>1</sup> Joe Biden, then a candidate for the US presidency, suggested the United States and other countries should offer resources to Brazil and say: ‘Stop tearing down the forest. And if you don’t then you’re going to have significant economic consequences.’<sup>2</sup> However, reactions from Brazil’s Amazon neighbours were different. Amid the crisis, states with sovereignty over parts of the Amazon rainforest decided to present a common response to the international outcry about the Amazon’s surging deforestation and wildfires. They expressed some commitment to forest conservation, but on their terms, reaffirming each state’s sovereign authority over their share of the ecosystem.<sup>3</sup>

The contrast between the responses of Amazon and global North states becomes a puzzle when one thinks about the concrete consequences of Amazon degradation. If images of large columns of smoke and devastated wildlife alarmed the world, the actual smoke and damage caused by the fire went beyond Brazil’s borders into neighbouring countries. In fact, ecosystem degradation does not respect borders. The growing deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon has come to be seen as leading to a tipping point of no return for the entire regional ecosystem, affecting populations in all Amazon countries.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, this impetus to joint

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Neuman, ‘Macron urges G-7 members to put Amazon fires at top of agenda’, NPR, 23 Aug. 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/23/753639869/macron-urges-g7-members-to-put-amazon-fires-at-top-of-agenda>.

<sup>2</sup> Jake Spring, ‘Biden’s criticism of Amazon deforestation draws swift reaction in Brazil’, Reuters, 30 Sept. 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-brazil-environment-idUSL1N2GR0WY>.

<sup>3</sup> Cumbre Presidencial de la Amazonía, ‘Pacto de Leticia por la Amazonía’ (Leticia, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Lovejoy and Carlos Nobre, ‘Amazon tipping point’, *Science Advances* 4: 2, 2018; Joana Pereira and Eduardo Viola, ‘Catastrophic climate change and forest tipping points: blind spots in international politics and policy’, *Global Policy* 9: 4, 2018, pp. 513–24.

action when confronting global audiences has been the dominant pattern in the regional governance of the Amazon. Why then do Amazon states stick together when faced with external criticism, instead of putting pressure on one another? And, more importantly, what are the consequences of such behaviour for environmental protection?

In this article, I explain these dynamics through the lens of what Wilson Rowe has called ecosystemic politics, viewing them as broad and unanticipated consequences of constructing large units of nature as the objects of international policy fields.<sup>5</sup> Ecosystems become policy objects because of the multiple and conflicting interests over the services they provide.<sup>6</sup> Some of these services have a wide range of beneficiaries, while others have concentrated benefits appropriated only by a few actors. For instance, the role of the Amazon rainforest in mitigating climate change can benefit the whole planet, while activities linked to deforestation can benefit only a much narrower range of actors. The realization of these services can be contradictory, as in the case of forest preservation versus deforestation, raising a conflict between beneficiaries. This conflict often produces a global/national cleavage, opposing local states, which are more likely to be targets of pressure from beneficiaries of services with concentrated excludable gains, and the global actors organized to protect more diffuse benefits.

This global–national tension—which is all too familiar in global environmental politics—increases in complexity when ecosystems cut across national borders, as is the case with the Amazon rainforest. In these cases, the sustainability of ecosystems is tied to preserving an ecosystem's entire span of biodiversity, requiring collaboration among the ecosystem-adjacent states. This is particularly the case for ecosystem services with globally diffuse benefits, such as harbouring a critical mass of biodiversity and mitigating climate change. In this sense, avoiding the leakage of ecosystem depletion requires policy consistency and cooperation among local states.<sup>7</sup>

For those reasons, regional environmental cooperation has been hailed as crucial for effectively governing ecosystems and as a cornerstone of global environmental regimes.<sup>8</sup> However, I contend that this very position creates incentives for dynamics of regional cooperation that may not induce—and can even hinder—intended policy outcomes. First, the global pressure to influence or constrain domestic governance can stimulate regional cooperation around ecosystems to

<sup>5</sup> Elana Wilson Rowe, 'Ecosystemic politics: analyzing the consequences of speaking for adjacent nature on the global stage', *Political Geography*, vol. 91, 2021, pp. 1–10.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Lant, J. B. Ruhl and Steven Kraft, 'The tragedy of ecosystem services', *BioScience* 58: 10, 2008, pp. 969–74; David Humphreys, *Logjam: deforestation and the crisis of global governance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Elinor Ostrom, 'Polycentric systems for coping with collective action and global environmental change', *Global Environmental Change* 20: 4, 2010, pp. 550–57; Jianbang Gan and Bruce McCarl, 'Measuring transnational leakage of forest conservation', *Ecological Economics* 64: 2, 2007, pp. 423–32; Harrison Fell and Peter Maniloff, 'Leakage in regional environmental policy: the case of the regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative', *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, vol. 87, 2018, pp. 1–23.

<sup>8</sup> Ken Conca, 'The rise of the region in global environmental politics', *Global Environmental Politics* 12: 3, 2012, pp. 127–33; Jörg Balsiger and Stacy VanDeveer, 'Navigating regional environmental governance', *Global Environmental Politics* 12: 3, 2012, pp. 1–17; Jon Marco Church, *Ecoregionalism: analyzing regional environmental agreements and processes* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020); Henrik Selin, 'Global environmental governance and regional centers', *Global Environmental Politics* 12: 3, 2012, pp. 18–37.

focus on the defence of sovereignty. Second, global interest in promoting regional policy coordination offers incentives for adjacent states to bargain jointly over the terms of their environmental stewardship, irrespective of how limited this may be. These interwoven dynamics of defensive sovereignty and bargained stewardship provide an analytical framework within which to understand the global–regional politics of ecosystem governance in the Amazon and shed light on analogous dynamics elsewhere.

In the Amazon case, drawing on both primary and secondary materials, I trace the institutional evolution of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty (ACT) and its successor organization, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), to illustrate this theory and demonstrate the degree to which it is substantiated. As we shall see, states adjacent to the Amazon have developed these regional cooperative institutions in response to the global salience of their ecosystem. Regional cooperation, then, has continuously provided a platform on which Amazon-adjacent states can defend their sovereignty and negotiate the place of the Amazon in global regimes relevant to its governance.<sup>9</sup> This has resulted in a bargained stewardship of the Amazon rainforest, in which Amazon states were able to divert global commitments that could limit their sovereignty, while attracting resources for building capacities to voluntarily coordinate preservation efforts.

This framework of analysis allows for tying together seemingly disparate aspects of Amazon international governance. Existing literature on Amazon regional cooperation converges on pointing out sovereignty concerns as a central reason behind the ACT's origins and early development.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, works that analyse the institutional evolution of the ACT/ACTO also describe how these organizations have progressively acquired an environmental mandate, shaped in dialogue with international commitments and partners.<sup>11</sup> In parallel, a larger body of research has explored how some Amazon states, particularly Brazil, played a relevant role in building global environmental regimes and helped enshrine sovereignty-preserving norms within them.<sup>12</sup> Here I go further to show that defence of sovereignty by Amazon states in global forums was interwoven with Amazon regionalism and was an outcome which the ACT/ACTO helped bring about. The analysis carried out in this article demonstrates and explains the linkage between these dynamics, in terms of a bargained stewardship underpinned by, and underpinning, sovereignty preservation in the interplay of regional and global actors.

<sup>9</sup> Lucas de O. Paes, 'Networked territoriality: a processual–relational view on the making (and makings) of regions in world politics', *Review of International Studies*, pp. 1–30, doi: 10.1017/S02660210522000249

<sup>10</sup> Beatriz Garcia, *The Amazon from an international law perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 75–84; Maria Antonia Tigre, *Regional cooperation in Amazonia* (Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 2017), pp. 87–92; Paulo Henrique Nunes, 'The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization: a critical analysis of the reasons behind its creation and development', *Brazilian Journal of International Law* 13: 2, 2016, p. 219.

<sup>11</sup> Tigre, *Regional cooperation in Amazonia*, pp. 362–85; Maria Antonia Tigre, 'Cooperation for climate mitigation in Amazonia: Brazil's emerging role as a regional leader', *Transnational Environmental Law* 5: 2, 2016, pp. 401–25.

<sup>12</sup> Eduardo Viola and Matías Franchini, *Brazil and climate change: beyond the Amazon* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); Kathryn Hochstetler and Manjana Milkoreit, 'Emerging powers in the climate negotiations: shifting identity conceptions', *Political Research Quarterly* 67: 1, 2014, pp. 224–35; Marco Vieira, 'Brazilian foreign policy in the context of global climate norms', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 9: 4, 2013, pp. 369–86.

The remainder of the article unfolds in three sections and a conclusion. The next section presents the argument that the politics of ecosystem governance is grounded in a dispute among beneficiaries of, respectively, ecosystem-preserving and ecosystem-depleting services. The second section elaborates on how these struggles may structure the governance of cross-border ecosystems in terms of a global–regional opposition. The third section turns to the empirical case, discussing the evolution of ACT/ACTO as a defensive sovereignty arrangement, which in its interplay with global actors underpinned a bargained stewardship of the Amazon ecosystem. The conclusion discusses the implications of this global–regional politics for the Amazon in particular and, more broadly, for the governance of cross-border ecosystems.

### Ecosystem services and the politics of ecosystem governance

Ecosystems can be defined in multiple ways, but they usually refer to a geographically bounded and cohesive ‘assemblage of natural communities and species’.<sup>13</sup> They become an object of governance because they offer material and immaterial benefits—often called *ecosystem services*.<sup>14</sup> An ecosystem can be as small as the natural life on an island in the Pacific or as big as the Arctic Ocean, the Sahara Desert or the Amazon rainforest, spanning several countries.<sup>15</sup> In this section, I discuss the challenge of governing ecosystems that yield benefits to different groups of actors across multiple scales but are nevertheless circumscribed by the boundaries of specific states. This challenge is grounded in what Wilson Rowe has called ecosystemic politics, that is, the consequences of constructing and delimiting ecosystems as the objects of international policy fields.<sup>16</sup> As her research explores, states’ efforts to delimit authority over such interconnected pieces of nature that cut across state boundaries can often have unintended consequences, which can escape the environmental domain and have global effects.<sup>17</sup>

Drawing on existing scholarship in environmental politics, I here argue that ecosystems become sources of cooperation or contention to a great extent because of the functional role of the ecosystem services they provide. Some of these services have wide-ranging and even global beneficiaries, while the benefits

<sup>13</sup> David M. Olson, Eric Dinerstein, Eric D. Wikramanayake, Neil D. Burgess, George V. N. Powell, Emma C. Underwood, Jennifer A. D’Amico, Illanga Itoua, Holly E. Strand, John C. Morrison, Colby J. Loucks, Thomas F. Allnutt, Taylor H. Ricketts, Yumiko Kura, John F. Lamoreux, Wesley W. Wettengel, Prashant Hedao and Kenneth R. Kassem, ‘Terrestrial ecoregions of the world: a new map of life on Earth; a new global map of terrestrial ecoregions provides an innovative tool for conserving biodiversity’, *BioScience* 51: 11, 2001, pp. 933–8; Kirsten Greer and Laura Cameron, ‘The use and abuse of ecological constructs’, *Geoforum*, vol. 65, 2015, pp. 451–3; Laura Cameron and Sinead Earley, ‘The ecosystem—movements, connections, tensions and translations’, *Geoforum*, vol. 65, 2015, pp. 473–81.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Costanza, Ralph d’Arge, Rudolf de Groot, Stephen Farber, Monica Grasso, Bruce Hannon, Karin Limburg, Shahid Naeem, Robert V. O’Neill, Jose Paruelo, Robert G. Raskin, Paul Sutton and Marjan van den Belt, ‘The value of the world’s ecosystem services and natural capital’, *Nature* 387: 6630, 1997, pp. 253–60; Lant et al., ‘The tragedy of ecosystem services’; Humphreys, *Logjam*; Barney Dickson et al., *Towards a global map of natural capital: key ecosystem assets* (Nairobi: UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Olson et al., ‘Terrestrial ecoregions of the world’.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson Rowe, ‘Ecosystemic politics’.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson Rowe, ‘Ecosystemic politics’.

of other services are more concentrated and geographically delimited.<sup>18</sup> The realization of these services can also often be mutually incompatible, producing an intrinsic conflict among beneficiaries—particularly when some services entail ecosystem depletion and others require preservation.<sup>19</sup>

The Amazon rainforest is a good illustration. It plays an important role in sequestering carbon and thus is widely seen as an important component of any successful strategy for mitigating climate change.<sup>20</sup> The benefits of this service are global and non-excludable—the entire planet profits from the Amazon in this sense. In contrast, activities such as predatory logging, mining and deforestation for cattle ranching have concentrated and often excludable benefits associated with the production and commercialization of these services. More importantly, the realization of concentrated and excludable benefits grounded in ecosystem depletion, such as those stemming from deforestation, necessarily conflicts with the realization of the other diffuse benefits grounded in ecosystem preservation.

Therefore, the politics of ecosystem governance can be understood as involving a clash between the beneficiaries of, respectively, ecosystem-preserving and ecosystem-depleting services. As the literature on collective action and environmental politics has long indicated, the dispersion or concentration of resource benefits gives different incentives for interest groups to mobilize and influence political outcomes related to their protection.<sup>21</sup> The ecosystem services associated with concentrated and excludable benefits tend to yield higher short-term gains and require local material exploration of the ecosystem.<sup>22</sup> Although the beneficiaries of these services may be spread geographically, the states that regulate and tax this exploration are better positioned to achieve these short-term benefits directly. Furthermore, when these benefits are extensive, this allows private beneficiaries to mobilize resources into influencing the domestic politics of states within, or bordering, the ecosystem.

Ecosystem-preserving services with diffuse benefits, in turn, seldom yield mobilizable resources through which to influence politics directly. Limited resources, coupled with beneficiary dispersion, also raise more coordination problems, demanding a catalysing sponsor to channel resources from elsewhere to support mobilization.<sup>23</sup> This catalysis could come from local states, but given the contradictory realization between services preserving and depleting an

<sup>18</sup> Humphreys, *Logjam*, pp. 2–4.

<sup>19</sup> Lant et al., ‘The tragedy of ecosystem services’.

<sup>20</sup> Oliver Phillips and Roel Brienen, ‘Carbon uptake by mature Amazon forests has mitigated Amazon nations’ carbon emissions’, *Carbon Balance and Management* 12: 1, 2017, pp. 1–9; Carolina Levis, Bernardo M. Flores, Guilherme G. Mazzochini, Adriana P. Manhães, João Vitor Campos-Silva, Pablo Borges de Amorim, Nivaldo Peroni, Marina Hirota and Charles R. Clement, ‘Help restore Brazil’s governance of globally important ecosystem services’, *Nature Ecology and Evolution* 4: 2, 2020, pp. 172–3; Britaldo Soares-Filho, Paulo Moutinho, Daniel Nepstad, Anthony Anderson, Hermann Rodrigues, Ricardo Garcia, Laura Dietzsch, Frank Merry, Maria Bowman, Letícia Hissa, Rafaella Silvestrini and Cláudio Maretti, ‘Role of Brazilian Amazon protected areas in climate change mitigation’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107: 24, 2010, pp. 10821–26.

<sup>21</sup> Mancur Olson, *The logic of collective action: public goods and the theory of groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Jeff Colgan, Jessica Green and Thomas Hale, ‘Asset revaluation and the existential politics of climate change’, *International Organization* 75: 2, 2021, pp. 586–610.

<sup>22</sup> Lant et al., ‘The tragedy of ecosystem services’, pp. 970–71.

<sup>23</sup> Lant et al., ‘The tragedy of ecosystem services’, p. 971.

ecosystem, for them, privileging the first may mean diverting short-term revenues from the latter. Hence, political outcomes favouring the realization of ecosystem-preserving services often depend on finding sponsors both committed to long-term thinking on ecosystem sustainability and sufficiently decoupled from the gains of ecosystem-depleting services. Table 1 summarizes this contrast.

**Table 1: Distributional and political logics of ecosystem services**

	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Costs</i>	<i>Resources for influencing states within or adjacent to the ecosystem</i>	<i>Need for catalytic sponsorship</i>
Ecosystem-preserving services	Diffuse	Concentrated	Low	High
Ecosystem-depleting services	Concentrated	Diffuse	High	Low

Therefore, one can expect the conflict over ecosystem services to have a geographical dimension, opposing concentrated and dispersed interests. Beneficiaries of concentrated and excludable services have greater incentives and may be best positioned to influence states with sovereign rights over the ecosystem. When that is the case, groups committed to the sustainable realization of diffuse benefits have to strive to channel their influence over those states through global governance to bring about commitments that foster some form of stewardship. This support tends to be found in state and non-state actors committed to environmental preservation and capable of absorbing the costs of supporting mobilization, often geographically distant from the ecosystem. To be sure, this conflict is not exclusive to ecosystemic politics; it is very familiar to global environmental politics in general.<sup>24</sup> However, it gains an additional layer of complexity when manifested in border-crossing ecosystems.

### **Cross-border ecosystem governance between the global and the regional: defending sovereignty and bargaining stewardship**

Globally diffuse ecosystem services are grounded in the ecosystem’s preservation, thus requiring that the ecosystem be treated as an integral policy object, regardless of the political boundaries cutting across it. Given their natural interconnectedness, the effects of ecosystem degradation in one country may be felt in another. For instance, predatory fishing in one part of a shared sea can affect

<sup>24</sup> Matthew Paterson and Michael Grubb, ‘The international politics of climate change’, *International Affairs* 68: 2, 1992, pp. 293–310; Thomas Dietz, Elinor Ostrom and Paul Stern, ‘The struggle to govern the commons’, *Science* 302: 5652, 2003, pp. 1907–12; Stefano Carattini, Simon Levin and Alessandro Tavoni, ‘Cooperation in the climate commons’, *Review of Environmental Economics and Policy* 13: 2, 2019, pp. 227–47; Colgan et al., ‘Asset revaluation and the existential politics of climate change’.

the entirety of the sea's ecological balance.<sup>25</sup> In the case of rainforests such as the Amazon, deforestation in a single country can lead to a point of no return for the whole ecosystem.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, sustainability-enhancing policies in these ecosystems are vulnerable to a particular form of local leakage. Without coordination, degradation can not only escape tougher policies in any single country, but it can also hinder the ability of these policies to properly preserve the ecosystem where they are applied. In this sense, global public goods provided by ecosystem services with diffuse beneficiaries are layered on top of a common pool resource structure in which states cannot prevent one another from depleting their shared ecosystem. The fragmented jurisdiction of cross-border ecosystems thus multiplies the number of fronts on which the beneficiaries of globally diffuse services must battle for the sustainable realization of these services. This scenario makes regional governance an important part of the effective environmental governance of cross-border ecosystems because it can offer a space for policy coordination and even joint governance among countries overlapping the ecosystem.

Accordingly, regional environmental governance has come to be seen as a cornerstone of the more effective global regimes.<sup>27</sup> This is often the case for regional cooperation constructed out of shared concerns with ecosystem governance, hence allowing for more locally tailored institutional solutions.<sup>28</sup> However, as I shall show through the Amazon case, regional cooperation around an ecosystem may emerge not from shared environmental concerns of adjacent states but rather as a response to the concerns and pressures of external actors. These external actors can be any interested parties from outside the region (such as states, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations) that are engaged in protecting ecosystem services with globally diffuse and long-term benefits. The responses to the emergence of an ecosystem as a global policy object can move ecosystem regionalism in directions other than improving environmental governance. I argue that they trigger the joint action of states with sovereignty over the ecosystem and enhance their bargaining power *vis-à-vis* other actors interested in ecosystem preservation.

This dynamic is rooted in the feedback between the salience of an ecosystem as a global policy object and the evolution of regionalism around ecosystems. I propose that one can understand this process as mediated by two interrelated mechanisms: *defensive sovereignty* and *bargained stewardship*. Both these mechanisms

<sup>25</sup> Dietz et al., 'The struggle to govern the commons', p. 1907.

<sup>26</sup> Luciana Gatti, Luana S. Basso, John B. Miller, Manuel Gloor, Lucas Gatti Domingues, Henrique L. G. Cassol, Graciela Tejada, Luiz E. O. C. Aragão, Carlos Nobre, Wouter Peters, Luciano Marani, Egidio Arai, Alber H. Sanches, Sergio M. Corrêa, Liana Anderson, Celso Von Randow, Caio S. C. Correia, Stephane P. Crispim and Raiane A. L. Neves, 'Amazonia as a carbon source linked to deforestation and climate change', *Nature* 595: 7867, 2021, pp. 388–93; Levis et al., 'Help restore Brazil's governance of globally important ecosystem services'; Phillips and Brienen, 'Carbon uptake by mature Amazon forests has mitigated Amazon nations' carbon emissions'.

<sup>27</sup> Conca, 'The rise of the region in global environmental politics'; Balsiger and VanDeveer, 'Navigating regional environmental governance'; Church, *Ecoregionalism*; Selin, 'Global environmental governance and regional centers'.

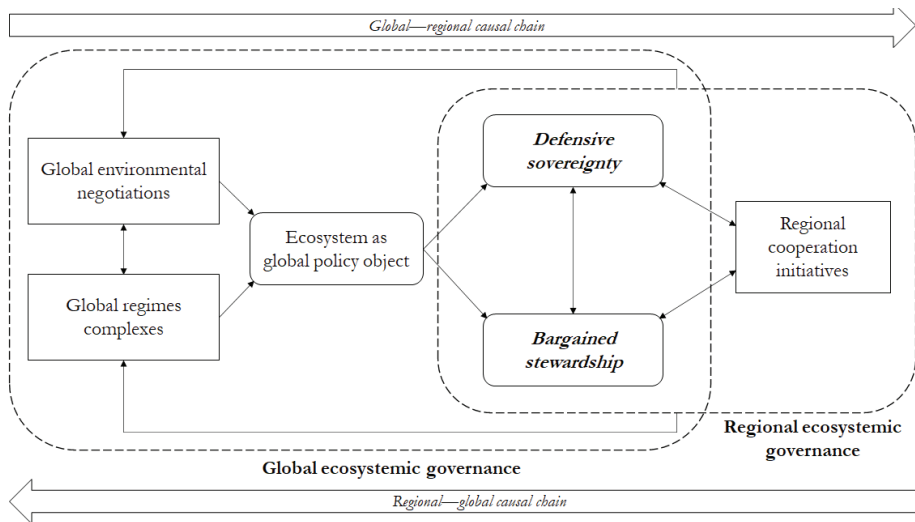
<sup>28</sup> Jörg Balsiger and Miriam Prys, 'Regional agreements in international environmental politics', *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 16: 2, 2016, pp. 239–60; Church, *Ecoregionalism*.

emerge from the production of an ecosystem as a global policy object and the regional responses to global governance.

The first and most direct mechanism is the induction of a defensive sovereignty. By definition, regional cooperation around ecosystems is born out of the shared privileged position of some states as holders of sovereign authority over their resources. Treating the ecosystem as an object of global regulation—or even more as global commons—can be seen as a direct threat to this right. That can then incentivize states within the ecosystem to act together to defend such a right, thus structuring regional cooperation around preserving a boundary that differentiates them from other, external, interested parties that do not share the same right.<sup>29</sup>

Second, and perhaps most relevantly, the very importance of regional cooperation for the effective environmental stewardship of ecosystems puts a premium on the collective commitments of states with sovereign authority over the ecosystem. Hence, it gives extra bargaining power to these states if they can work out common positions in negotiation with non-local interested parties. This allows for a form of bargained stewardship, in which these states use the environmental relevance of their joint action to attract more resources or set commitments on terms more favourable to themselves.

**Figure 1: Global–regional feedbacks in ecosystemic governance**



<sup>29</sup> Wilson Rowe, 'Ecosystemic politics'; Paes, 'Networked territoriality'; Paul Beaumont and Elana Wilson Rowe, 'Space, nature, and hierarchy: the ecosystemic politics of the Caspian Sea', paper presented to the European International Studies Association conference, Athens, 2022; Kristin Fjæstad, 'Actor–issues networks in Caspian regional cooperation', paper presented to International Studies Association conference, Nashville, 2022.



As figure 1 illustrates, both these mechanisms are mutually reinforced and further catalysed by the institutionalization of regional cooperation. International organizations are well known for providing spaces for the negotiation of shared interests and the mitigation of divergent ones.<sup>30</sup> Although states with sovereignty over the ecosystem may all be vulnerable to having their interests shaped by the beneficiaries of unsustainable ecosystem services, one cannot assume that all states will have a uniform preference or that they will privilege these short-term concentrated benefits. Still, the common pool resource structure of cross-border ecosystems, with pervasive risks of local leakage, and the ensuing incentives for collective commitments, can privilege the preferences of non-committers, even if they are a minority. In this sense, the institutionalization of regional cooperation intensifies the previous two mechanisms, consolidating defensive sovereignty and the joint bargaining capacity it entails.

The remainder of the article uses the framework presented in this section to study Amazon regional cooperation. It will demonstrate that such cooperation emerged and evolved as a response to the growing salience of the ecosystem in world politics. This reactive character tailored the institutional development of regionalism around positioning Amazon states to protect their sovereignty and bargain their stewardship over the region.

## **The construction of regional governance of the Amazon rainforest**

Rainforests are among the ecosystems whose services are most clearly associated with the provision of global public goods. They harbour a great share of world biodiversity, and their capacity for carbon sequestration is crucial for mitigating climate change.<sup>31</sup> However, forests can also yield short-term concentrated benefits that entail their depletion. Unlike other ecosystems like the high seas, forests are terrestrial biomes, falling within the jurisdiction of states, which have the ultimate authority to decide which ecosystem services are realized. In this sense, rainforests are both relevant and apt cases for examining the conflicting intersection of interests between global and local beneficiaries of ecosystems.

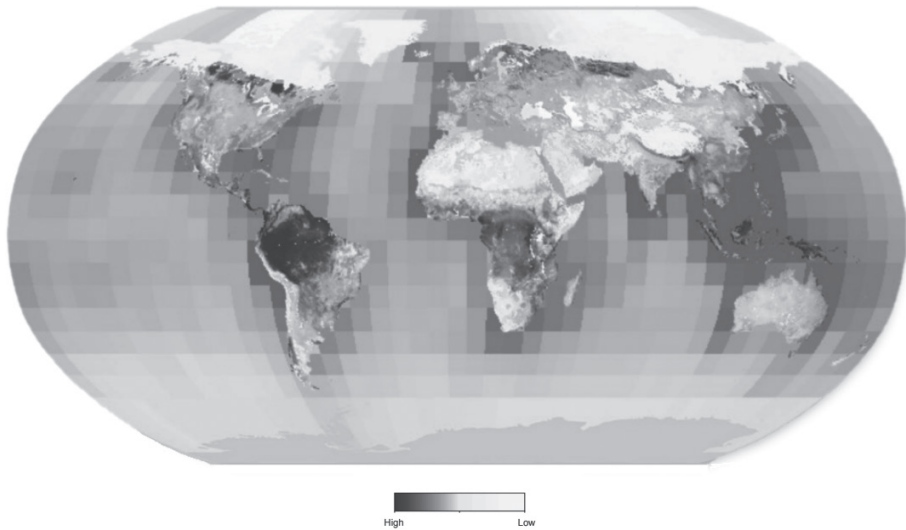
The Amazon rainforest, in particular, lies under the sovereignty of eight states in South America: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela. It is one of the ecosystems with the highest concentration of environmental assets in the world, as figure 2 illustrates. International attention to the global public goods provided by the Amazon precedes the very notion of ecosystem services. As I shall show, its global salience has been tied to the very creation and evolution of interstate cooperation in the region.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Robert Axelrod and Robert Keohane, 'Achieving cooperation under anarchy: strategies and institutions', *World Politics* 38: 1, 1985, pp. 226–54.

<sup>31</sup> Vivien Stern, Sarah Peters and V. Bakhshi, *The Stern Review* (London: Government Equalities Office, 2010); David Humphreys, 'The politics of avoided deforestation: historical context and contemporary issues', *International Forestry Review* 10: 3, 2008, pp. 433–42; Marleen Buizer, David Humphreys and Wil de Jong, 'Climate change and deforestation: the evolution of an intersecting policy domain', *Environmental Science and Policy*, vol. 35, 2014, pp. 1–11.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Little, *Amazonia: territorial struggles on perennial frontiers* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press,

**Figure 2: Geographical density of ecosystem services assets**



*Key:* Dark areas indicate a high concentration of ecosystem service assets.

*Source:* Map adapted from Barney Dickson et al., *Towards a global map of natural capital: key ecosystem assets* (Nairobi: UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, 2017), p. 30.

### *Methodology*

The analysis in this section relies on process tracing to probe the fit between the analytical framework presented in the previous section and the existing empirical record about Amazon regionalism. The study draws on a range of primary documents and secondary literature to verify the ‘empirical fingerprints, or traces’ of the mechanisms of defensive sovereignty and bargained stewardship in the emergence and evolution of regional cooperation in the Amazon.<sup>33</sup> Primary documents include joint statements of ACT/ACTO ministers and heads of state, minutes of meetings of the ACT/ACTO governing bodies, reports produced by the ACT/ACTO secretariat, and project reports produced by external partners and funders. The analysis of these sources provides evidence of how member states created the organization as an instrument for defensive sovereignty and progressively used it to bargain their stewardship of the Amazon ecosystem in global environmental governance.

2001); Seth Garfield, *In search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States and the nature of a region* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Nunes, ‘The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization’.

<sup>33</sup> Derek Beach and Rasmus Pedersen, *Process-tracing methods: foundations and guidelines* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), p. 2.

## *Defensive sovereignty: global–regional politics in the emergence of the ACT*

In the 1940s, decades before the signing of the ACT, UNESCO sponsored the creation of the International Institute for the Hylean Amazon (IIHA), to promote scientific exploration of the Amazon river basin. After an initially positive reception by local states, the Brazilian Congress ended up refusing the initiative, bringing it to a halt.<sup>34</sup> This was an early example of how global interest in the region fuelled worries over sovereignty and fears of foreign intervention among local states, even before the rise of environmental politics in the global governance agenda. In fact, according to one influential Brazilian geopolitical strategist at the time, General Meira Mattos, the very signature of the ACT in 1978 echoed these concerns surrounding the IIHA. He asserted that the ACT was meant to refute ‘desires of interference of the kind of the Hylean Amazon Initiative ... The regionalization of the Amazon is the best antidote to constrain the appearance of modern reincarnation of this demoralized but persistent internationalization manoeuvre.’<sup>35</sup> Though the ghost of the IIHA itself may be marginal among the factors bringing about the ACT, the fear of internationalization it symbolized was certainly central among them.<sup>36</sup>

These fears became more salient as the environmental agenda gained traction in global governance. The UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, as well as its preparatory talks, gave unprecedented international attention to the issue of environmental degradation that was produced by the development strategies of the time.<sup>37</sup> For Amazon states in general—and Brazil in particular—these talks meant a threat to their development strategy, which was rooted in the economic exploitation of the region through activities that were detrimental to the ecosystem’s preservation.<sup>38</sup> Thus, it made explicit the conflict between the globally diffused benefits of ecosystem preservation and the private benefits linked to the kind of economic exploitation championed by local states. As a response to this emergence of the Amazon as a global policy object, the Amazon states gathered to create a regional pact to safeguard their rights to govern their shared ecosystem.<sup>39</sup>

The ACT was thus born as a sovereignty club to shield Amazon states from the incipient global environmental regime, preserving their exclusive rights to shape the region’s development. Before the 1970s, international cooperation around the

<sup>34</sup> Marcos Maio, ‘A Unesco e o projeto de criação de um laboratório científico internacional na Amazônia’, *Estudos Avançados* 19: 53, 2005, pp. 115–30.

<sup>35</sup> Carlos de Meira Mattos, *Uma geopolítica pan-Amazônica* (Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca Do Exército Editora, 1980), pp. 122–3. See also Rodrigo Medeiros, ‘A ditadura de 1964 e o governo da natureza: a construção de uma Amazônia geopolítica’, *Universitas Humanas* 12: 1, 2015, pp. 41–58.

<sup>36</sup> García, *The Amazon from an international law perspective*, pp. 75–84; Tigre, *Regional cooperation in Amazonia*, pp. 87–92; Nunes, ‘The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization’.

<sup>37</sup> Djamchid Momtaz, ‘The United Nations and the protection of the environment: from Stockholm to Rio de Janeiro’, *Political Geography* 15: 3–4, 1996, pp. 261–71.

<sup>38</sup> Bertha Becker, *Geopolítica da Amazonia: a nova fronteira de recursos* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1982); Eve Bratman, *Governing the rainforest: sustainable development politics in the Brazilian Amazon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>39</sup> Tigre, *Regional cooperation in Amazonia*, pp. 87–92; Nunes, ‘The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization’.

Amazon was limited to river navigation treaties.<sup>40</sup> Yet in a span of three years (1975–8), a series of bilateral cooperation agreements between Brazil and other Amazon states would lead to a multilateral treaty: the ACT.<sup>41</sup> At the document's core was the defence of the parties' common position as the ultimate authority in the governance of the Amazon, as its Article 4 clearly expresses:

The Contracting Parties declare that the *exclusive use and utilization of natural resources* within their respective territories is a *right inherent in the sovereignty of each state and that the exercise of this right shall not be subject to any restrictions* other than those arising from International Law.<sup>42</sup>

However, at this point, the salience of the Amazon as a global policy object was stronger in the minds of local politicians than in actual debates over global governance. Correspondingly, the ACT stayed very much dormant in its first decade of existence.<sup>43</sup> This would slowly change in the 1980s as concerns about rapid deforestation in rainforests would grow in the global North and a push towards conceiving rainforests as global commons would gain some traction.<sup>44</sup> The global push from developed countries to establish a global regime against deforestation and the pressure specifically directed at Amazon basin states would grow more concrete.<sup>45</sup> In the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, this tension would reach its first peak, here centred on the debates about a global convention and a legally binding instrument on forests.<sup>46</sup> Faced with renewed global pressure and interest, Amazon states would inaugurate a new phase in their cooperation, focusing on bargaining their stewardship of this globally valued ecosystem.

### *From Rio to REDD+: regional cooperation as bargained stewardship of the Amazon rainforest*

The elevation of the Amazon as a global policy object in the emergent negotiations on forests and biodiversity global governance reawakened the ACT. A decade after its creation, in 1989, the Amazon presidents issued their first joint statement about their 'common interests in the Amazonian region'.<sup>47</sup> Once again, the Amazon

<sup>40</sup> Garcia, *The Amazon from an international law perspective*, pp. 60–71.

<sup>41</sup> Garcia, *The Amazon from an international law perspective*, p. 75.

<sup>42</sup> Organización del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica – Secretaría Permanente (OTCA/SP), *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica: actualización resumida 2003–2012* (Brasilia, 2013), emphasis added.

<sup>43</sup> Tigre, *Regional cooperation in Amazonia*, pp. 95–7.

<sup>44</sup> David Humphreys, *Forest politics: the evolution of international cooperation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Humphreys, *Logjam*, pp. 5–11.

<sup>45</sup> Xavier Sartre and Romain Taravella, 'National sovereignty vs. sustainable development: lessons from the narrative on the internationalization of the Brazilian Amazon', *Political Geography* 28: 7, 2009, pp. 406–15; Margaret Keck, 'Social equity and environmental politics in Brazil: lessons from the rubber tappers of Acre', *Comparative Politics* 27: 4, 1995, 409–24; Andrew Hurrell, 'The politics of Amazonian deforestation', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 23: 1, pp. 197–215.

<sup>46</sup> David Humphreys, 'Forest Negotiations at the United Nations: Explaining Cooperation and Discord', *Forest Policy and Economics* 3:3–4, 2001, pp. 125–35.

<sup>47</sup> OTCA/SP, *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica*, pp. 35–6.

states would be pulled together to defend their shared interest in preserving sovereignty rights over the Amazon. This position would be reaffirmed in another joint statement, explicitly directed at the UNCED in 1992.<sup>48</sup> On biodiversity, it stated that ‘biological resources are unquestionably natural resources of each country, which therefore exercises its sovereignty on them’.<sup>49</sup> On forests, it indicated that any discussion ‘should take into account the fact that these ecosystems are part of territories under the jurisdiction of the States, wherein the latter fully exercise their sovereignty’.<sup>50</sup>

Both the 1989 and 1992 declarations signalled the emergence of a novel dynamic catalysed by the ACT: these states would start taking on environmental responsibility for protecting the Amazon ecosystem and would start bargaining the terms of their joint stewardship. The 1989 statement started with a commitment to the sustainable development of the region, announcing the creation of special commissions on the environment and on indigenous affairs.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, at the same time it stressed that the concern of the ‘developed countries’ for the conservation of the Amazon environment needed to be translated into ‘financial and technological cooperation’ and ‘new flows of resources for environmental protection’.<sup>52</sup> The joint positions of the 1992 declaration seemed to strike a middle ground. On the one hand, it recognized the necessity of actions towards biodiversity preservation and sustainable forest management. On the other hand, it reaffirmed the need to reconcile preservation with economic uses, and for the efforts of local states to be met with more financial resources and technological transfer from developed states.<sup>53</sup>

This bargained stewardship would slowly take form through a double movement in the global–regional politics of Amazon governance. Globally, Amazon states would build on the relevance of their ecosystem to influence the emergence of global regimes pertinent for the region. Regionally, they would strive to attract international funding to help meet their pledges of coordinated ecosystem protection. The institutional evolution of the ACT into an organization with an international juridical personality, the ACTO, reflected a need to increase the capacity of carrying out internationally funded regional projects.<sup>54</sup> Figure 3 shows a timeline of the multi-year externally funded projects executed by ACT/ACTO, in which the horizontal length of bars represent the duration of each project and their thickness is proportional to the non-reimbursable funding allocated.<sup>55</sup> Dashed lines reflect projects whose funding values are not described.

<sup>48</sup> OTCA/SP, *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica*, pp. 38–40.

<sup>49</sup> OTCA/SP, *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica*, p. 39.

<sup>50</sup> OTCA/SP, *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica*, p. 39.

<sup>51</sup> OTCA/SP, *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica*, pp. 35–6.

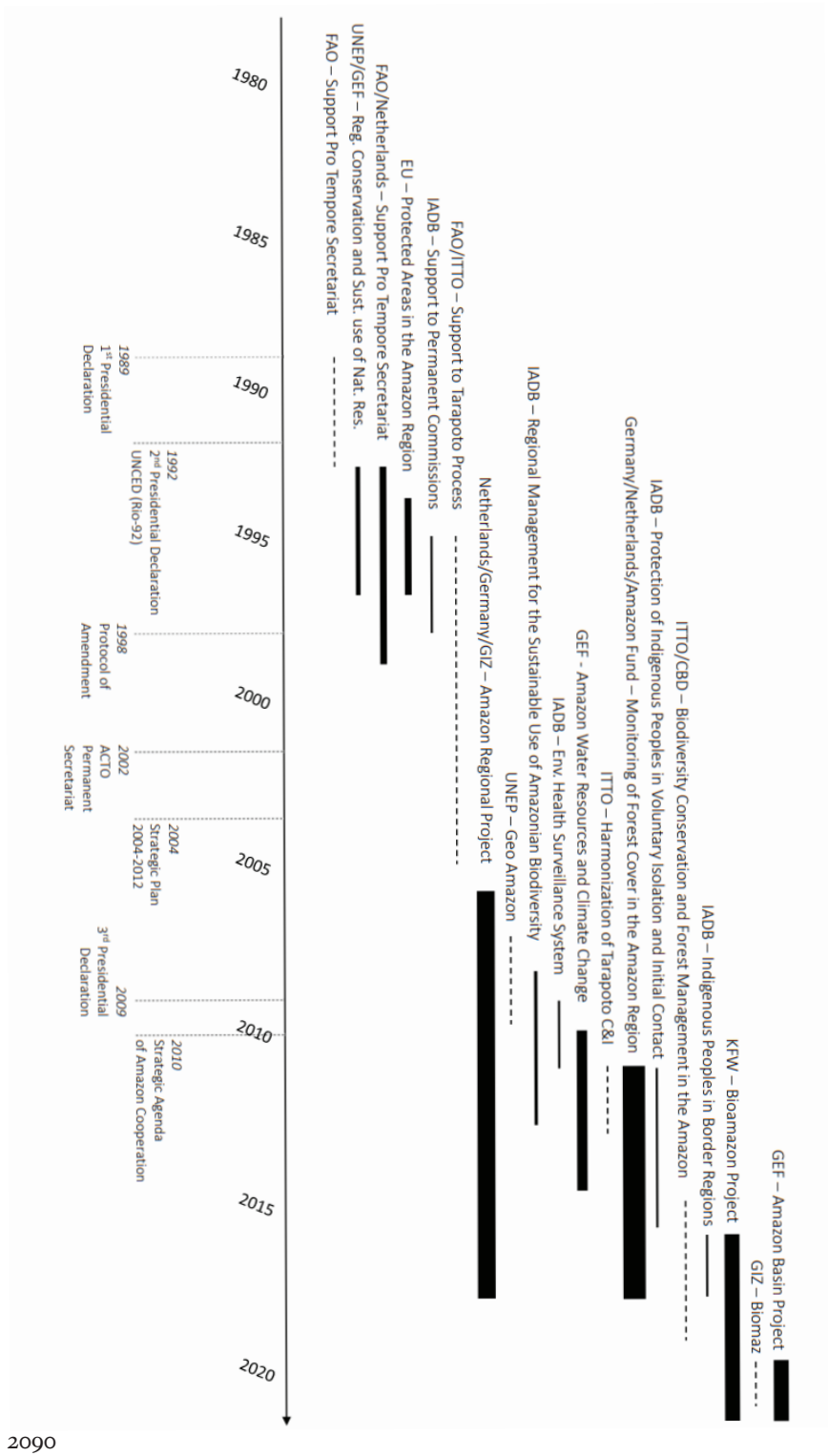
<sup>52</sup> OTCA/SP, *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica*, pp. 35–6.

<sup>53</sup> OTCA/SP, *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica*, pp. 38–40.

<sup>54</sup> Amazon Cooperation Treaty. *Report of activities of the pro tempore secretariat 1994–1997* (Lima, 1998).

<sup>55</sup> The complete list of projects informing this timeline, along with additional details and sources, can be provided by the author upon request.

Figure 3: Timeline of ACT/ACTO multi-year externally funded projects



During the UNCED itself, this double movement of defending sovereignty and bargaining terms of stewardship was evident. The Amazon states would join others in the global South in resisting an international convention on forests, especially the possibility of constructing a legally binding instrument on the matter.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, they would support international negotiations on criteria for assessing sustainable forest management and the expansion of North–South cooperation to fund more programmes to foster sustainability in forests.<sup>57</sup> The Amazon states also managed to jointly leverage their relevance for biodiversity preservation to influence the construction of a legally binding instrument on this issue. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), drafted during the UNCED and signed in 1993, committed parties to goals of conservation and sustainability, but its main provision reinforces the sovereign rights of states over benefits stemming from the proprietary use of natural resources within their territories.<sup>58</sup>

This articulation in international forums was institutionally backed by the ACT and later the ACTO. As early as 1990, the main institution overseeing the ACT, the Amazon Cooperation Council, mandated its secretariat to support formulating common positions on environmental issues for the upcoming UNCED.<sup>59</sup> In 1994, the Amazon states formalized the practice of establishing regular diplomatic consultations and political coordination in international forums.<sup>60</sup> Additional resolutions guiding the secretariat to support the articulation of joint positions became the norm in ministerial meetings, particularly in forest and biodiversity negotiations.<sup>61</sup>

Global forest governance was a particular focus of Amazon states. Through the 1990s, they became central to the development of an incipient international regime on forests emerging around the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (1995–7) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (1997–2000), where they continued their efforts to block the creation of a legally binding convention on this matter.<sup>62</sup> They were also among the main proponents of the creation of a United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), to establish voluntary guidelines for sustainable forest management.<sup>63</sup> At UNFF, the Amazon states stood together as a block when negotiations in the 2000s fragmented developing countries' coalitions over multiple issues, from the definition of forest products to the design of mechanisms for funding sustainable forest management and compensating for avoided deforestation.<sup>64</sup> Between 2000 and 2005, the ACTO held almost a third

<sup>56</sup> Humphreys, 'Forest negotiations at the United Nations'.

<sup>57</sup> Humphreys, 'Forest negotiations at the United Nations'.

<sup>58</sup> Philippe le Prestre, *Governing global biodiversity: the evolution and implementation of the convention on biological diversity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>59</sup> Amazon Cooperation Treaty, *Report of activities of the pro tempore secretariat 1991–1992* (Quito, 1993).

<sup>60</sup> Tigre, *Regional cooperation in Amazonia*, p. 193.

<sup>61</sup> OTCA/SP, *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica*, pp. 101, 112, 130, 150, 187.

<sup>62</sup> Humphreys, 'Forest negotiations at the United Nations'.

<sup>63</sup> Radoslav Dimitrov, 'Empty institutions in global environmental politics', *International Studies Review* 22: 3, 2020, pp. 626–50.

<sup>64</sup> Humphreys, 'Forest negotiations at the United Nations'; International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), 'Summary report, 16–27 April 2007: 7th session of the UNFF', in *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* 13: 62, pp. 1–20.

of all meetings of foreign affairs ministers it ever held, and in all joint declarations the ministers would highlight their agreements on common positions in those negotiations.<sup>65</sup>

A similar pattern can be found in other negotiations. The ministers of foreign affairs also mentioned common positions in contexts such as those in the ambit of the CBD and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).<sup>66</sup> Here too, shared positions focused on negotiations in which alternative ecosystem services were in conflict, such as in provisions involving curbs on deforestation. In the realm of biodiversity, Amazon states together supported the establishment of the Cartagena Protocol of 2000, on the cross-border transit of genetically modified organisms,<sup>67</sup> and the Nagoya Protocol in 2010, on the implementation of the principle of fair and equitable sharing of genetic resources.<sup>68</sup> Both principles reinforced the sovereignty of states over the biodiversity in their territories and had been championed by Amazon states jointly through ACTO.<sup>69</sup> Regionally, this bargained stewardship was paralleled by an expansion in the number of cooperation projects, as figure 3 illustrates. Immediately after UNCED, the ACT was able to attract international funding both to help finance its activities and to coordinate environmental projects. A good example of the latter was an EU grant from 1994 to 1997 to help coordinate, at the regional level, the national protected areas programmes of the Amazon states, a preservation tool which had been jointly defended by them at UNCED.<sup>70</sup>

The Tarapoto Process is another example of this global–regional dynamic feedback supporting bargained stewardship. It was born out of stalled debates on forest governance at UNCED and centred on the thin international consensus on the necessity of producing criteria and indicators to define and measure sustainable forest management.<sup>71</sup> The process offered an opportunity for Amazon states to find their positions on a definition of sustainability reconciling local economic benefits and global public services of the ecosystem. It would then allow them to jointly influence the construction of an incipient forest regime from the late 1990s until its culmination in the (quite limited) Non-legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests in 2007, under the auspices of the UNFF.<sup>72</sup>

As the debate on deforestation started shifting from the stalled UNFF to the emerging climate governance forum,<sup>73</sup> so did the focus of the ACTO's joint diplomatic action on the topic. In the late 2000s, in the UNFCCC, negotiations on

<sup>65</sup> OTCA/SP, *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica*, pp. 97, 128, 132, 147, 153.

<sup>66</sup> OTCA/SP, *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica*, pp. 98, 109, 110, 127.

<sup>67</sup> Convention on Biological Diversity, *Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety* (Montreal, 2000).

<sup>68</sup> Convention on Biological Diversity, *Nagoya Protocol on access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilization* (Montreal, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> OTCA/SP, *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica*, pp. 67, 77, 88.

<sup>70</sup> OTCA/SP, *Base jurídica del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica*, p. 39.

<sup>71</sup> Tigre, *Regional cooperation in Amazonia*, pp. 183–4.

<sup>72</sup> Radoslav Dimitrov, 'Hostage to norms: states, institutions and global forest politics', *Global Environmental Politics* 5: 4, 2005, pp. 1–24.

<sup>73</sup> Buizer et al., 'Climate change and deforestation'; Elana Wilson Rowe, 'Locating international REDD+ power relations: debating forests and trees in international climate negotiations', *Geoforum*, vol. 66, 2015, pp. 64–74; Jen Iris Allan and Peter Dauvergne, 'The global South in environmental negotiations: the politics of coalitions in REDD+', *Third World Quarterly* 34: 8, 2013, p. 1313.



compensation mechanisms for ‘reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation’, called REDD+, would become a cornerstone of the global debates on forest governance.<sup>74</sup> This financial mechanism is of key relevance for states with large forest ecosystems, because it provides a framework for compensating them for avoiding deforestation and forest degradation, for forest conservation and for sustainable forest management—all of which were not established in the carbon market mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol. Even so, this debate sparked a controversy that once again divided developing countries. Some states preferred a market-based mechanism linked to trading in carbon credits, while others wanted public funds voluntarily financed by multilateral organizations and developed countries.<sup>75</sup> Among the Amazon states, the clearest position was that of Brazil, which firmly opposed a market mechanism that would allow developed countries to offset their emissions,<sup>76</sup> while others were more open to greater flexibility.<sup>77</sup> Despite these points of divergence, the ACTO became a forum for finding common ground. It promoted a technical meeting on the topic,<sup>78</sup> and in its Amazon Strategic Cooperation Agenda of 2010, the ACTO committed itself to fostering mutual support on identifying international financial mechanisms as a long-term goal.<sup>79</sup> Concretely, it used external funding, including resources from the Brazilian REDD+ scheme ‘Amazon Fund’, to create a regional project for forest monitoring to help implement REDD+ projects.<sup>80</sup> REDD+ would become an important component of funding forest management in the Amazon in the following years.<sup>81</sup>

REDD+ programmes are illustrative of the logic of bargained stewardship because they allow for states to forgo short-term revenues from ecosystem-depleting services in exchange for compensation funded by external actors invested in the longer-term benefits of ecosystem preservation. Apart from REDD+, in the 2010s, ACTO expanded its role as a catalyst for cooperation projects, attracting international funds. The common denominator among these projects was the application of international aid to implement commitments previously made through the diplomacy of Amazon states. For instance, the BioAmazon and Biomaz projects, both funded by German development agencies, have aimed to help local states to create capacities for a coordinated implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the CBD respectively. International funds also helped the organization improve its institutional capacity. After member states agreed on acquiring a permanent headquarter-

<sup>74</sup> Wilson Rowe, ‘Locating international REDD+ power relations’.

<sup>75</sup> Buizer et al., ‘Climate change and deforestation’; Wilson Rowe, ‘Locating international REDD+ power relations’; Allan and Dauvergne, ‘The global South in environmental negotiations’.

<sup>76</sup> Allan and Dauvergne, ‘The global South in environmental negotiations’, p. 1319; Vieira, ‘Brazilian foreign policy in the context of global climate norms’, pp. 369–86.

<sup>77</sup> Allan and Dauvergne, ‘The global South in environmental negotiations’, p. 1315; Garcia, *The Amazon from an international law perspective*, pp. 246–7.

<sup>78</sup> Tigre, *Regional cooperation in Amazonia*, p. 277.

<sup>79</sup> OTCA/SP, *Agenda estratégica de cooperación Amazónica* (Brasilia, 2010), p. 53.

<sup>80</sup> Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization, *Monitoring deforestation, logging and land use change in the pan Amazonian forest* (Brasilia, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> Tigre, *Regional cooperation in Amazonia*, p. 300.

ters in Brasília, the Amazon Regional Programme, funded by the governments of Germany and the Netherlands, would be crucial for financing the operations of its permanent secretariat. Despite its limitations, Amazon regionalism, centred on the ACTO, was proving effective as a platform on which Amazon states could assert their sovereignty and better bargain the terms of the stewardship of their shared ecosystem.

### *Sovereignty before stewardship? Regional cooperation amid divergence*

A series of changes in the domestic politics of Amazon countries would put regional environmental cooperation to the test in the face of increasing divergences in the domestic governance of the forest.<sup>82</sup> Regionally, the ACTO continued to carry out regional projects that create capacity for environmental stewardship, but had not the power to spur members to move this capacity into outcomes.<sup>83</sup> With the election of President Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, Brazil would explicitly adopt a discourse that largely departed from the terms of bargained stewardship defended by the ACTO until then.<sup>84</sup> The results of the policy change in Brazil—less than a year into Bolsonaro's tenure—was already having consequences, with an alarming further increase in levels of deforestation. This, coupled with the widespread wildfires of 2019, raised international concern and attracted global attention to the degradation of the Amazon ecosystem.

Despite this backdrop of political divergence, the reaction of Amazon states was still to fall back on their defensive sovereignty position. In September 2019, just a few weeks after the peak of the wildfires, representatives of all heads of state in the region, except for Venezuela's, met in the city of Leticia in Colombia to sign the Pact and Plan of Action for the Amazon. The document stated an array of vague commitments, most already espoused by the ACTO, while reaffirming the full autonomy of each country to decide on policies within its sovereign share of the ecosystem.<sup>85</sup> The pact prompted little action, but worked yet again as a show of unity in a moment of clear divergence, bringing together, in a joint declaration to the world, governments as different as Bolsonaro's in Brazil and Evo Morales' in Bolivia.

This occasion exemplifies the power of ecosystemic politics in pulling together states in the face of seemingly external challenges to their sovereign authority. Furthermore, it illustrates how these states' drive to reaffirm their position as the ultimate governors of the ecosystem can supersede commitments to stewardship even with one key non-compliant state. Of course, the limited ability of other

<sup>82</sup> Joana Pereira and Eduardo Viola, 'Catastrophic climate risk and Brazilian Amazonian politics and policies: a new research agenda', *Global Environmental Politics* 19: 2, 2019, pp. 93–103; Joana Pereira and Eduardo Viola, *Climate change and biodiversity governance in the Amazon: at the edge of ecological collapse?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021).

<sup>83</sup> Joana Pereira and Eduardo Viola, 'Close to a tipping point? The Amazon and the challenge of sustainable development under growing climate pressures', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 52: 3, 2020, pp. 467–94.

<sup>84</sup> Pereira and Viola, 'Catastrophic climate risk and Brazilian Amazonian politics and policies'.

<sup>85</sup> Cumbre Presidencial de la Amazonía, 'Pacto de Leticia por la Amazonía' (Leticia, 2019).

states to put effective pressure on their biggest neighbour certainly plays a role in the process, but that alone would not explain why states would choose to actively provide a joint response to the crisis. This is particularly remarkable amid a period of overall lower engagement in foreign policy cooperation on other topics in the region.<sup>86</sup> This show of unity in the face of external pressure suggests that preserving the defensive sovereignty that allows these states to bargain effectively with external actors can be a greater force driving regional cooperation than the potential benefits of stewardship commitments themselves.

In sum, regional cooperation around the Amazon rainforest has evolved to coordinate responses to the global salience of the ecosystem in world politics. This took form in the ACT, and later in the ACTO, designed to preserve Amazon states' inalienable sovereign rights over the region. As global pressure for preserving the region grew, Amazon states turned regional cooperation into a platform on which to negotiate the terms of their stewardship over the ecosystem. This resulted in some positive engagement with foreign actors that helped find and fund some agreed solutions to help coordinate efforts at ecosystem protection for as long as domestic political will lasted. However, when domestic policy pulled environmental commitments of Amazon states in different directions, it was the preservation of unity against external actors that prevailed.

## Conclusion

This article has discussed the global–regional politics of ecosystem governance, focusing on the case of the Amazon rainforest. It has argued that these politics are rooted in the contradiction between concentrated and diffuse benefits of ecosystem services. It proposed a framework for understanding how these contradictions structure a dynamic in which the global investment in ecosystem preservation may drive forms of regional cooperation that may stall or hinder its intended policy outcome. Global pressure for building international regimes constraining domestic policy or inducing policy change can be seen as a shared threat to the sovereignty of states with jurisdiction over an ecosystem and may pull them together to defend their rights over that ecosystem. At the same time, the relevance of regional cooperation for effective environmental stewardship puts a premium on achieving coordinated commitments to ecosystem protection. In conjunction, the salience of an ecosystem in global politics creates incentives for regional governance to become a platform on which states can bargain with external interests and act jointly to influence the global regimes that could impact the ecosystem's governance.

In the case of the Amazon, this feedback between the salience of the rainforest as a policy object in global governance and regional cooperation seems to operate strongly. The ACT was signed in response to narratives of extraregional intervention, openly aiming to protect sovereignty rights over the Amazon in the face

<sup>86</sup> Pedro Barros and Julia Gonçalves, 'Crisis in South American regionalism and Brazilian protagonism in Unasur, the Lima Group and Prosur', *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 64: 2, 2021, pp. 1–19.

of global environmental concerns. As it evolved, the ACT's political activity has been geared towards coordinating responses to debates in global environmental governance that may affect the ecosystem. This allowed for a bargained stewardship, aimed at finding governance solutions that helped reconcile sovereignty concerns and ecosystem preservation. However, when Brazil's policies towards ecosystem governance diverged from these terms of stewardship, its neighbours in the Amazon did not join the global outcry but instead faced external audiences together.

These findings point to an additional challenge in promoting more efficient stewardship of cross-border ecosystems such as the Amazon. Given the relevance of preserving a large cross-border ecosystem to mitigate climate change and promote worldwide ecological stability, a better understanding of the challenges to these ecosystems' governance is an urgent necessity. Regional environmental organizations have been seen as the cornerstone of global environmental governance because of their sensitivity to the local particularities of environmental problems and social contexts.<sup>87</sup> However, as this analysis of the Amazon case shows, the promotion of such stewardship by extraregional actors may entail entering a collective bargain with states of the ecosystem to offset alternative incentives to privilege ecosystem-depleting services. These bargains can lead, albeit in limited fashion, to intended goals of more coordinated ecosystem protection, when the domestic politics of each state allows for it. When that is not the case, global pressure alone risks triggering the defensive sovereignty aspect of regional cooperation, turning its prospects for promoting effective ecosystem preservation into potential regional solidarity with states failing to tackle ecosystem degradation.

Although solutions to these challenges are beyond the scope of the present article, the policy implications of the findings resonate with recent scholarship pointing to the relevance of domestic coalitions to drive policy reforms regarding climate change.<sup>88</sup> Recent experimental research finds that naming and shaming against Amazon degradation may bump against nationalistic sentiments in the region, but may not lead to defiance of international cooperation.<sup>89</sup> The analysis of regional cooperation presented here goes further to show that this in-group sentiment can be translated into regional solidarity among Amazon states. Yet similarly, while Amazon states stick together when faced with criticism, we do not find defiance regionally: the ACTO has carried on with implementing projects that create capacity for environmental stewardship and has not moved towards breaking off cooperation ties with external partners. Hence, defensive sovereignty may stall bargained stewardship but not necessarily dismantle it, helping to support the building of capacities for enhancing coordinated stewardship when political momentum resumes.

<sup>87</sup> Conca, 'The rise of the region in global environmental politics'; Balsiger and VanDeveer, 'Navigating regional environmental governance'; Balsiger and Prys, 'Regional agreements in international environmental politics'; Church, *Ecoregionalism*.

<sup>88</sup> Colgan et al., 'Asset reevaluation and the existential politics of climate change'.

<sup>89</sup> Matias Spektor, Umberto Mignozzetti and Guilherme Fasolin, 'Nationalist backlash against foreign climate shaming', *Global Environmental Politics* 22: 1, 2022, pp. 139–58.

The challenge, then, is how to make bargained stewardship progressively more ambitious and resilient to domestic defections. While normative pressure alone may have limited power to drive policy change regionally, global concertation may still help foster coalitions for the realization of ecosystem-preserving services. Whereas the beneficiaries of concentrated degradation-inducing ecosystem services may be better positioned to influence local states, other domestic actors may be the main short- or long-term beneficiaries of many other preservation-entailing services. Efforts that expand the awareness of these ecosystem benefits domestically and foster local coalition-building to shape domestic policy-making in the Amazon states could be a way of bypassing the defensive sovereignty dynamics of ecosystem regionalism discussed here. This may mean funding regional projects that reward and empower local stakeholders for ecosystem-preserving services, as some REDD+ projects do. It can also mean using supply chains and market power to curb the economic rewards of ecosystem-depleting services, cutting out the channels that feed these activities with global resources. The Amazon Soy Moratorium and, more recently, the environmentally concerned threats to the ratification of the EU–Mercosur trade agreement have driven parts of Brazilian agribusiness to become wary of ecosystem depletion.<sup>90</sup> Effectively tying bargains over stewardship to ambitious commitments to ecosystem preservation may require the consolidation of domestic preferences across the region in that direction.

The analytical framework provided here is built on structures of incentives with parallels in other cross-border ecosystems. Whether these dynamics hold in other cases remains an avenue for further investigation, which I believe this article helps to inform. We can expect this global–regional politics to be most salient when an ecosystem is largely endowed with assets to offer services with both concentrated and diffuse benefits, as tropical rainforests do. However, previous scholarship has already pointed to the formation of similar sovereignty ‘clubs’ in the regional governance of the Arctic and the Caspian Sea.<sup>91</sup> In any case, the Amazon ecosystem, besides being relevant by itself, raises a warning flag regarding both the potential and the limitations of global–regional engagement to foster more effective environmental stewardship.

<sup>90</sup> Holly Gibbs Lisa Rausch, Jacob Munger, Ian Schelly, Douglas C. Morton, Praveen Noojipady, Bitraldo Soares-Filho, Paulo Barreto, Laurent Micol and Nathalie F. Walker, ‘Brazil’s soy moratorium’, *Science* 347: 6220, 2015, pp. 377–8; Jake Spring, ‘EU–Mercosur trade deal to clear environmental hurdles this year, EU commissioner says’, Reuters, 2 May 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/eu-mercotur-trade-deal-clear-environmental-hurdles-this-year-eu-commissioner-2022-05-02/>.

<sup>91</sup> Wilson Rowe, ‘Ecosystemic politics’; Beaumont and Wilson Rowe, ‘Space, nature, and hierarchy’.