

Marcela Alonso Ferreira, 2024

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Abstract:

*Governing informal land tenure in megacities: a comparative historical analysis of land regularization in Mexico City and São Paulo*

My doctoral dissertation examines how informal land tenure is governed in Latin America's largest cities, Mexico City and São Paulo, using a historical institutionalist approach. Although governments in both cities initially acknowledged land rights for informal settlements, my research demonstrates that their paths diverged, with São Paulo expanding these rights and Mexico City gradually restricting them. By conducting a comparative historical analysis spanning the past 50 years, I explain these divergent outcomes of land regularization, which is the institution (or "rules of the game") determining which settlements are eligible for legal land rights.

I argue that the origins of land regularization stem from social mobilization, but frictions with other institutions better explain its development. I conceptualized this as a case of *intercurrence*, whereby different sets of rules operate simultaneously, eventually competing. Land regularization is a conflictive institution since it challenges the limits of property rights and land-use regulations, the sets of rules that make settlements "informal" or "illegal" in the eyes of the state. Frictions between these institutions explain the *drift* of land regularization in Mexico City. Meanwhile, in São Paulo, *skilled social actors*, notably bureaucrats embedded in social movements, were responsible for *layering* new rules, fostering a process of incremental change that broadened access to land rights.

This dissertation thus examines how political dynamics and historical trajectories in major Latin American cities shape the governance of informality in time, shedding new light on the evolving rights to formal land tenure and interplay among citizens, state actors, and institutional development.