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Latin American perceptions of Europe and the European Union



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Abstract

This paper argues that public opinion is a useful tool and valuable source of information to better understand Latin Americans' preferences, levels of priority, and evaluations of other countries, regions and institutions, including European countries, Europe, and the European Union (EU). The central arguments are, on one hand, that the higher the levels of trade with Europe as a percentage of total trade of Latin American countries, the higher the degree of importance, interest, and priority that Latin Americans will give to Europe, European countries, and the EU. On the other hand, as Latin Americans have more knowledge about international organisations, including the EU, they have a better evaluation of their work. Using the data from The Americas and the World survey, Latinobarómetro and the Map of Interests between the European Union & Latin America and the Caribbean, sufficient evidence is provided to support these arguments. If public opinion determines, to some extent, foreign policy decision making, priorities and actions, then a better evaluation and prioritisation of Europe and the UE within Latin America's populations can have a positive effect on Latin American foreign policy vis à vis the EU and the countries that compose it. Therefore, increasing knowledge about and more trade with each other is a good strategy for European and Latin American countries to build on their bi-regional and bilateral relations, creating a virtuous circle of incremental cooperation and welfare for both regions.

Keywords: perceptions, public opinion, foreign policy, Europe, European Union, Latin America.

Resumen

Este artículo argumenta que la opinión pública es una herramienta útil y una fuente de información valiosa para tener un mejor entendimiento de las preferencias, los niveles de prioridad y las evaluaciones que tienen los latinoamericanos sobre otros países, regiones e instituciones, incluyendo los países europeos, Europa y la Unión Europea (UE). Los argumentos centrales son, por una parte, que un nivel más alto de comercio con Europa como porcentaje del comercio total de los países latinoamericanos tendrá como consecuencia un grado más alto de importancia, interés y prioridad por parte de los latinoamericanos hacia Europa, los países europeos y la UE. Por otra parte, un mayor conocimiento de organizaciones internacionales, incluyendo la UE, por parte de los latinoamericanos llevará a tener una mejor evaluación sobre su trabajo. Con el uso de los datos de la encuesta México, las Américas y el Mundo, de Latinobarómetro y del Mapa de Intereses entre la Unión Europea y América Latina y el Caribe, este artículo provee suficiente evidencia para comprobar los argumentos. Si la opinión pública determina, en cierta medida, la toma de decisión, las prioridades y las

acciones en materia de política exterior, una mejor evaluación y priorización de Europa y la UE en la población latinoamericana tendrá un efecto positivo en la política exterior de América Latina vis-à-vis la UE y los Estados que la componen. Por lo tanto, mayor conocimiento y mayores niveles de comercio son buenas estrategias para que los países de Europa y América Latina fortalezcan sus relaciones bilaterales e interregionales, de tal forma que se cree un círculo virtuoso de cooperación progresiva y de bienestar para las dos regiones.

Palabras clave: percepciones, opinión pública, política exterior, Europa, Unión Europea, América Latina.

Introduction: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

In democracies, public policies designed and implemented by elected governments must represent the preferences and interests of the population; foreign policy should be no exception, especially in a globalised world where whatever happens in the international system directly impacts national and local dynamics. Consequently, the national interest of a democratic state should be built upon the opinions and viewpoints of the society (Schiavon 2013). Therefore, public opinion is of paramount importance when dealing with foreign policy in democratic states.

However, the importance of public opinion in the policymaking process in international affairs has not been widely supported until recently. According to the Almond-Lipmann consensus, the public in general is unable to make appropriate decisions related to foreign policy given the difficulties and subtleties of these subjects (Almond 1950). These topics tend to be complex and unfamiliar to most people and public opinion should be discarded or even ignored in the decision making process.¹ This position was very strong in the literature until a few years ago, although there are alternative ways to analyse the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy.

Several authors have argued that public opinion does have a strong influence in the process of foreign policy decision making. For instance, Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro (1992) and Ole Holsti (1992) have proven that opinions regarding foreign policy remain stable over time. Public opinion may not be enough to initiate a public policy, but it can shape the limits of policy making (Sobel 2001). In general, these authors agree that public opinion has a powerful impact on policy making in most cases and, in others, it does at least set the boundaries of operating ability for policy makers.²

Sobel argues that ‘public opinion constrains but does not set American foreign intervention policy’ (Sobel 2001: 5). Policy makers are worried about the electoral consequences of pursuing unpopular policies in the world arena (Marra, Ostrom and Simon 1990). There is an interaction between the public and policy makers that forces leaders to react and lead public opinion (Russett 1990). Whenever presidents fail to seriously contemplate public opinion or consider it too malleable, they cannot adequately advance their foreign.³

¹ See W. Lipmann (1922) *Public Opinion*, (New York: Free Press) and P. E. Converse (1999), *Counting the Public in: Presidents, public opinion, and foreign policy*, (New York: Columbia University Press).

² See B. Russett (1990), *Controlling the sword: The democratic governance of national security*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press); P. Powlick (1991), “The attitudinal bases for responsiveness to public opinion among American foreign policy officials”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 35 (4): 611–141; D. C., Foyle (1999), *Counting the public in: Presidents, public opinion, and foreign policy*, (New York: Columbia University Press); S. Kull, C. Ramsay and E. Lewis (2003), “Misperception, the Media, and the Iraq War”, *Political Science Quarterly* 118(4); E. V. Larson and B. Savych (2005), *American Public Support for US Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation).

³ See E. R. Wittkopf (1990), *Faces of internationalism: Public opinion and American foreign policy*, (Durham: Duke University Press); O. Holsti, “Public Opinion...”; E. R. Wittkopf, and J. M. McCormick, eds. (1993), *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield).

Until very recently, the literature on public opinion and foreign policy in Latin America was pretty scarce. Some authors have identified social welfare as the ultimate goal of foreign policy, which in turn leads governments to be aware of the interests and preferences of the population when designing their foreign policy. Therefore, the opinion of the society must be taken into account by governments in the policymaking process. Schiavon summarizes these and other arguments, and states that:

[R]ecent studies establish that in democratic systems in which rulers, particularly the President, need the popular support via the majority voting of the electorate to achieve and retain power —individually or through their party or followers—, the influence of public opinion over the definition of policies, including foreign policy, is essential (Schiavon 2013: 521).

Therefore, public opinion can be a valuable source of information and a useful tool to better understand Latin Americans' preferences, affinities, evaluations of other regions and countries, including European countries and institutions. This public opinion determines, to some extent, the priorities and actions of their governments towards these regions. Conversely, the actions and policies undertaken by Latin American leaders might determine how their electorates perceive other regions. This correlation that involves public opinion and policy making poses a central question that will be addressed in this article: what is the effect of foreign policy implementation in Latin American countries toward Europe on the public opinion of their citizens? We seek to sustain that decisions made by leaders and governments of Latin America toward Europe have an effect on how Latin Americans perceive the region, both in terms of their individual countries and their regional institutions, especially the European Union (EU). Specifically, we seek to sustain the following hypothesis:

H1: Higher levels of exports and imports (as a percentage of total trade) between Latin America and Europe will have a positive effect on the level of importance given by Latin Americans to Europe.

This hypothesis attempts to show that the societies of Latin America benefit from increased and substantial trade relations, including those with Europe, and this has a positive consequence in the welfare of the citizens. Therefore, the higher the levels of trade with Europe as a percentage of total trade, the higher the evaluation that Latin Americans will give to European countries.

Regarding the EU, Latin American leaders might rely on the level of knowledge and evaluation of their populations toward this organization in order to strengthen their relations. Therefore, better knowledge of Latin American countries about the EU will have a positive effect on how Latin Americans perceive and assess the work of this international institution; in particular, the second hypothesis to be tested is:

H2: Higher levels of knowledge of the EU by Latin Americans will result in a better evaluation of the EU.

Trade, perceptions and regional priorities: more trade = higher priority

We will begin by testing our first hypothesis. In order to do so, the first step is to examine trade flows between Latin America and the EU. By analysing the share of exports and imports with the EU as a percentage of total trade of some Latin American countries, we might be able to infer to what extent the EU will be considered a regional priority by Latin America.

The following charts show the share of exports and imports of six representative Latin American countries and the members of the European Union and other American countries. The column 'European Union' includes its current 27 members. The column 'Americas' includes the United States and other main destinations within the region (which are indicated for each country).⁴

TABLE 1. MERCHANDISE TRADE (SHARE IN WORLD TOTAL EXPORTS)

	AMERICAS	EUROPEAN UNION
Brazil	18.5 ¹	20.2
Chile	12.3	15.3
Colombia	41.9 ²	15.1
Ecuador	65.8 ³	10.3
Mexico	82.2 ⁴	5.9
Peru	21.7 ⁵	17.1

Source: World Trade Organisation; Notes: 1. U.S. and Argentina; 2. U.S., Panama, and Venezuela; 3. U.S., Chile, Peru, and Colombia; 4. U.S., Brazil, and Canada; 5. U.S. and Canada.

TABLE 2. MERCHANDISE TRADE (SHARE IN WORLD TOTAL IMPORTS)

	AMERICAS	EUROPEAN UNION
Brazil	22 ¹	21.4
Chile	36 ²	13.4
Colombia	40 ³	12.6
Ecuador	42.2 ⁴	11.5
Mexico	50.1	11
Peru	29.9 ⁵	11.9

Source: World Trade Organisation; Notes: 1. U.S. and Argentina; 2. U.S., Argentina, and Brazil; 3. U.S., Brazil, and Mexico; 4. U.S., Colombia, and Panama; 5. U.S., Brazil, and Ecuador.

As can be noted from the figures presented in Tables 1 and 2, Brazil and Chile are the only two countries whose share of exports directed to the EU members is higher

⁴ This means that not all the American countries are included in this column, but only those that account for the largest share of exports and imports. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) identifies the main destinations of exports, as well as the main origins of imports of each country. We have taken those destinations and origins that belong to the Americas.

than the one directed to the Americas. In the other cases (Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru), the figures are higher for the Americas than for the EU, with some variation. This descriptive information will help us to determine whether higher levels of trade flows have an effect on whether Latin America perceives Europe as a priority. In order to do so, we need to examine the evaluation of the European region and its countries by Latin Americans.

In order to examine this phenomenon, we have taken two surveys that measure the opinions, evaluations and interests of Latin Americans toward Europe. First, *The Americas and the World*, which is a public opinion survey on foreign policy in Latin America. Second, the *Map of Interests between the European Union & Latin America and the Caribbean*, which reports Google searches that Latin Americans and Europeans undertake on topics of the other region. In 2010-2011, *The Americas and the World* survey was carried out in five Latin American countries (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru) with the aim of studying public opinion on issues related to foreign policy and international relations (González et al. 2011: 7). Among many other questions, the survey asks Latin American citizens to give their opinions about the regions of the world. The results are portrayed in what the authors call the 'Region's Thermometer', which shows the evaluation of the interviewees on seven regional blocs: North America, Asia-Pacific, Central America and the Caribbean, the Southern Cone, the Andean Region, Europe, and the Middle East.

This thermometer shows that the five countries surveyed have varying rankings of the regions. Europe is the second best evaluated region in Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico, with 67, 64 and 64 average points out of 100, respectively; in all three cases, the best evaluated region is North America. Brazilians and Peruvians rank Europe in the third place (49 and 61 points), after Asia-Pacific and North America. Therefore, Europe is not the best evaluated region for any of these countries (González et al. 2011: 56).

However, the same survey then wonders whether the evaluations of the regions match those ranked as strategic priorities. When the public is asked to which region of the world their country should pay more attention, there are very interesting results. The report argues that '[w]hen it comes to regional priorities, Brazilians and to a lesser extent, Peruvians, have a more global vision than their counterparts in Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico: their preferences are less concentrated in the American continent and more open to other regions in the world' (González et al. 2011: 89). Including Chile, which was part of the survey in 2008-09 (using the same methodology) but not in 2010-11, the Americas (North and Latin America) are identified as the highest priority by all the publics surveyed, although with varying levels of importance. Regarding Europe, it is the second highest priority for all of the countries. The percentage of the public who identifies Europe as the region to which their countries should pay more attention ranges from 10% in Ecuador to 30% in Chile. These numbers are far lower than those reported for the American region, as Table 3 shows.

TABLE 3. REGIONAL PRIORITIES OF LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

	AMERICAS	EUROPE	ASIA-PACIFIC	OTHERS
Brazil	36	11	10	21
Chile	44	30	11	9
Colombia	62	15	5	9
Ecuador	63	10	4	10
Mexico	65	12	5	8
Peru	37	22	13	7
Brazil	36	11	10	21

Source: Table compiled by the authors with the data from *The Americas and the World 2010-2011*; in the case of Chile, the information was taken from the 2008-2009 edition of the survey, where the same methodological standards were applied.

In terms of our first hypothesis, higher levels of interregional trade between Latin America and the EU members should be positively reflected in the level of importance given by the former to the latter. Regarding the share of total exports that are directed by the five representative countries to the EU, Brazil and Chile have a larger share of their exports and imports to the EU than to the Americas. In the case of Brazil, the share of imports that are originated in the EU and the Americas is almost the same, which means that both regions are almost equally important in this aspect of interregional trade.

On the other hand, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru report a higher share of trade (both exports and imports) with the Americas than the EU members. In these three cases, the percentage of exports and imports are far higher for the Americas than for the EU, which means that these countries' trade flows are highly concentrated in their own region. Moreover, a significant share of trade flows within the Americas takes place with the US. In other words, the foreign trade of Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru is concentrated with this country. For instance, in Mexico, nearly 78% of exports and 50% of imports take place with the United States (WTO 2014). In contrast, the share of exports that are directed from Peru to the US is lower (14%) than the one directed to the EU (17%). However, given that Canada is also a main destination for Peruvian merchandise (7.5%), the combined share of exports that go to these North American countries surpasses the one reported for the EU (WTO 2014). The varying levels of intraregional and interregional trade flows reported for the six Latin American countries are somewhat coherent with the evaluations that are shown in *The Americas and the World* reports. For instance, significantly high levels of exports and imports of Mexico are concentrated on the Americas, only sending 5.9% of its exports to Europe. Consequently, the level of priority or importance given by Mexicans to North America (65 points) greatly differs from the one given to Europe (12 points), with a 53 point gap. In contrast, more diversified economies like Brazil, Chile and Peru report a smaller gap between the level of importance given to North America and the EU (a gap of only 25, 14 and 15 points respectively). They also have the largest shares of exports to the region among the six countries surveyed (20.2, 15.3 and 17.1% respectively). Finally, Colombia and Ecuador are in between, with 15.1

and 10.3% of their exports going to Europe and a gap in perception of 47 and 53 points between North America and Europe. Therefore, we have provided partial evidence to sustain our first hypothesis: the higher the level of trade with Europe as a percentage of total trade, the higher the relative priority given to Europe as a region, relatively compared to North America; these means that the higher levels of importance given to a region are likely to be explained by the share of trade flows with that region.

Measuring Affinities and Importance of Countries in Europe

In order to fully assess the perception and the overall evaluation that Latin Americans have of Europe, an examination of the individual countries that compose this region needs to be undertaken. Given that a comprehensive survey that measures the opinion that all Latin American countries have about all European countries is not publicly available, we decided to use, once again, the representative countries from both regions that The Americas and the World 2010-2011 survey includes. Respondents were asked to provide their opinion about countries from various regions of the world, using a scale from 0 to 100, being 0 a very unfavourable and 100 a very favourable opinion of the country. Only two European countries were included in the list, Spain and Germany. The results are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4. EVALUATION OF SELECTED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES BY LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

		Germany	Spain
Brazil	Points	50	48
	Rank	3	4
Chile	Points	58	58
	Rank	4	4
Colombia	Points	65	69
	Rank	3	2
Ecuador	Points	60	68
	Rank	5	2
Mexico	Points	63	64
	Rank	3	2
Peru	Points	60	63
	Rank	5	3

Source: Table compiled by the authors with the data from *The Americas and the World 2008* and *2010-2011*.

With no exceptions, both Germany and Spain rank in the ‘top 5’ most highly evaluated countries by Latin Americans. Moreover, in almost all of the ‘Country Thermometers’, these two European countries are more favourably evaluated than any Latin American country, sharing the best positions with North American countries like Canada and the United States, and Asia-Pacific nations like China and Japan (González et al. 2011). These results show that, even if countries are pulled out from their regional blocs and assessed individually, the perception that Latin Americans have of them does not vary considerably. The North American, Asia-Pacific and European

regions are the best evaluated by Latin Americans, as well as the North American, Asia-Pacific and European countries. Including the two best evaluated countries of each of these regions (Canada and the United States, China and Japan, and Germany and Spain), we constructed Table 5.

TABLE 5. RANKS OF BEST EVALUATED COUNTRIES

	Brazil	Chile	Colombia	Ecuador	Mexico	Peru
Canada	5	2	1	4	1	5
China	5	1	5	5	4	2
Germany	3	3	3	4	3	4
Japan	1	4	4	3	2	1
Spain	4	3	2	2	2	3
United States	2	5	1	1	1	1

Source: Table compiled by the authors with the data from The Americas and the World 2008-2009 and 2010-2011.

The United States is, in average, the best evaluated country, for it is at the top of the ranking for all the Latin American countries with the exception of Brazil and Chile. As for the European countries, Spain is better evaluated than Germany by all countries, with the exception of Brazil that evaluates Germany better, and Chile which evaluates them in identical terms. The level of importance given to these two European countries mirrors the fact that Spain and Germany are among the most important trade partners of Latin American countries in Europe. For instance, bilateral trade between Mexico and Spain surpassed 11 billion USD in 2012 (Secretaría de Economía 2014). Also, the Mexican Ministry of Economics reports that Germany is one of its five most important trade partners (Secretaría de Economía 2011). Therefore, we can argue that strong trade relations with a specific European country has a positive effect on the affinities and level of importance given to them by Latin Americans.

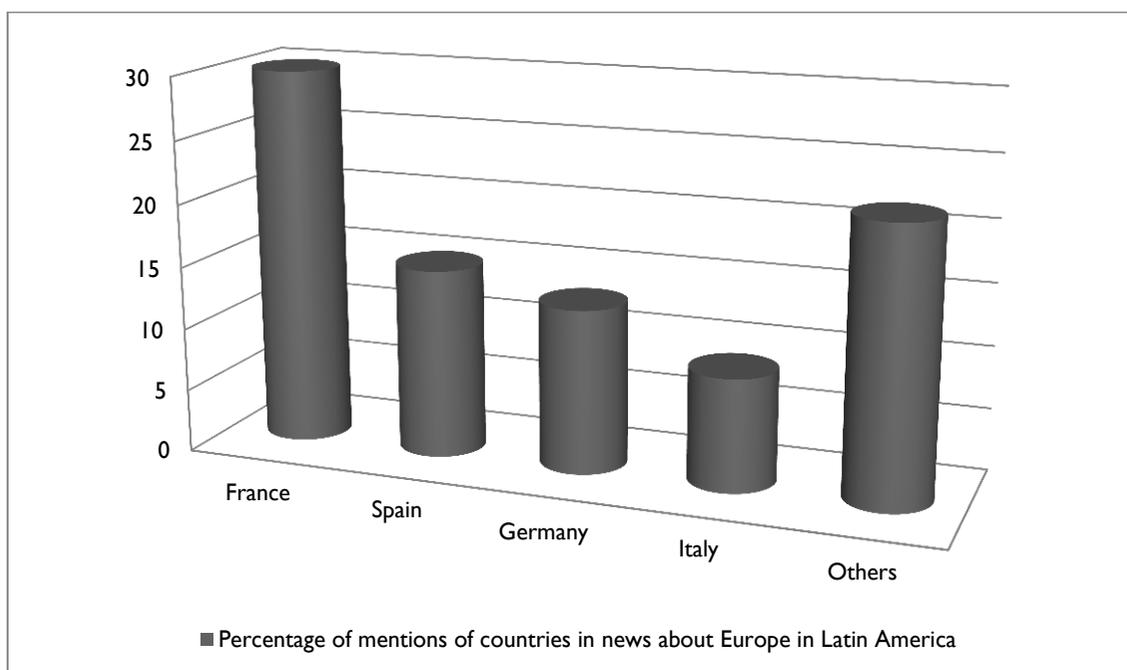
The perceptions, affinities and the level of importance given to Europe by Latin America are not only reflected by a general evaluation of the region or its most significant countries, but also by the degree of interest and level of attention that is paid to them on a regular basis. Therefore, it is not only necessary to examine the general perception that Latin Americans have towards Europe, but also the level of interest that they have on the region. To do so, we used the Map of Interests between the European Union & Latin America and the Caribbean created by the International Prospective Institute. The methodology that they used to collect the data is quite simple: measure Google searches done by citizens of both regions (between September 2011 and September 2012) in order to determine their level of interest regarding the other region. After narrowing the reference population and observations to select only those that included 'methodologically appropriate terms', over 273 million interactions were analysed (García de la Cruz 2012).

Some results are worthy of being examined for the purposes of this article. First, the Map shows the overall interest of Latin American and Caribbean citizens on European countries based on Google searches. According to the report, more than three quarters of the 'interests' were focused on only four European countries,

namely, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. The country that receives the most attention is Spain, with nearly 30% of the total Google searches, followed by France with 18%, Italy with 16%, and Germany with 14%. The report argues that all EU countries generate some degree of interest for Latin Americans, but these four countries receive the most attention (García de la Cruz 2012).

The level of interest shown by Latin America on European countries is also determined by the degree of attention that is paid to European countries in the news. In this case, the same four European countries are the ones that appear most in the Latin American news (see Graph I).

GRAPH I. NEWS ABOUT EUROPE IN LATIN AMERICA



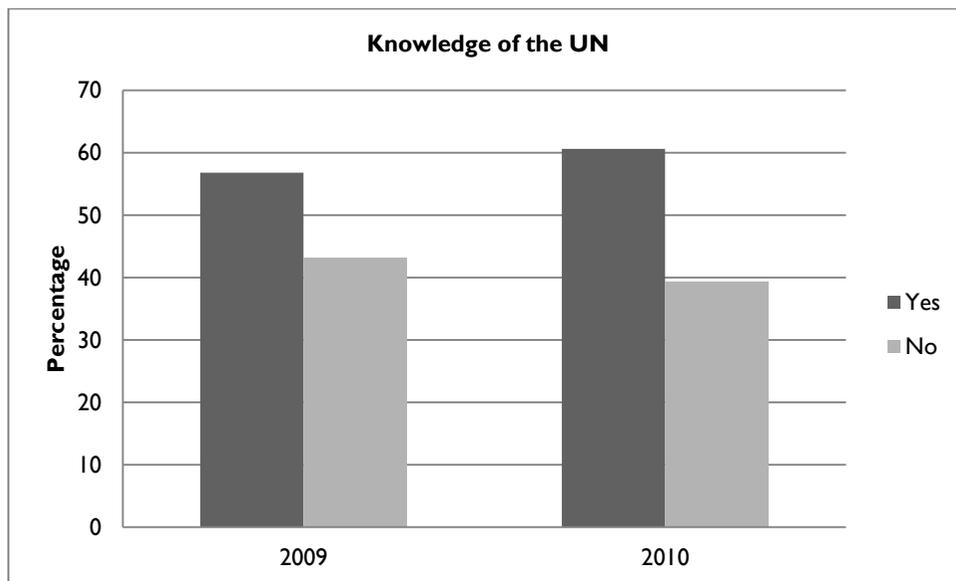
Source: Graph by the authors with the data from Map of Interests between the European Union & Latin America and the Caribbean, 2012.

As Graph I shows, 30% of the news about Europe in Latin America mention France, followed by Spain (15%), Germany (13%), and Italy (9%). These results are consistent with the ones discussed above on the level of interest shown on European countries in Google searches. In this case, France takes the lead over Spain, and Germany surpasses Italy. These changes notwithstanding, the attention paid to Europe continues to be highly concentrated in only these four countries. These results reinforce the previously stated argument that higher levels of trade between Latin American countries and certain European countries will result in higher levels of attention given to such countries.

Latin Americans perceptions on International Organisations and the European Union

In terms of the second hypothesis, we argue that there is a positive relation between the knowledge that people have of international organisations and their evaluation of them. In other words, if Latin Americans know about a specific international organisation, such as the EU, they will evaluate it more favourably. In order to test this hypothesis, we will use the data and information provided by Latinobarómetro (2009 and 2010), as well as The Americas and the World 2010-2011 survey. Respondents of both surveys were asked whether they knew various international organisations, such as the United Nations (UN), the Organisation of American States (OAS), and the EU, among others. Before turning to the EU, we will first take the UN as a reference, because it is the single largest international governmental organisation in the world, dealing with a wide array of relevant issues of the international agenda. Therefore, it is expected that most Latin Americans will be familiar with this institution.

GRAPH 2. KNOWLEDGE OF THE UN



Source: Graph by the authors with the data from Latinobarómetro (2009 and 2010).

As it can be seen in Graph 2, overall, there are more Latin Americans who know the UN than those who do not (Latinobarómetro 2009, 2010). The same question was asked in The Americas and the World 2010-2011 survey to respondents of five different countries. According to the results presented in this report, the UN is the best known international organisation for Brazilians, Ecuadorians, Mexicans and

Peruvians: Only 11% of Brazilians, 22% of Ecuadorians, 13% of Mexicans and 26% of Peruvians had not heard of the UN, did not know it or did not answer the question. This organisation is the second best known in Colombia, after multinational corporations: 11% of Colombians do not know the UN compared to 10% who are not familiar with multinationals (González et al. 2011: 44). In general, 'The United Nations is without a doubt the organisation most recognised in the majority of Latin American publics surveyed: only 18% of Latin Americans could not identify or have no opinion of the UN, ranging from a low of 11% of Colombians to a high of 26% of Peruvians' (González et al. 2011: 42).

As stated before, the European Union (EU) is the largest and most active regional organisation in Europe. Therefore we need to determine whether the EU is known by Latin Americans in order to test our second hypothesis. According to the Americas and the World 2010-2011 survey, the EU it is the second best known organisation in Ecuador (26% are not familiar with it); the fourth best known in Peru (27%); and the fifth best known in Colombia (16%) and Mexico (33%) (González et al. 2011: 44). The international actors that are better known than the EU to Peruvians, Colombians, and Mexicans are multinational corporations, the OAS and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), with varying degrees for each country. Unfortunately, no data is available for Brazil.

Given that the European Union is a regional organisation, comparing it to the OAS, the American regional organisation, can be helpful to further understand how well-known regional organisations are in Latin America. The Americas and the World survey shows that, overall, the OAS is better known in Latin America than the EU. It is the best known to Ecuadorians alongside the UN; the second best known to Peruvians (27% are not familiar with it); the third best known to Colombians (12%) after the UN and multinationals; the fourth best known to Mexicans (31%) below the UN, NAFTA and multinationals; and the sixth best known to Brazilians (37%) after the UN, multinationals, Mercosur, the IMF and NGOs. Although the ranking of the OAS is not the same for all countries, in all cases it is better known than the EU. These values demonstrate that Latin Americans are more familiar with global international organisations like the UN, then with organisations of their own region, and finally with those of other regions, like the EU (González et al. 2011: 43-44).

If our second hypothesis is correct, it is expected that the UN will be the best evaluated international organisation by Latin Americans, followed by the OAS and the EU. In The Americas and the World 2010-2011 survey, respondents are asked to evaluate various international organisations on a scale of 0 to 100, with 0 being the worst evaluation and 100 being the best. Based on the answers, an 'Organization Thermometer' is constructed, which presents the ranking and average scores of such evaluations (González et al. 2011: 105).

As expected, 'for Latin Americans, the international organization most recognised is also the best evaluated in each of the countries: the UN' (González et al. 2011: 105). It is the best evaluated in Brazil (59 points), Chile with (60 points), Colombia (72

points), Ecuador (63 points), Mexico (75 points), and Peru (63 points).⁵ With respect to the OAS, results vary but, overall, it is one of the most positively evaluated: it is second to last in Brazil (45 points), second in Chile (57 points) and Colombia (68 points); fourth in Ecuador (60 points); and third in Mexico and Peru (64 and 61 points). Finally, regarding the EU, results are also favourable, but less than the OAS, given that it stands below this American regional organisation in all the thermometers—in Brazil there is no data available—. The EU is the third best evaluated in Colombia (66 points) and Chile (55 points); the sixth in Ecuador (59 points); and the fourth in Mexico and Peru (63 and 60 points).

A general conclusion that can be drawn based on these results is that the UN is both the best known and the most favourably evaluated international organisation by Latin Americans. With respect to regional organisations, all of the countries for whom the data is available have a better knowledge and give a better evaluation to the OAS than the EU. Therefore, the more Latin Americans know an international organisation, the better they will evaluate it, which is consistent with our second hypothesis. In order for Latin Americans to provide a better evaluation to the EU institutions, it is necessary to become better known and be more familiar to the citizens of this region.

⁵ The data for Chile is taken from the 2008-09 edition of *The Americas and the World*. The same methodological standards were applied to this edition than in 2010-2011.

Conclusions

Public opinion is a useful tool and valuable source of information to better understand Latin Americans' preferences, levels of priority, and evaluations of other countries, regions and institutions, including European countries, Europe, and the EU. The central arguments of this article were, on one hand, that the higher the levels of trade with Europe as a percentage of total trade of Latin American countries, the higher the degree of importance, interest, and priority that Latin Americans will give to Europe and European countries. On the other hand, as Latin Americans have more knowledge about international organisations, including the EU, they have a better evaluation of their work. Using the data of The Americas and the World survey, Latinobarómetro and the Map of Interests between the European Union & Latin America and the Caribbean, sufficient evidence was provided to support these arguments.

If public opinion determines, to some extent, foreign policy decision making, priorities and actions, then a better evaluation and prioritisation of the Europe and the UE within Latin America's populations can have a positive effect on Latin American foreign policy vis à vis the EU and the countries that compose it. Therefore, increasing knowledge about and trade with each other is a good strategy for European and Latin American countries to build on their bi-regional and bilateral relations, creating a virtuous circle of incremental cooperation and welfare for both regions.

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