

Latin American Perceptions of Europe and the European Union

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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 assessment of other countries, regions and institutions, including European countries, Europe, and the European Union (EU). The central arguments are, on the one hand, that the higher the levels of trade with Europe as a percentage of the 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, the more knowledge Latin Americans have about international organisations, including the EU, the more they appreciate 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 higher assessment and prioritisation of Europe and the EU 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.

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

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of the society.¹ 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 was not 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.² 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.³ This position was very strong in academic 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 Shapiro⁴ and Ole Holsti⁵ 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.⁶ 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.⁷

Sobel argues that ‘public opinion constrains but does not set American foreign intervention policy’.⁸ Policy makers are worried about the electoral consequences of pursuing unpopular policies in the world arena.⁹ There is an interaction between the public and policy makers that forces leaders to react and lead public opinion.¹⁰

¹ J. Schiavon, ‘¿Qué quieren los mexicanos en temas internacionales?: Opinión pública y política exterior en México (2006–2012)’, *Foro Internacional*, 2013, Vol. 53, No. 3–4, pp. 517–536.

² G.A. Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, New York: Praeger, 1950.

³ See: W. Lipmann, *Public Opinion*, New York: Free Press, 1922; P.E. Converse, *The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics*, in D.C. Foyle, *Counting the Public In: Presidents, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

⁴ B.I. Page, R.Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans’ Policy Preferences*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

⁵ O.R. Holsti, ‘Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond–Lippmann Consensus, Mershon Series: Research Programs and Debates’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 1992, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 439–466.

⁶ R. Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam: Constraining the Colossus*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

⁷ See: B. Russett, *Controlling the Sword: The Democratic Governance of National Security*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990; P. Powlick, ‘The Attitudinal Bases for Responsiveness to Public Opinion among American Foreign Policy Officials’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1991, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 611–141; D.C. Foyle, op.cit.; S. Kull, C. Ramsay, E. Lewis, ‘Misperception, the Media, and the Iraq War’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 2003, Vol. 118, No. 4; E.V. Larson, B. Savych, *American Public Support for US Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005.

⁸ R. Sobel, op.cit., p. 5.

⁹ R.F. Marra, C.W. Ostrom Jr., D.M. Simon, ‘Foreign Policy and Presidential Popularity: Creating Windows of Opportunity in the Perpetual Election’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1990, Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 588–623.

¹⁰ B. Russett, op.cit.

Whenever presidents fail to seriously contemplate public opinion or consider it too malleable, they cannot adequately advance their foreign policies.¹¹

Until very recently, academic 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 summarises 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.¹²

Therefore, public opinion can be a valuable source of information and a useful tool to better understand Latin Americans' preferences, affinities, as well as assessment 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 between 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 prove 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 verify 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 on the welfare of the citizens. Therefore, the higher the levels

¹¹ See: E.R. Wittkopf, *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1990; O.R. Holsti, op.cit.; E.R. Wittkopf, J.M. McCormick (eds), *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993.

¹² J. Schiavon, op.cit., p. 521.

of trade with Europe as a percentage of total trade, the higher the rating that Latin Americans will give to European countries.

Regarding the EU, Latin American leaders might rely on the level of knowledge and attitude of their populations toward this organisation 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 about the EU by Latin Americans will result in a higher opinion of the EU.

1. 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).¹³

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 Organization.

¹ the US and Argentina; ² the US, Panama and Venezuela; ³ the US, Chile, Peru, and Colombia; ⁴ the US, Brazil and Canada; ⁵ the US and Canada.

¹³ 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 Organization (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.

As can be observed on the basis of 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 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 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 perception of the European region and its countries by Latin Americans.

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 Organization.

¹ the US and Argentina; ² the US, Argentina and Brazil; ³ the US, Brazil and Mexico; ⁴ the US, Colombia and Panama; ⁵ the US, Brazil and Ecuador.

In order to examine this phenomenon, we have analysed two surveys that assess the opinions, attitudes 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 make 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 the public opinion on issues related to foreign policy and international relations.¹⁴ 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 seven regional blocs made by the interviewees: North America, Asia-Pacific, Central America and the Caribbean, the Southern Cone, the Andean Region, Europe, and the Middle East.

The Thermometer shows that the five countries surveyed have varying rankings of the regions. Europe is the second highest rated region in Colombia, Ecuador and

¹⁴ G. González González, J.A. Schiavon, D. Crow, G. Maldonado, *The Americas and the World 2010–2011: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru*, Mexico: CIDE, 2011, p. 7.

Mexico, with 67, 64 and 64 average points out of 100, respectively; in all three cases, the highest rated 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 highest rated region for any of these countries.¹⁵

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 on the American continent and more open to other regions in the world'.¹⁶ Including Chile, which was part of the survey in 2008–2009 (using the same methodology) but not in 2010–2011, the Americas (North and Latin America) are identified as the highest priority by all the public 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 per cent in Ecuador to 30 per cent 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

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.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 56.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 89.

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 percentages 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 United States. In other words, the foreign trade of Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru is concentrated with this country. For instance, in Mexico, nearly 78 per cent of exports and 50 per cent of imports take place with the United States.¹⁷ In contrast, the share of exports that are directed from Peru to the United States is lower (14 per cent) than the one directed to the EU (17 per cent). However, given that Canada is also a main destination for Peruvian merchandise (7.5 per cent), the combined share of exports that go to these North American countries surpasses the one reported for the EU.¹⁸

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, the country sending only 5.9 per cent of its exports to Europe. Consequently, the level of priority or importance given by Mexicans to North America (65 points) greatly exceeds 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 per cent, 15.3 per cent and 17.1 per cent, respectively). Finally, Colombia and Ecuador are in between, with 15.1 per cent and 10.3 per cent 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; this 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.

¹⁷ World Trade Organization, *Statistics Database*, 2004, [http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFView.aspx?Language=E&Country=BR%2cCL%2cCO%2cEC%2cMX%2cPE_\(accessed on 1 December 2014\)](http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFView.aspx?Language=E&Country=BR%2cCL%2cCO%2cEC%2cMX%2cPE_(accessed on 1 December 2014)).

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

2. Measuring affinities and importance of countries in Europe

In order to fully assess the perception and the overall opinion that Latin Americans have of Europe, an examination of the individual countries that make up this region needs to be undertaken. Given that no comprehensive survey examining the opinion that all Latin American countries have about all European countries is 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, namely 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’ highest rated countries by Latin Americans. Moreover, in almost all of the ‘Country Thermometers’, these two European countries are looked upon more favourably than any Latin American country, sharing the best positions with the North American countries Canada and the United States and with Asia-Pacific nations such as China and Japan.¹⁹ 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 rated the highest by Latin Americans, as are the North American, Asia-Pacific and European

¹⁹ G. González González, op.cit.

countries. Including the two highest rated countries of each of these regions (Canada and the United States, China and Japan, Germany and Spain), we constructed Table 5.

The United States is, on average, the highest rated 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 rated higher than Germany by all countries, with the exception of Brazil, which rates Germany better, and Chile, which rates 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 USD 11 billion in 2012.²⁰ Also, the Mexican Ministry of Economy reports that Germany is one of its five most important trade partners.²¹ Therefore, we can argue that strong trade relations with a specific European country have a positive effect on the affinities and level of importance given to them by Latin Americans.

Table 5. Ranks of Highest Rated 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*.

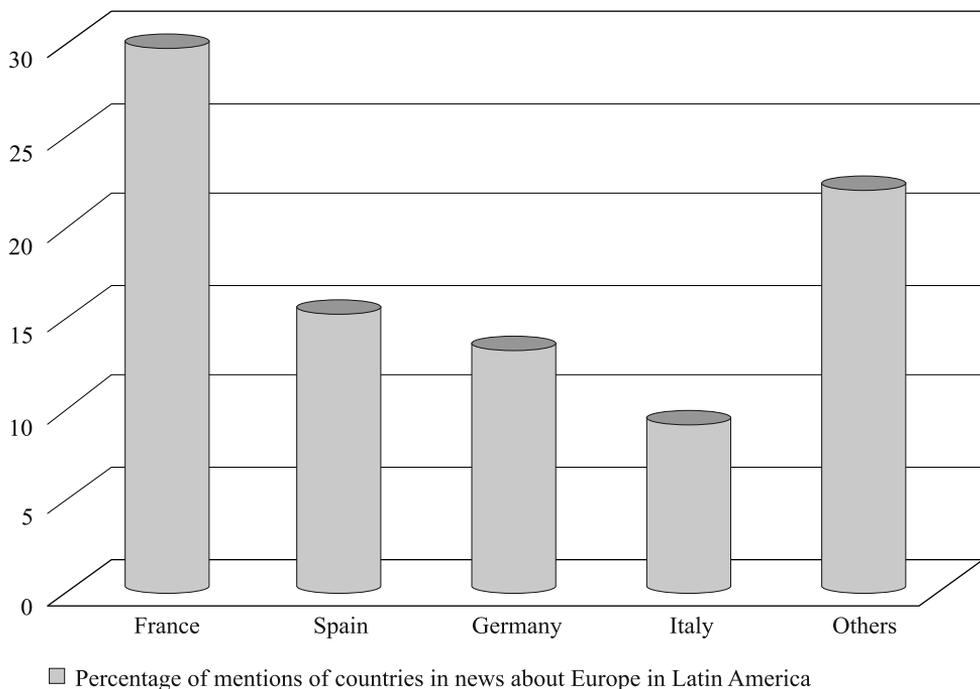
The perceptions, affinities and the level of importance given to Europe by Latin America are not only reflected by a general evaluation of the region or its most significant countries but also by the degree of interest and level of attention that is paid to them on a regular basis. Therefore, it is not only necessary to examine the general perception that Latin Americans have towards Europe but also the level of interest that they have in 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: to examine the 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

²⁰ <http://www.economia.gob.mx/comunidad-negocios/comercio-exterior/informacion-estadistica-y-arancelaria> (accessed on 5 September 2014).

²¹ http://www.economia.gob.mx/files/diagnostico_economia_mexicana.pdf (accessed on 5 September 2011).

those that included ‘methodologically appropriate terms’, over 273 million interactions were analysed.²²

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 in 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 per cent of the total Google searches, followed by France with 18 per cent, Italy with 16 per cent, and Germany with 14 per cent. The report argues that all EU countries generate some degree of interest for Latin Americans, but these four countries receive the most attention.²³



Graph 1. News about Europe in Latin America

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

²² J.J. García de la Cruz Herrera, ‘Map of Interests between the European Union & Latin America and the Caribbean’, *I Congreso EU-LAC de Editores de Medios: Invertir en conocernos*, Madrid: Editorial Fundación EU-LAC, 2012, pp. 25–26.

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 23–39.

The level of interest in European countries shown by Latin America 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 1).

As Graph 1 shows, 30 per cent of the news about Europe in Latin America mention France, followed by Spain (15 per cent), Germany (13 per cent), and Italy (9 per cent). These results are consistent with the ones discussed above regarding the level of interest shown in 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.

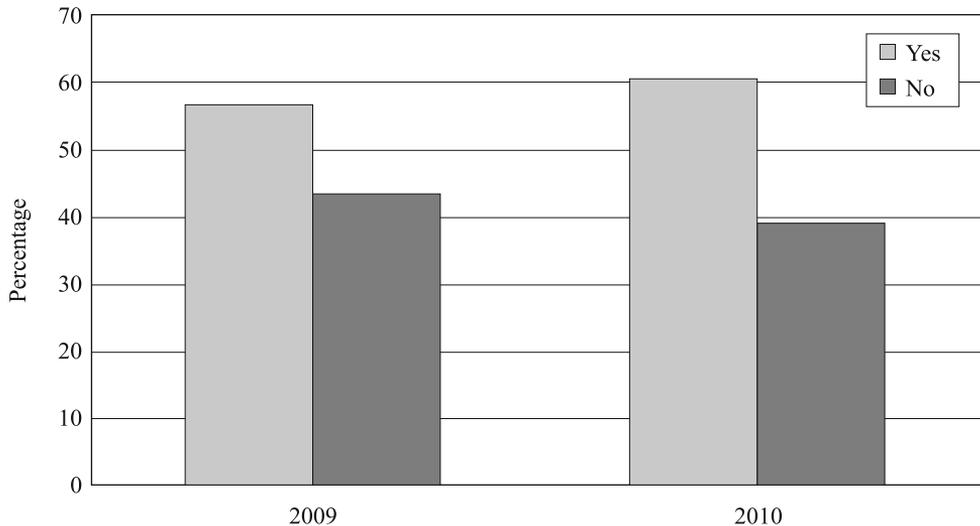
3. Latin Americans' perceptions of international organisations and the European Union

As regards the second hypothesis, we argue that there is a positive relation between the knowledge that people have of international organisations and the rating they give them. In other words, if Latin Americans know about a specific international organisation, such as the EU, they will rate 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.

As it can be seen in Graph 2, overall, there are more Latin Americans who know the UN than those who do not.²⁴ The same question was asked in *The Americas and the World 2010–2011* survey to respondents from 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 per cent of Brazilians, 22 per cent of Ecuadorians, 13 per cent of Mexicans, and 26 per cent 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 per cent of Colombians do not know the UN compared to 10 per cent who are not familiar with

²⁴ *Latinobarómetro*, 2009, 2010.

multinationals.²⁵ In general, ‘The United Nations is without a doubt the organisation most recognised in the majority of Latin American societies surveyed: only 18 per cent of Latin Americans could not identify or have no opinion of the UN, ranging from a low of 11 per cent of Colombians to a high of 26 per cent of Peruvians’.²⁶



Graph 2. Knowledge of the UN

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

As stated before, the European Union 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 is the second best known organisation in Ecuador (26 per cent are not familiar with it); the fourth best known in Peru (27 per cent); and the fifth best known in Colombia (16 per cent) and Mexico (33 per cent).²⁷ 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 regional organisations are known in Latin America. *The Americas and the World* survey shows that, overall, the OAS is better known in Latin America than the EU.

²⁵ G. González González, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

It is the best known to Ecuadorians alongside the UN; the second best known to Peruvians (27 per cent are not familiar with it); the third best known to Colombians (12 per cent) after the UN and multinationals; the fourth best known to Mexicans (31 per cent) after the UN, NAFTA and multinationals; and the sixth best known to Brazilians (37 per cent) 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 most 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.²⁸

If our second hypothesis is correct, it is expected that the UN will be the international organisation highest rated 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 lowest rating and 100 being the best. Based on the answers, an ‘Organization Thermometer’ is constructed, which presents the ranking and average scores.²⁹

As expected, ‘for Latin Americans, the international organisation most recognised is also the highest rated in each of the countries: the UN’.³⁰ It is the highest rated in Brazil (59 points), Chile (60 points), Colombia (72 points), Ecuador (63 points), Mexico (75 points), and Peru (63 points).³¹ With respect to the OAS, results vary, but overall, it is one of the most positively rated: 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’s, 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 highest rated 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).

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

²⁸ Ibidem, pp. 43–44.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 105.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ The data for Chile is taken from the 2008–2009 edition of *The Americas and the World*. The same methodological standards were applied to this edition as to the 2010–2011 edition.

4. Conclusions

Public opinion is a useful tool and valuable source of information to better understand Latin Americans' preferences, levels of priority, and their assessment 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 appreciation 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 appreciation 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 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.