

Public Attitudes toward an Emerging China in Latin America

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Abstract

In the past two decades, China has substantially increased its economic presence in Latin America. The impressive rate of economic growth in China has resulted in a voracious appetite for Latin American commodities and energy sources. China has also become a major investor in the region, and has loaned billions of dollars to Latin American countries. This paper evaluates how aware Latin American citizens are of this increased economic presence of China, and also studies citizens' attitudes toward the rising influence of China in Latin America. Public attitudes toward the Chinese economic and political model, and evaluations of the Chinese popular culture are also presented and discussed. The evidence suggests that the image of China is improving in Latin America as a result of its new economic role in the region. However, Chinese soft power faces several limitations in the region. The Chinese political and economic models, and the Chinese popular culture are still not very attractive in Latin America.

Introduction

In the past two decades, the relations between China and Latin America have changed considerably. Changes in the international environment after the Cold War and the impressive economic rise of China have led to a profound transformation in Sino-Latin American relations (Jiang, 2008). In particular, since the early 2000s, China has become a major trading partner of most Latin American countries and has increased its investments in the region. China and Latin America have also tightened their diplomatic and political relations with several high-level visits from Chinese authorities to the region (and from Latin American presidents to China) in the past 20 years.

This transformation in Sino-Latin American relations has generated a lot of scholarly attention. Some studies have focused on the economic aspects of the increased importance of China in Latin America (Gallagher & Porzecanski, 2010; Jenkins & Dussel Peters, 2009; Santiso & Avendano, 2011). These works have discussed the benefits and opportunities Latin American countries derive from closed economic association with China, but also the risks posed by the rise of China for manufacturers in the region (Gallagher & Porzecanski, 2010; González, 2008). Other scholars have analyzed the geopolitical implications of the increased economic and political presence of China in Latin America, paying special attention to the strategic interests of China, the United States, and key players in Latin America, such as Brazil and Venezuela (Hirst, 2008; Lanxin, 2008; Tokatlian, 2008). Finally, policy analysts have studied the challenges posed by the rise of China in Latin America and offer policy recommendations to address these challenges (Ray, Gallagher, Lopez, & Sanborn, 2015).

While these studies offer useful perspectives on the evolution of the relations between China and Latin America at the macro level, the issue of public attitudes towards the increased Chinese presence in Latin America has received scant attention in the literature. We still know very little about how Latin American citizens perceive this new economic and geopolitical situation. In this paper, I start closing this gap by analyzing public attitudes toward the Chinese presence in Latin America. In the last decade, China has launched a charm offensive with the goal of increasing its soft power around the globe. Beijing's soft power strategy is based on an intense promotion of China as a tool to serve the international ambitions of this rising power (Hartig, forthcoming; Shambaugh, 2015). Is that strategy working in Latin America? Do Latin Americans

hold positive views about the increasing Chinese presence in the region? Do people in the region respect and admire the Chinese culture and its institutions?

In order to address these questions, I will assess the general attitudes of Latin American citizens towards China and Chinese investments in the region. I will compare those attitudes with Latin Americans' perceptions of other major world powers that have a diplomatic or economic presence in the region, in particular the United States which has historically had a hegemonic position in Latin America. In a second set of analyses, I will evaluate whether Latin American citizens are concerned about the possible negative repercussions of Chinese investments in Latin America which are often discussed in the media and in the political arena (e.g. environmental degradation, cultural mistrust, and difficulties of native workers to access jobs in infrastructure projects funded by Chinese investments). Finally, I will assess public attitudes toward Chinese economic and political institutions, and toward Chinese popular culture (i.e. music and television). These different public opinion analyses will provide us with a complete picture of Latin Americans' perceptions of the increasingly important Chinese economic and political presence in Latin America.

Political and Economic Presence of China in Latin America

The last two decades have seen a profound transformation in Sino-Latin American relations. In this introductory section, I briefly present the main factors that contribute to an increased Chinese influence in Latin America.

The main characteristic of this new relationship is the voracious *appetite of China for Latin American commodities*. The economic rise of China has led to demands of energy and commodities that cannot be satisfied by Chinese producers. Since the early 2000s, the Chinese demand for Latin American commodities has been one of the drivers of economic growth in the region. In fact, China became the most important commercial partner of many Latin American countries during this period (Gallagher & Porzecanski, 2010). China's share of Latin American exports increased from 2% in 1993 to 9% in 2013 –15% in the agriculture and extraction sectors–. The exponential increase in the Chinese demand for Latin American exports contributed to the boom in the extractive and agricultural sectors. The Chinese demand also led to an increase in the prices of

major commodities in the world market, improving the terms of trade across the Americas (Blázquez-Lidoy, Rodríguez, & Santiso, 2006; Ray et al., 2015: 4-5).

Beyond trade, China's regional engagement is characterized by *large-scale investments and financing*. The increase in Chinese investments in the region has been remarkable. While China invested 7.3 billion dollars in Latin America between 1990 and 2009, it invested 42.7 billion dollars in the region between 2010 and 2013 (Dussel Peters, 2015: 10). China's FDI in Latin America is highly concentrated in two different areas: 1) acquisition of raw materials, and 2) large energy and infrastructure projects (Dussel Peters, 2013). China also substantially increased its financial presence in the region by committing \$118 billion in loans, in particular to support large-scale projects in infrastructure and in the energy sector (Dussel Peters, 2015: 9).

The increased economic presence of China in Latin America has also resulted in *closer political and diplomatic ties* between the Asian giant and the countries of the region. Since the early 2000s, there have been several public and private sector delegations and other high-level visits from China to Latin America. Between 2001 and 2015, there were 31 official visits to Latin America by Chinese presidents and premiers. The top destinations were Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Cuba. Moreover, China increased its presence in multilateral regional organizations. For instance, it became a permanent observer of the Organization of American States (OAS) in 2004 and a member of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in 2009 (Dussel Peters, 2015: 6-7).

In sum, the last two decades have seen a fundamental transformation of Sino-Latin American relations. The economic presence of China in Latin America increased exponentially through trade, large-scale investments, and financing. This has also contributed to closer political relations between China and several countries throughout the region.

China's Soft Power Strategy and the Importance of Public Opinion

In the early 2000s, the Chinese government realized that economic and military power was not enough to be a global power; and that improving the global image of China mattered. As a result, China began public diplomacy efforts to improve its reputation and the cultural appeal. This strategy became official when Hu Jintao addressed the 17th Congress of the Chinese Communist

Party in 2007 and said that China needed to invest in its *soft power* (Hartig, forthcoming; Shambaugh, 2015).

Nye defines soft power in international politics as “the ability to shape the preferences of others” through attraction rather than hard power (Nye, 2004: 5). In other words, soft power results from countries being liked, respected, trusted, or admired (Moss, 2013). There are three main sources of soft power: 1) an attractive culture, 2) appealing political values, and 3) respected foreign policies (Nye, 2004: 11). The Chinese government has been actively attempting to improve its global image since the mid-2000s through several public diplomacy efforts, such as an increase in the Chinese media presence overseas, cultural exhibitions, student exchanges, and the opening of more than 400 Confucius institutes worldwide to promote Chinese language and culture (ChinaFile, 2013).¹

Public diplomacy can be understood as “a country’s engagement and communication with foreign publics” (Hartig, forthcoming: 1). The premise behind this soft power strategy is that appealing to foreign publics serves the foreign policy goals and the global standing of China. When public opinion in other countries is favorable to China, Beijing can more easily obtain what it wants in intergovernmental negotiations. On the other hand, governments in Latin America (and elsewhere) might have a harder time making concessions to China when public opinion holds negative views about the increased economic and political presence of China in the region. In fact, several important works have shown that foreign policies are responsive to public opinion shifts (Erikson, MacKuen, & Stimson, 2002; Page & Shapiro, 1992).

It is then essential to understand and measure the extent of China’s soft power in Latin America, through a detailed analysis of public opinion. The study of public attitudes toward China is still in its infancy. While there have been some studies analyzing how the media portrays China in some Latin American countries –such as Mexico or Colombia– (Armony, 2012; Cornejo, Haro Navejas, & León-Manríquez, 2013), and some attention paid to how engaged citizens understand and discuss China online (Armony & Velásquez, 2015); we still know very little about public opinion trends. Armony (2012: 196), for example, points out that “studies focused on the media, which serve as a window to understand how elites in Latin America view China, should be complemented by other research that shows perceptions held by average citizens.” This paper will take on this task, and assess whether China has been able to develop soft power in the region.

¹ 37 Confucius institutes are located in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Data

Data for the subsequent analysis are drawn primarily from the 2012-2014 waves of the AmericasBarometer. The survey is administered every two years by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University. The sampling process involves multistage stratification by country and then substratification within each country by major geographic region to increase precision. Within each primary sampling unit (PSU), the survey respondents are selected randomly.² The dataset includes 75,541 individual observations from surveys conducted in 21 Latin American and Caribbean countries over a period of two years.

The 2012 and 2014 waves of the AmericasBarometer surveys have the most complete list of survey items related to the topic studied here. In fact, this is –to my knowledge– the only cross-national survey that asks several questions about Latin American citizens’ attitudes toward China, the Chinese government, and the Chinese presence in Latin America. One of the reasons that there are very few studies about public attitudes toward the increasing Chinese influence in Latin America is simply that until recently there was no reliable survey data to conduct the analysis. These AmericasBarometer data finally allow us to conduct this important evaluation.

In the section analyzing the limits of soft power in Latin America, I will also present the results of several survey items from the 2013 Pew Global Attitudes Survey. Surveys are based on telephone and face-to-face interviews with national samples conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. The 2013 edition of the Global Attitudes Survey included several questions regarding the perception of Chinese cultural, economic, and political life in seven Latin American countries. These survey items are useful to assess other aspects of Chinese soft power in Latin America.

Chinese Presence in Latin America: Are Citizens Aware?

The first goal of this paper is to evaluate citizens’ perceptions of the increased Chinese political and economic influence in Latin America. In order to conduct this analysis, I use several survey items that were included in the 2014 wave of the Americas Barometer.

² More technical information can be obtained from the website <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/core-surveys.php>.

In the analysis in this section, I systematically compare Latin American citizens' attitudes towards China and their perceptions of the US influence in the region. The United States has been the hegemonic power in Latin America at least since the early 20th century. It has a strong political and economic influence in the region (Smith, 2013). During the 20th century, the United States repeatedly intervened in the internal affairs of Latin American countries –either openly or through covert operations– (Schoultz, 1998). Moreover, the United States has often exerted pressure on Latin American states in order for them to adopt economic policies that also benefit the economic interests of the hegemon. For instance, the package of neoliberal policies that were widely adopted by Latin American countries during the 1990s became known as the “Washington Consensus” (Kingstone, 2011: chapter 3).

The increased presence of China in Latin America must be understood against the backdrop of the US historical hegemonic position in the region. Many Latin American political leaders (especially the leaders of the contestatory left) have adopted an anti-US rhetoric and openly criticize what they perceive as the imperialistic ambitions of the United States in the region (Castañeda, 2006; Kingstone, 2011: chapter 4; Weyland, Madrid, & Hunter, 2010).³ Moreover, a substantial share of Latin American citizens (especially voters identified with the left) hold very negative perceptions of the US government (McPherson, 2006), although these perceptions vary over time (e.g. the US government was much more negatively perceived under the Bush administration than under the Obama administration).

On the contrary, Latin American countries (especially those with contestatory leftist governments) have eagerly pursued Chinese investments and benefited from the commodities' boom generated by the meteoric rise of China during the past two decades (Locatelli, 2011). The media in Latin America has clearly made the connection between the economic rise of China, the skyrocketing price of commodities in the international market, and the economic bonanza in Latin America (Marín Raventós, 2012; Villa, 2015). While the US influence in the region remains tainted by a long history of meddling with the internal affairs of Latin American countries, the Chinese presence has been presented by analysts and political leaders in a more positive light.

³ Kingstone (2011) describes the contestatory left as leftist governments that have called into question substantial aspects of the pre-existing economic and political situations in their countries. The neoliberal policies of the ‘Washington Consensus’ were clearly undermined by these governments (e.g. through looser fiscal policies and re-nationalization of key natural resources). Countries governed by the contestatory left include Argentina (2002-2015), Bolivia (2006-2017), Ecuador (2007-2017), Nicaragua (2007-2017), and Venezuela (1998-2017).

During the Cold War period, the political and economic influence of China in Latin America was extremely limited (Jiang, 2008). Sino-Latin American relations have become much closer in the past two decades, as China has become a major trading partner of several Latin American countries and has invested in several key infrastructure and development projects in the region. Are Latin Americans aware of this profound transformation? Fortunately, three survey items introduced in the 2012 and 2014 waves of the Americas Barometer allow us to tackle this important question, as can be observed in Table A1 in the Appendix.

These first two questions are useful because they allow us to observe Latin Americans' perceptions of Chinese influence in the region vis-à-vis other emerging world and regional powers, as well as the United States. If Latin American citizens are aware of the increased Chinese influence in the region, we should observe a clear difference between the perceived influence of China and that of other emerging or developed countries (e.g. India or Japan) with a much smaller presence in the region. Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of the answers of Latin American citizens to this question. Panel A shows the present evaluation of which country has the most influence in Latin America, while Panel B shows evaluations of which country will be the most influential in the region in 10 years.

[Figure 1 about here]

The answers to these questions are revealing of the shifting perceptions of Latin American citizens regarding the increased influence of China in the region. 54% of respondents correctly identify the United States as the most influential country in the region, which reflects both the present situation and the historical hegemonic position of the United States. Interestingly, however, almost 1 in 5 Latin American citizens (19.7% of respondents) believe China is the most influential country in the region. This is a very large proportion of the Latin American population, considering the fact that until a few decades ago China had a very small diplomatic and economic presence in Latin America. Unfortunately, there is no similar data on perception of foreign influence in previous decades but the current perception is certainly reflects the increased Chinese presence in Latin America in the past two decades. For comparison, another emerging power (India) which has a much smaller political and economic presence in Latin America is considered as the most influential country by a very small minority of Latin American citizens (0.71%). And none of the

other countries considered in this survey question is considered as the most influential country in the region by more than 6% of respondents. In other words, China is considered by Latin American citizens as much more influential than important regional economic and political powers such as Brazil and Venezuela.

While it is not possible to observe the perceptions of Latin Americans regarding foreign influence in the region in the recent past, Panel B in Figure 1 gives us a good indication of shifting perceptions in the region. When asked which country will be the most influential in 10 years, Latin American citizens consider that the United States will lose influence and that China will become a more influential foreign power. In fact, the percentage of Latin American citizens who believe that the United States will be the most influential country in 10 years (43%) is much lower than the percentage of Latin Americans who believe that the United States is currently the most influential country (54%). On the contrary, the percentage of Latin American citizens who believe that China will be the most influential country in the region in 10 years (27%) is much larger than the percentage of Latin Americans who believe that China is currently the most influential country in the region (20%).

In order to evaluate whether Latin Americans' perceptions of Chinese regional influence also reflect their perceptions of the political and economic influence of China in their own countries, I take advantage of the third question in Table A1. The answers to this question can be observed graphically in Figure 2.

[Figure 2 about here]

Again, this figure clearly shows that Latin American citizens perceive China as an influential player in their own countries. More than 70% of respondents in the AmericasBarometer surveys perceive China to be influential in their countries. Interestingly, almost 38% of Latin American citizens believe that China has *a lot* of influence in their countries. This is a very high percentage given the short history of Chinese involvement in Latin America. China has become a major economic and (to a lesser extent) diplomatic player in the region only in the last two decades, but Latin Americans have quickly shifted their perceptions regarding this Chinese presence.

In sum, the descriptive statistics presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 clearly show that the increased presence of China in the region and the tightening of Sino-Latin American relations are correctly perceived by Latin American citizens. This is probably related to media analyses that connect the economic growth in the past 15 years in Latin America to the rise of China and the increased appetite of this emerging giant for Latin American commodities (Armony, 2012). Moreover, many Latin American citizens may be aware of the exponential growth of Chinese investments in the region (especially in infrastructures and in the energy sector). These massive projects are well covered in the media, and may contribute to shifting perceptions in Latin America. Although China has become increasingly influential, the United States remains the most powerful economic and political player in the region; and China does not appear to want to challenge that hegemonic position now or in the near future. Hence, it seems that a large percentage of Latin American citizens actually misperceive China as more powerful and influential than it actually is in the region.

Evaluation of Chinese Influence in the Region

The data shown in the previous section shows that Latin Americans are aware of the transformation of Sino-Latin American relations, and that they correctly perceive the increasing economic and political influence of China in the region. But they do not tell us anything about how Latin American citizens evaluate this Chinese presence. Is public opinion in Latin America favorable to the increasingly important role China plays in the economic development of Latin America? How do public attitudes towards China compare to public evaluations of the United States? In order to answer these questions, I use several survey items from the 2012 and 2014 waves of the AmericasBarometer surveys, described in Table A2 in the Appendix.

I first analyze the responses to a survey question in the 2012 wave of the Americas Barometer which asks respondents to react to a statement regarding the contribution of Chinese business to economic development in Latin America. Most analysts and media reports agree that the rise of China has contributed to an increase in the price of the commodities which created the conditions for renewed growth in Latin America in the past two decades. The answers to this survey question (reported in Figure 3) suggest that this optimistic view of the Chinese economic presence in Latin America is shared by a large number of Latin American citizens.

[Figure 3 about here]

In fact, almost 57% of Latin Americans agree or strongly agree with the statement that Chinese business contributes to economic development in the Western Hemisphere, and only 19% of Latin American citizens disagree or strongly disagree with that statement. The rest of the respondents (24%) chose an intermediate neutral category (“neither agree nor disagree”). Among those who express an opinion, the vast majority of Latin American citizens believes China is contributing to the economic development of the region. This is not necessarily surprising given the increased importance of Chinese investments and the relation between the economic rise of China and the explosion in the price of the commodities which clearly benefits Latin America, at least in the short term. But this figure clearly indicates that public opinion in the region is not only aware of the increased influence of China, but is also informed about the positive repercussions of this presence.

It is interesting to contrast public attitudes toward China and public attitudes toward the United States. The United States remains a very important economic actor in the Western Hemisphere, and has signed bilateral or multilateral trade agreements with several countries in the region. For a long time, the Latin American economies were very intertwined with the US economy. On the contrary, the Chinese presence in the region is much more recent but it has been portrayed in the media as a factor conducive to economic growth and development. If we take public attitudes toward the United States as a baseline for comparison, do Latin Americans perceive the Chinese influence in the region as positive or negative? In order to assess this question, I analyze the responses to questions 2-5 in Table A2. The aggregate statistics showing how respondents in Latin America answered these questions can be observed in Figures 4 and 5.

[Figures 4 and 5 around here]

Figures 4 and 5 show remarkably similar patterns in public opinion’s evaluations of China and the United States in Latin America. As can be observed in Figure 4, 66% of Latin Americans perceive that the Chinese influence in Latin America is positive or very positive, and only 16% of Latin Americans have a negative or very negative evaluation of the Chinese influence in the region.

Again, this suggests that public opinion in Latin America sees the new role of China in Latin America as a positive force for growth and development in the region. Panel B in Figure 4 shows that these evaluations are very similar to Latin Americans' perceptions of US influence in the region. 65.3% of Latin American citizens perceive the US influence in the region as positive or very positive, and only 18% evaluate the US presence as negative or very negative. In other words, Latin Americans appear to be slightly more critical of the US influence in Latin America but the difference is almost imperceptible.

Figure 5 shows the level of trust in the Chinese and US governments in Latin America. The data reveal that Latin Americans have a moderate level of trust in both the US and the Chinese governments. While the percentage of Latin Americans who trust the Chinese government (54 %) is lower than the percentage of Latin American citizens who trust the US government (60%), the difference is not very big. Actually, this small difference can be interpreted as a positive sign for China's soft power. The Chinese regime is repeatedly criticized in the Latin American press for its authoritarianism and lack of respect for human rights (Armony, 2012; Cornejo et al., 2013), so it is quite remarkable that more than half of the Latin American population trusts the Chinese government. The recent shift in Sino-Latin American relations and the increased economic presence of China in the region appears to have improved the image of Chinese institutions as well. The data reveal that the more recent Chinese presence has produced very similar attitudes than the more long-standing US presence in the region.

While there is no discernible difference in public perceptions of the US and the Chinese influence in Latin America at the regional level, it remains possible that differences exist in specific countries for historical or political reasons. In particular, governments of the contestatory left have been in power in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela during the past 15 years. The contestatory left has been very critical of neoliberalism and the policies of the "Washington Consensus." These governments also adopted a clear anti-American rhetoric denouncing the hegemonic position of the United States in the region and the US policies toward Latin America often described as imperialistic. The anti-US rhetoric sometimes took an incendiary tone. For instance, in 2006 the Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez delivered a controversial speech in front of the UN General Assembly in which he referred to the US president George Bush as the "devil" (Pilkington, 2006). This group of countries governed by the contestatory left governments was

also instrumental in blocking the US-backed Free Trade Area of the Americas during the Summit of the Americas held in Mar del Plata (Argentina) in 2005.

On the contrary, these leftist governments have embraced much closer relations with China, as a way to counteract the influence of the United States in the region. Several bilateral deals have seen China invest billions in countries such as Venezuela and Argentina, especially in infrastructure projects and in the energy sector. Moreover, trade between China and Latin American countries governed by the contestatory left increased exponentially during the past two decades. Many bilateral agreements were negotiated in high-level meetings between Chinese and Latin American leftist leaders that were heavily publicized. The Chinese presence was presented as a positive development by the media in these countries (especially by media outlets favorable to the government). According to these media reports, closer relations between China and Latin America could both contribute to economic development in the region and help Latin American countries become more independent from the hegemonic power in the Western Hemisphere (i.e. the United States).

Given the trends described in the two previous paragraphs, it is possible that public opinion in countries governed by the contestatory left perceive the US influence in the region in a more negative way than the Chinese influence. In order to evaluate this possibility, I analyze the responses to questions 2 and 3 in Table A2 (which ask respondents to assess whether the US and the Chinese influence in Latin America is positive or negative) in the five countries governed by the contestatory left at the time of the survey in 2014: Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. These data are presented in the five graphs in Figure 6.

[Figure 6 about here]

The graphs show interesting differences in citizens' evaluations of the Chinese and the US influence in these five countries. As expected, citizens of countries governed by the contestatory left perceive the US presence in the region in a much more negative way than the Chinese presence. To take the most striking example, while 57% of Argentinian respondents evaluate the Chinese influence in their country as positive or very positive; only 32% have a similar opinion about the US influence in Argentina. Panels B to E in Figure 6 show very similar patterns in the other countries governed by the contestatory left, although the perceptions' gap is not as big as in the

Argentinian case. In sum, the data analyzed here clearly shows that the anti-US rhetoric of the governments of these five countries; as well as their political and economic rapprochement with China has had an impact on how citizens perceive the influence of China and the United States in their countries.

The data presented in this section has interesting implications for Chinese soft power in Latin America. While soft power is often associated with cultural attraction and admiration for political values, China appears to be garnering soft power in Latin America as a result of its economic dynamism and its contributions to Latin American economic success. The Chinese voracity for Latin American commodities and its large-scale investments in the region have promoted a positive image of China in Latin America. Although the Chinese economic presence in Latin America is quite recent, the publics in the region perceive China as a foreign actor that contributes to economic development. Moreover, in countries with governments that are ideologically opposed to the United States, the economic influence of China is perceived even more positively. The results of the analyses presented above parallel previous findings regarding Chinese soft power in Africa. Unconditional aid projects, investments in the manufacturing sector, and other contributions to economic development (e.g. technology transfers) have led to a favorable image of China in Africa (Brautigam, 2009; Kim, 2015; Moss, 2013). It appears then than while Western countries perceive China as an economic competitor, developing countries in Africa and Latin America have a positive evaluation of the increasing economic presence of China in their respective regions.

Limitations of Chinese Soft Power in Latin America

The previous section shows that Latin Americans tend to have a positive view of the Chinese influence in the region and evaluate positively the contribution of China to Latin American development. This suggests that the rise of China in the global stage and the increased economic presence of China in Latin America are well received by people in the region. This favorable image of China in Latin America appears to indicate that Beijing's soft power strategy is working. However, the measures discussed in the previous sections are avowedly quite crude. Soft power is about much more than evaluations of the contributions made by a foreign power to economic development. In order to develop soft power, Beijing also needs to develop the attractiveness of

China as a cultural and political model. Using data from the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, I will show in this section that China is still far from achieving that type of soft power. Moreover, the same Chinese presence that is favorably perceived by most Latin American citizens carries risks for the long term public evaluations of China in the region if some of its negative externalities are not addressed. I will assess the impact of the (perceived) negative consequences of the Chinese presence in Latin America on public opinion in the region by analyzing other survey items from the AmericasBarometer.

The 2013 wave of the Pew Global Attitudes Survey has several questions that measure different aspects of the attractiveness of the Chinese cultural, economic, and political model around the globe. Seven Latin American countries were included in the survey (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico, Venezuela), which allows us to evaluate Chinese soft power in Latin America. One of the questions asked respondents whether a free market economy (such as the US economy) or a state capitalist one (such as the Chinese economy) was a better model for their countries to follow. Another question assessed whether respondents liked or disliked Chinese music, movies, and television. The third question asked whether the Chinese government respects the personal freedoms of its people. Since respondents in the survey were also asked to give their opinion about the US popular culture and the respect of US governments for personal freedoms, I will also present those results as a baseline for comparison. The exact wording of the questions is presented in Table A3 in the Appendix. The aggregate statistics showing how respondents in Latin America answered those questions can be observed in Figure 7.

[Figure 7 about here]

In stark contrast with the positive evaluation of the Chinese economic influence in Latin America reported above, citizens in the region appear much less favorably inclined to the cultural, economic, and political model offered by China. Panel A shows that people in the region overwhelmingly choose the US free-market economic model over the planned state capitalism that exists in China. Panel B shows equally clearly that the US popular culture remains much more attractive in the region than the Chinese popular culture. For instance, close to 70% of Argentinean respondents like US music, movies, and TV; but less than 15% like Chinese popular culture. The

gap is very large in all cases (more than 20% difference), except in Bolivia. Finally, Panel C shows that in all countries except Venezuela, Latin American citizens are much more likely to believe that the US government respects the freedoms of its people than to believe that the Chinese government respects the freedoms of its people.

The results presented in Figure 7 show very clearly the limits of Chinese soft power in Latin America. Chinese popular culture does not seduce Latin Americans, and China's political and economic model does not attract Latin Americans. Although citizens in Latin America value the Chinese contributions to economic development in the region, they tend not to want their own countries to reproduce the Chinese state-led capitalist economic model. The fact that Latin Americans do not find Chinese popular culture appealing is particularly damaging for the Chinese soft power strategy. Latin American publics tend to misrepresent and misunderstand Chinese culture and society, and negative stereotypes about China are prevalent in the media and in online discussions (Armony, 2012; Armony & Velásquez, 2015; Cornejo et al., 2013). The goal of Beijing's soft power charm-initiative is precisely to break those stereotypes and lead to a better understanding of Chinese culture. The results presented here suggest that China still has a lot of work to do to try to render its culture more attractive. The problems China is facing in this area are not really surprising. Several scholars have argued that soft power grows organically, from the bottom-up when free societies unleash their creativity and become appealing for publics in other countries. China tightly controls the political and the cultural arenas at home, and has attempted a top-down approach to public diplomacy with a strong governmental role in 'selling' the Chinese culture abroad (e.g. through the Confucius institutes). This approach does not appear to be working. In the words of Shambaugh (2015: 107), soft power "is best earned when a society's talented citizens are allowed to interact directly with the world, rather than being controlled by authorities". Finally, the political authoritarianism and the lack of respect for human rights in China are often criticized by the media and by political leaders in Latin America (Armony, 2012; Cornejo et al., 2013), which negatively affects the image of China in the region. The perceived lack of civil and political liberties reduces the attractiveness and soft power of China.

The image of China in Latin America also suffers from the negative externalities of the Chinese economic presence in the region. Although, as we showed in the previous section, Latin American citizens tend to have a positive view of the new economic role China has in the region, several problems remain which may affect Chinese soft power in the region if they are not

addressed. The first problem is the deleterious environmental impacts of the Chinese presence in Latin America. Over the last decades, China has tripled its market share of Latin American exports but that increase has been concentrated in the extractive and agricultural sectors. In the same vein, most Chinese investments in Latin America have been in primary sectors. These investments and these exports to China have high environmental costs. They are carbon intensive, water intensive, and are sometimes located in highly biodiverse areas inhabited by indigenous peoples. In addition to the direct impact of Chinese exports on environmental degradation, there is also an indirect impact through Chinese-financed roads, canals, and railroads (necessary to get products to ports) which are an important cause of deforestation (Ray et al., 2015: 7-10).

Another bone of contention generated by the economic presence of China in Latin America is the disappointing impact of this economic boom on employment creation and employment conditions in the region. First, Latin American exports to China and Chinese investments support fewer jobs than other activities because of their heavy concentration in extractive industries. Second, many Chinese investments hire foreign (mostly Chinese) individuals to work on these projects. Finally, there are often substantial differences between directly-hired and subcontracted employees working at the same project. All these factors have generated social conflicts and labor protests against the Chinese economic groups in charge of large infrastructure projects. (Ray et al., 2015: 6-7)

Finally, Chinese investors operate in an unfamiliar milieu which sometimes generates tensions with Latin American governments or civil society because of cultural misunderstandings or lack of knowledge of local regulations and customs (Ray et al., 2015). For instance, China has a very centralized political system but Chinese economic groups operate in Latin America in areas where they face vocal demands from civil society at the local level. Norms and laws to protect labor or the environment are different in different Latin American countries, and Chinese investors are not always familiar with these regulations. Chinese investors are particularly unfamiliar with the customs of indigenous groups which often have a strong presence in areas where Chinese-financed infrastructure projects are located.

The 2012 wave of the Americas Barometer surveys included a series of questions regarding perceptions of problems suffered by Chinese businesses operating in Latin America. These survey items are helpful to understand which issues are generating public mistrust in the increased Chinese presence in the region. While there is no specific question regarding

environmental issues, the other structural problems discussed in the previous paragraphs are captured in these questions. The survey items used in this analysis are presented in Table A4 in the Appendix. Figure 8 shows a graphic representation of citizens' responses to these questions.

[Figure 8 about here]

Several conclusions can be derived from these answers. First, these data indicate that we should not overestimate the knowledge and information of the average Latin American respondent. A very large group of Latin American citizens (around one third) opted for the “don't know/no opinion” answer (shown in grey in the graphs), suggesting that they have little knowledge about the operations of Chinese investments in Latin America. However, among those who do have an opinion, there is a clear indication that the problems identified in the previous paragraphs are negatively affecting popular attitudes towards the Chinese presence in Latin America. In particular, around 40% of Latin American citizens perceive that cultural misunderstandings, lack of knowledge of regulations, and lack of communication are problems that affect the Chinese economic presence in Latin America. These problems generate obstacles for the consolidation of the Chinese economic presence in the region and weakens Chinese soft power in Latin America. Public opinion in the region remains skeptical about the political and economic influence of this powerful Asian country that is perceived as culturally distant and not making enough efforts to communicate with its counterparts in the region. Labor issues are considered as slightly less problematic, but 35% of Latin American respondents still consider that labor disputes are a problem in the operation of Chinese businesses in the region.

Conclusion

Sino-Latin American relations have been substantially transformed during the past two decades. In particular, the impressive rates of economic growth in China have led to a strong demand for Latin American commodities. China has also invested heavily in Latin America (especially in major infrastructure projects). The increased economic presence of China in the region has also led to a tightening of diplomatic and political relations.

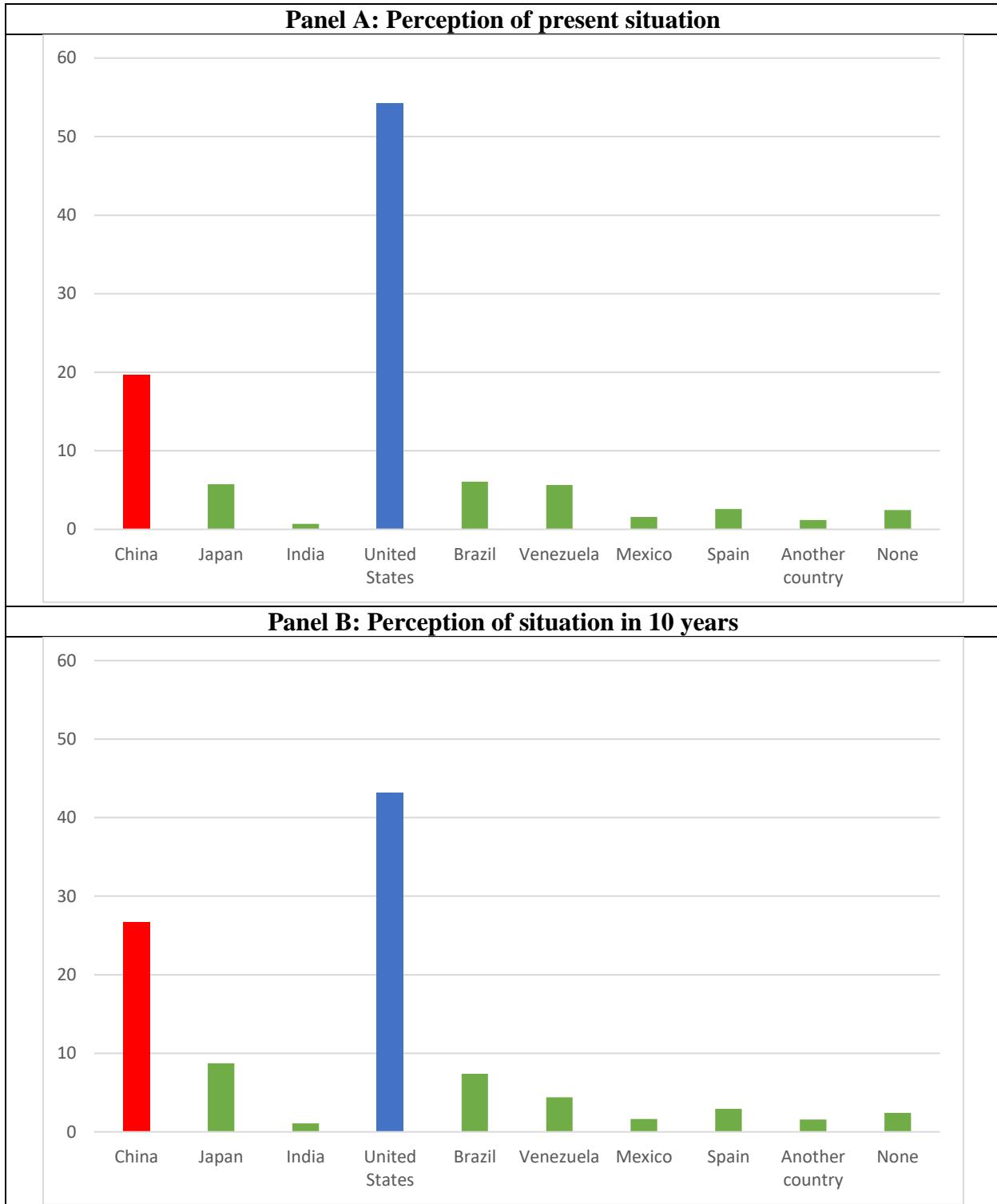
This paper has attempted to bring new light on this transformed relationship by assessing public attitudes towards the Chinese presence in Latin America. The data analysis has led to three major conclusions. First, Latin American citizens are aware of the increasing economic and political presence of China in Latin America. They are also able to recognize that China is rapidly becoming a more important player in the region, at the expense of the traditional hegemonic power in the Western Hemisphere (i.e. the United States). Second, Latin American citizens appear to have mixed feelings about the Chinese presence in the region. On the one hand, the majority of Latin Americans perceive the Chinese economic influence as a factor that contributes to economic development in the region. On the other hand, respondents in the surveys analyzed in this paper are concerned by labor disputes, perceived cultural misunderstandings, and lack of communication between Chinese investors, Latin American governments, and the local population. Third, Latin American publics do not see China as political or economic model that is worth following, and they do not admire Chinese popular culture.

These findings have important implications for our analysis of Chinese soft power in Latin America. The economic rise of China and the increasingly important economic presence of China in Latin America are perceived favorably by a substantial majority of Latin American citizens. As previous studies have shown before for the case of Africa (Brautigam, 2009; Moss, 2013), those positive evaluations about the increasing economic role of China in Latin America undoubtedly contribute to a positive image of China in the region. Publics in the region admire the rapid Chinese economic rise and value the Chinese contributions to Latin American economic growth and development (i.e. appetite for Latin American commodities and large-scale investments in the region). The overall positive views that Latin Americans have about the Chinese economic presence in the region suggest that the doors will remain open for Chinese investments and trade. The image of China has improved in Latin America since the early 2000s. But the positive evaluation of the foreign economic policies of a foreign country (in this case China) are just one aspect of soft power –and arguably not the most important one–. Soft power is also about having respected institutions, dynamic and creative societies, and an attractive popular culture that other countries respect and want to emulate. From that perspective, Chinese soft power strategy is not working in Latin America. Latin American citizens continue to see flaws in the highly centralized economic model and the authoritarian regime in China. Attacks on civil liberties and political freedoms are discussed in the Latin American media (Armony, 2012), and negatively affect the

image of China. Moreover, most Latin Americans do not like or do not know the Chinese popular culture (music, television, and movies), making it harder for China to seduce Latin American publics. In sum, China still has a lot of work to do if it wants to improve its image and increase its soft power in Latin America. The top-down public diplomacy efforts to increase knowledge and appreciation of Chinese culture in Latin America are not producing the desired results.

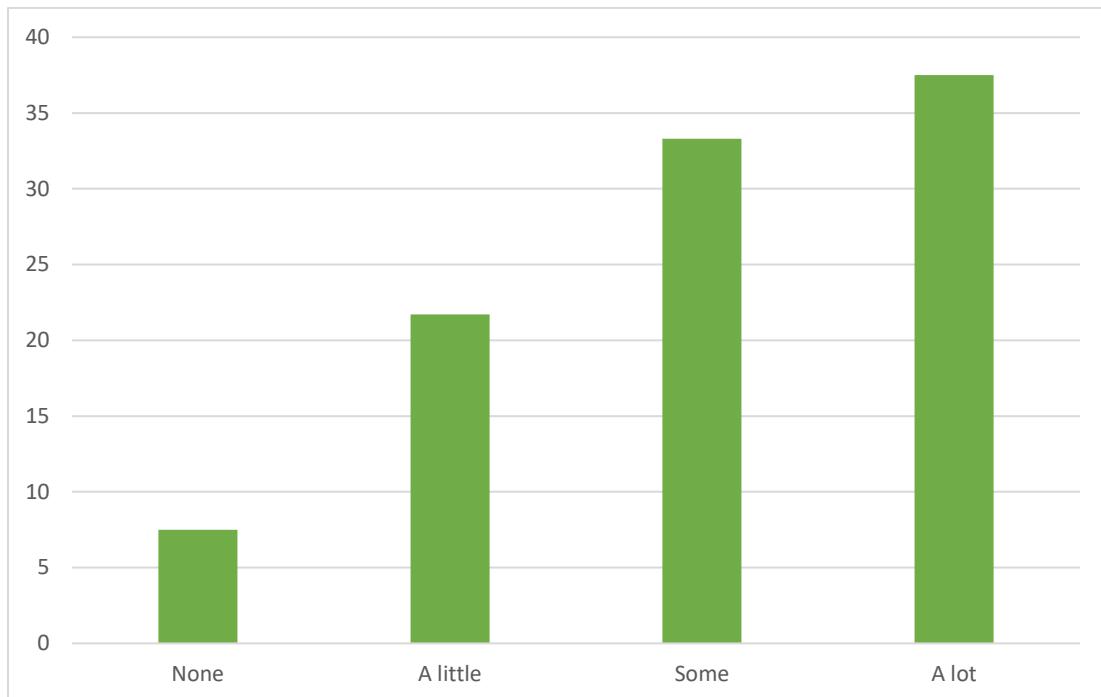
The evidence presented in this paper suggests that China might be able to take advantage of Anti-American feelings and favorable views of China to pursue its economic and political interests in countries governed by the left (especially the contestatory left). However, such a strategy might lead to tensions with the United States which China might prefer to avoid given its “peaceful rise” strategy (Roett & Paz, 2008). Moreover, we are currently experiencing a decline of the left in Latin America (e.g. Argentina and Brazil), which might lead to a re-evaluation of the Chinese presence in Latin America. However, center-right governments are not likely to fundamentally transform the relationship with China started under previous administrations because China has become a major trading partner and investor in the region. For instance, the center-right president of Argentina (Mauricio Macri) was very critical of mega-deals with China (e.g. infrastructure projects) under the administration of Cristina Kirchner; but after coming to power he decided not to cancel those projects in order not to jeopardize the broader economic relations with China (Patey, 2017). Since Latin Americans now perceive the Chinese economic presence in the region as having positive effects on economic development, it might be politically costly for Latin American leaders to threaten major Chinese investments.

Figure 1. Most influential country in Latin American (citizens' perceptions)



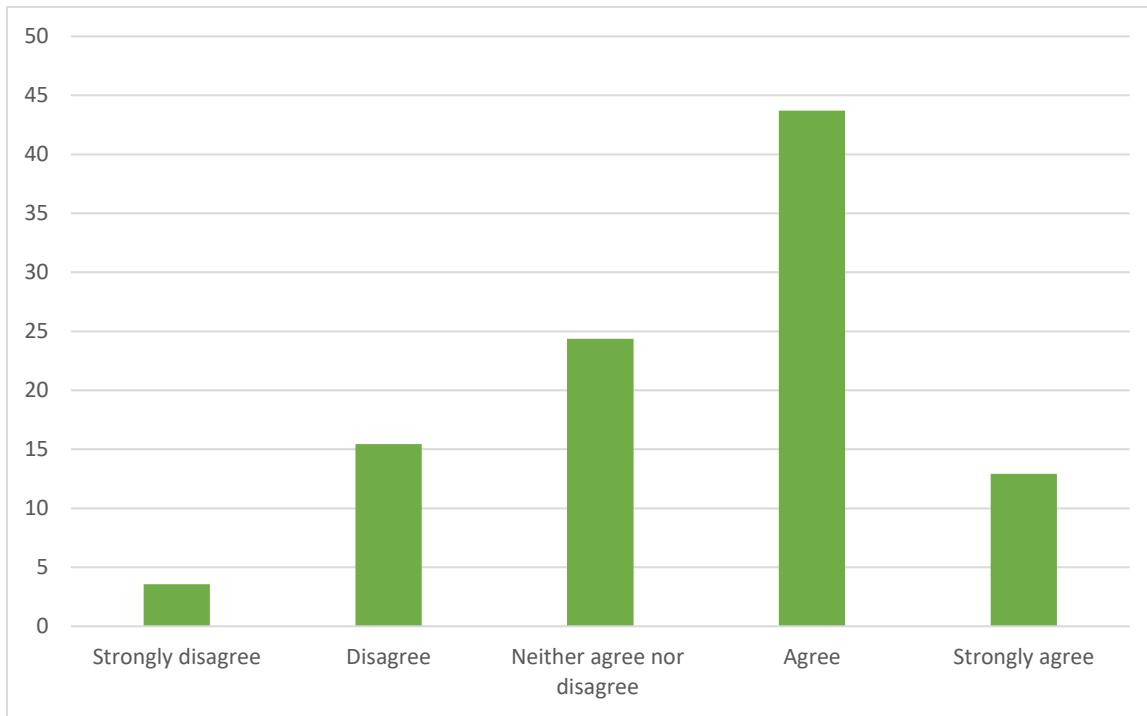
Source: LAPOP (2012)

Figure 2. Perception of Chinese influence in respondent's country



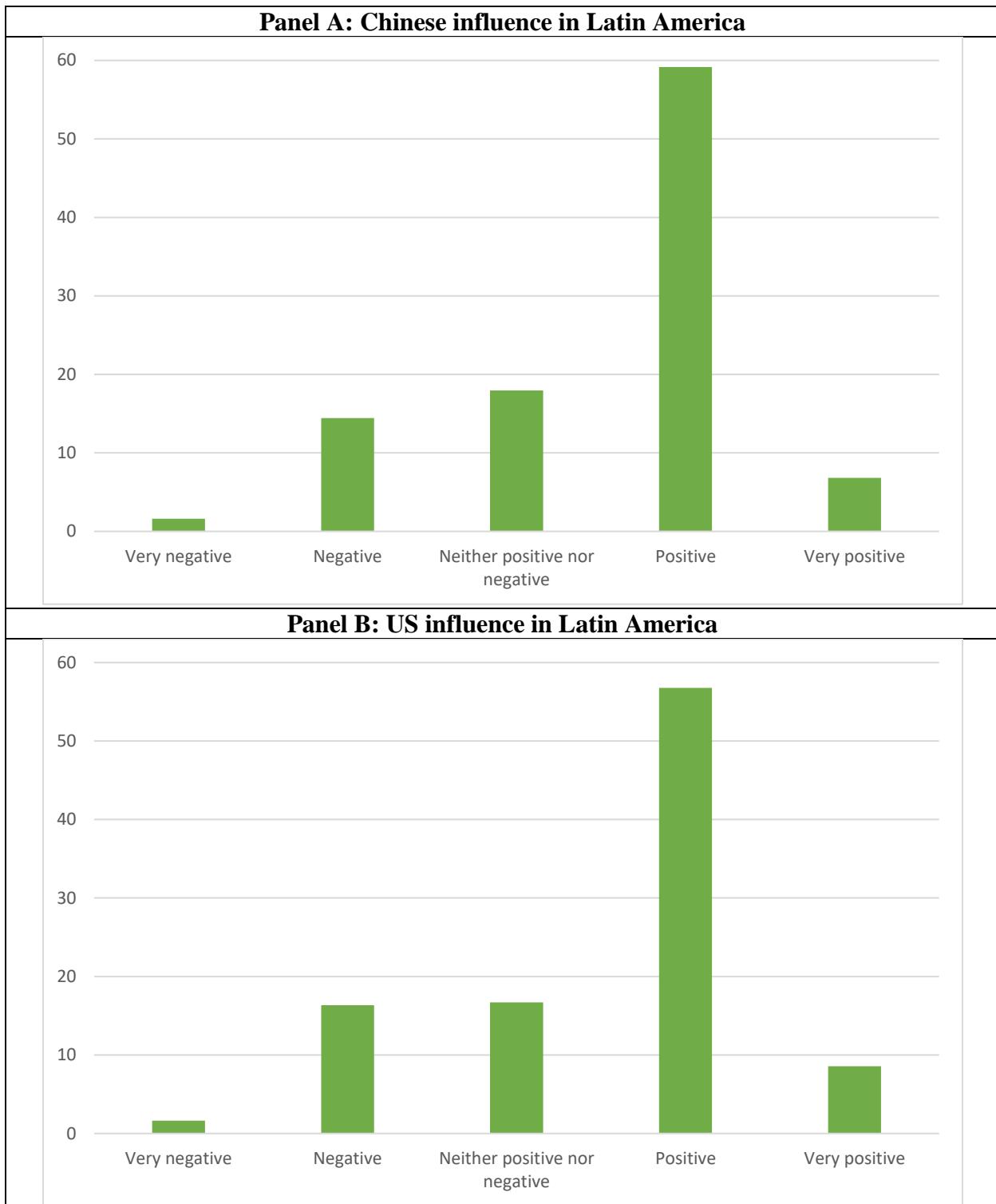
Source: LAPOP (2012-2014)

Figure 3. Agreement with statement that China contributes to economic development



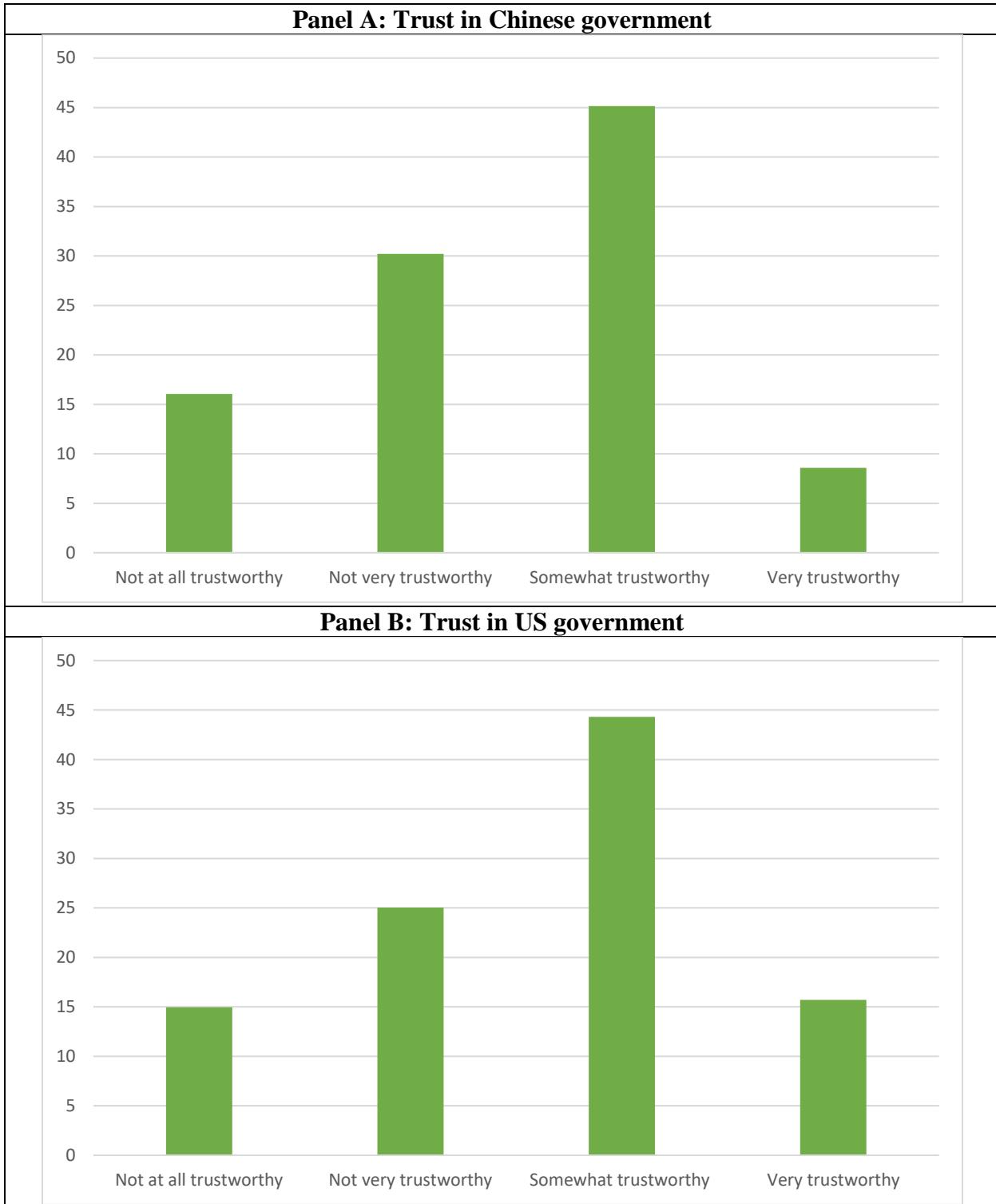
Source: LAPOP (2012)

Figure 4. Citizens' evaluation of Chinese and US influence in Latin America



Source: LAPOP (2012-2014)

Figure 5. Citizens' trust in the Chinese and US government

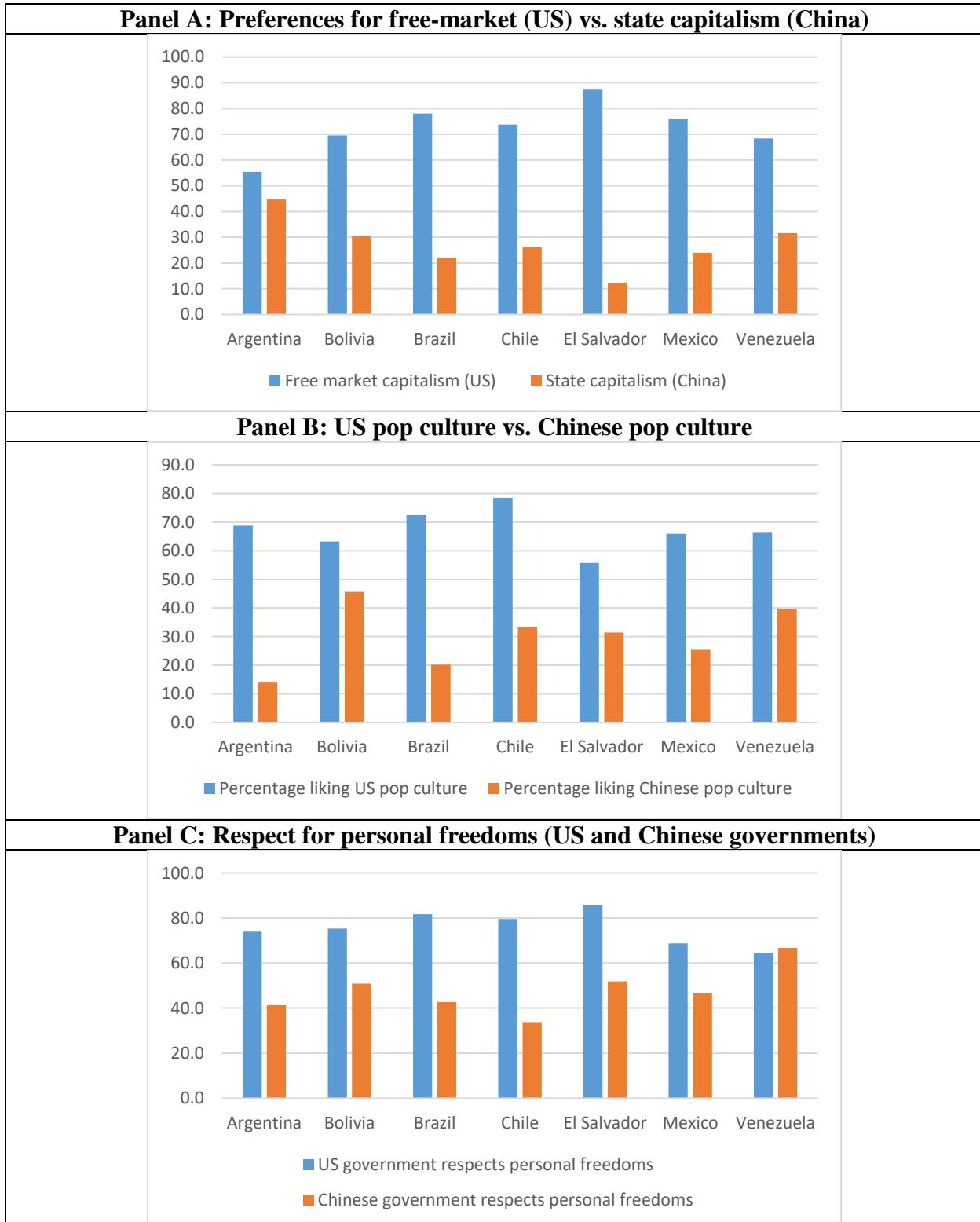


Source: LAPOP (2012-2014)

Figure 6. Citizens' evaluation of Chinese and US influence in Latin America (contested left countries)

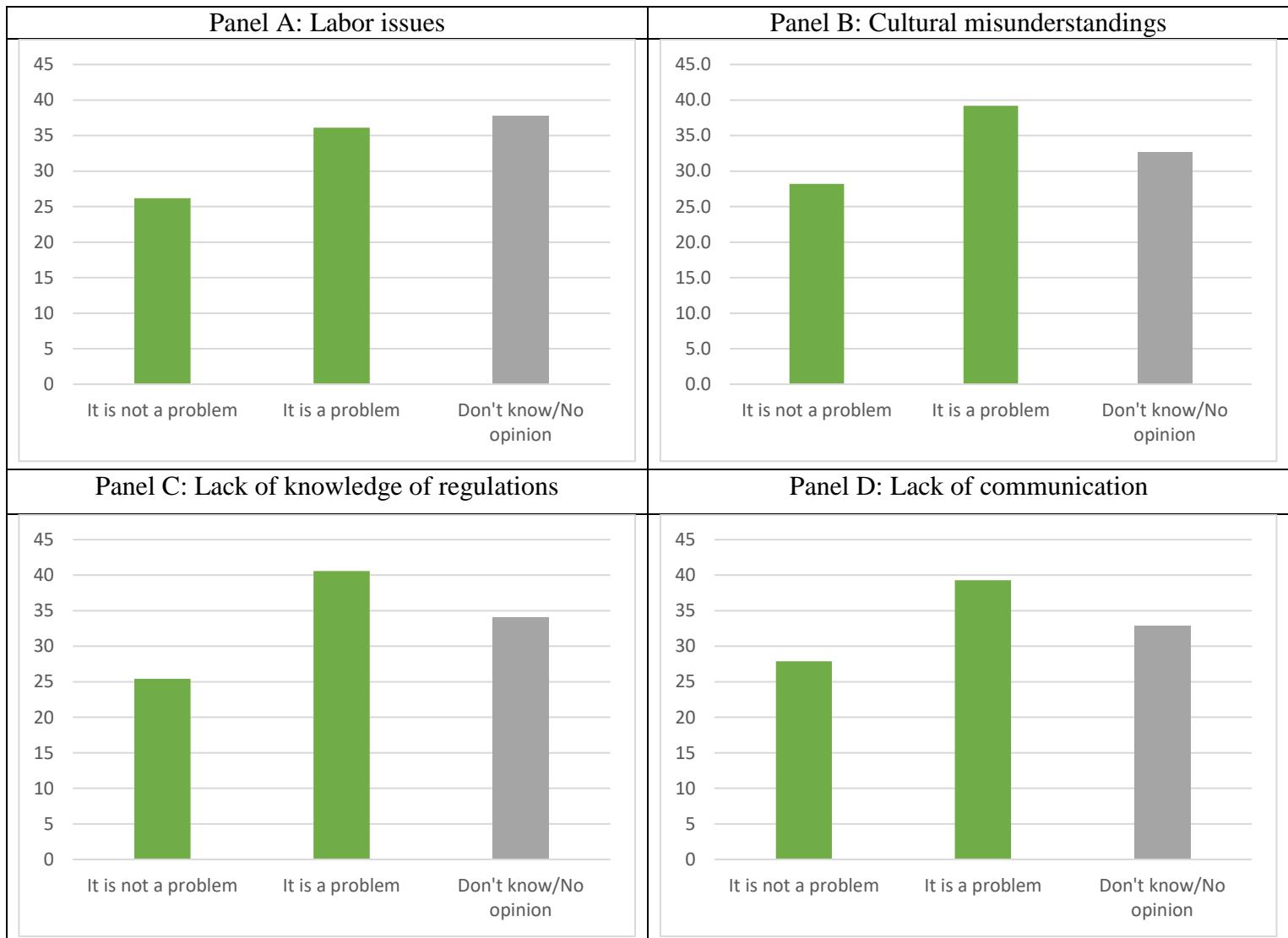


Source: LAPOP (2014)

Figure 7. Attractiveness of China and the United States in Latin America

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Survey (2013)

Figure 8. Citizens' perceptions of problems in the operations of Chinese businesses in Latin America



Source: LAPOP (2012)

APPENDIX

Table A1. Foreign Influence in Latin America (LAPOP Surveys, 2012-2014)

Variables	Survey Items
Question 1: Foreign influence in Latin American (present)	Which of the following countries has the most influence in Latin America/ Caribbean?
Question 2: Foreign influence in Latin America (future)	And within 10 years, in your opinion which of the following countries will have most influence in Latin America/ Caribbean? [Choices for questions 1 and 2: (1) China, (2) Japan, (3) India, (4) United States, (5) Brazil, (6) Venezuela, (7) Mexico, (10) Spain, (11) Another country, (12) None]
Question 3: Chinese influence in country	And thinking now only of our country, how much influence do you think that China has in our country? [Recoded into (1) None (2) A little (3) Some (4) A lot]

Table A2. Evaluation of Chinese and US Influence in Latin America (LAPOP Surveys, 2014)

Variables	Survey Items
Question 1: Chinese contribution to economic development	How much do you agree with the following statement: “Chinese business contributes to the economic development of [country]”? [Recoded into (1) Strongly disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly agree]
Question 2: Evaluation of Chinese influence in Latin America	In general, the influence that China has on our country is very positive, positive, negative, or very negative?
Question 3: Evaluation of US influence in Latin America	The influence that the United States has on our country is very positive, positive, negative, or very negative? [Choices for questions 2 and 3: recoded into (1) Very negative (2) Negative (3) Neither positive nor negative –option not read– (4) Positive (5) Very positive]
Question 4: Trust in Chinese government	The government of China. In your opinion, is it very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or not at all trustworthy?
Question 5: Trust in US government	The government of the United States. In your opinion, is it very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or not at all trustworthy? [Choices for questions 4 and 5: recoded into (1) Not at all trustworthy (2) Not very trustworthy (3) Somewhat trustworthy (4) Very trustworthy]

Table A3. Perceptions of Chinese and US Soft Power in Latin America (Pew Global Attitudes Survey, 2013)

Variables	Survey Items
Question 1: Economic model	What's the best model economy for (survey country) to try to follow - a free market capitalist one such as in the United States or a state capitalist one such as in China?
Question 2: Chinese popular culture	Which is closer to describing your view? I like Chinese music, movies and television, OR I dislike Chinese music, movies and television.
Question 3: US popular culture	Which is closer to describing your view? I like US music, movies and television, OR I dislike US music, movies and television.
Question 4: Chinese government respects freedoms	Do you think the government of China respects the personal freedoms of its people, or don't you think so?
Question 5: US government respects freedoms	Do you think the government of the United States respects the personal freedoms of its people, or don't you think so?

Table A4. Perceptions of Problems Affecting Chinese Presence in Latin America (LAPOP Surveys, 2012)

Variables	Survey Items
Leading sentence (for all questions)	According to what you have heard, do Chinese businesses operating in [country] suffer from any of the following problems?
Question 1: Labor problems	Labor relations, such as disputes with workers or unions. Do you think that it is a problem, or that it is not, or do you not have an opinion on the matter?
Question 2: Cultural misunderstandings	Problems that arise from failure to understand the culture and customs of [country].
Question 3: Lack of knowledge of regulations	Lack of knowledge of the political, legal, and social values and rules in [country].
Question 4: Lack of communication	Lack of communication with the media and residents. [Choices for questions 1-4: (1) It is a problem (2) It is not a problem (3) Don't know/No opinion]

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