

Citizens' Perceptions and International Relations in Latin America: A Systematic Literature Review (2020-2025)

*Percepciones ciudadanas y Relaciones Internacionales
en América Latina: una revisión sistemática de literatura
(2020-2025)*

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Abstract

This research addresses the theoretical relationship between public opinion and international relations (IR) in Latin America from an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates political science, communication, and international studies in the Spanish language. It starts by recognizing that, within the context of globalization, digital technologies, and public diplomacy, public opinion has transcended its traditionally national analysis to acquire a transnational dimension. Utilizing the PRISMA methodology for a systematic literature review of recent academic work (2020-2025) within the Scopus database, the study focuses on the theoretical-conceptual nexus between public opinion, IR, and the Latin American context. The main objective is to map trends, identify gaps, and establish emerging lines of research. Additionally, the role of the media, social networks, and political actors in shaping opinion climates that directly impact the foreign policies and international image of the region's States will be discussed. This proposal aims to contribute significantly to the construction of research avenues linking public opinion with the discipline of International Relations in Latin America, an area insufficiently explored to date.

Keywords

International Relations, public opinion, Latin America, globalization, digital public sphere, Scopus, prisma methodology, foreign policy.

Resumen

Esta investigación aborda la relación teórica entre la opinión pública y las Relaciones Internacionales internacionales (RR. II.) en América Latina desde una perspectiva interdisciplinaria que integra la ciencia política, la comunicación y los estudios internacionales en lengua castellana. Se parte del reconocimiento de que, en el contexto de la globalización, las tecnologías digitales y la diplomacia pública, la opinión pública ha trascendido su análisis tradicionalmente nacional para adquirir una dimensión transnacional. Utilizando la metodología PRISMA para una revisión sistemática de la literatura académica reciente (2020-2025) en la base de datos Scopus, el estudio se centra en el nexo teórico-conceptual entre la opinión pública, las RR. II. and el contexto latinoamericano. El objetivo principal es mapear las tendencias, identificar vacíos y establecer líneas emergentes de investigación. Adicionalmente, se discutirá el rol de los medios, las redes sociales y los actores políticos en la configuración de climas de opinión que impactan directamente en las políticas exteriores y la imagen internacional de los Estados de la región. Esta propuesta aspira a contribuir significativamente a la construcción de líneas de investigación que vinculen la opinión pública con la disciplina de las Relaciones Internacionales en América Latina, un área insuficientemente explorada hasta la fecha

Palabras clave

Relaciones Internacionales, opinión pública, América Latina, globalización, esfera pública digital, Scopus, metodología prisma, política exterior.

Introduction and state of the art

Although the concept of public opinion has been studied predominantly in the fields of communication and political science, under precursors such as

Habermas (1994) this concept has gained greater importance in other disciplines such as International Relations. To understand this issue and establish a common thread with other branches of knowledge, visionary contributions such as those of McLuhan and Powers (2015[1989]) argue for the potential of a democratic macrocosm that would allow mediation between different societies and cultures, under the concept of the Global Village. These authors' dialogue was visionary in terms of a reality where "the medium is the message," in that these platforms will have the capacity to mold themselves to reality and build new mechanisms to generate stimuli in future audiences. Thus, authors of their stature were already betting on an environment marked by globalization.

It should be noted that, at present, public opinion is also developing within the framework of a digital public sphere, which "is not a sphere separate from society, but a dimension and aspect of the public sphere in societies where digital information and communication are predominant" (Fuchs, 2021, p. 19). Therefore, it is possible to refer to the behavior of public opinion—to which we could add, in this context, the adjective "international"—as inherent to the effective development of diplomatic relations between different states and supranational institutions (Valle de Frutos, 2024).

Likewise, with a view to constructing a phenomenon of 'international public opinion', the emergence and rise of Artificial Intelligence has led to a series of virtues and, at the same time, risks in the strengthening of diplomacy. For example, the efforts of major economic powers to revolutionize their research and strengthening are noteworthy, not only in terms of their strengths as tools for generating information, but also in terms of their predictive capabilities applicable to different sectors involving public and private entities (Mialhe *et al.*, 2020).

Taking the above into account, this article presents a literature review of existing studies that allow us to establish a link—it should be noted, a theoretical one—between public opinion and international relations in Latin America. To this end, taking into account the presence of all three terms, a systematic review of the literature will be carried out on the main results obtained from searches in the Scopus database, and a discussion will be held on their main contributions.

Construction of a concept of public opinion

In recent years, it has been difficult to establish a consensus on the concept of public opinion. Classic authors such as Jürgen Habermas (1994) have

made important contributions in this regard. It should be noted that his study has been approached from multiple areas of the social sciences, such as sociology, political science, and communication (Dader, 2008). In this sense, to understand its origins, it is necessary to go back to the context of the French Revolution, where precepts of political propaganda and messages disseminated to large groups of individuals characterized by reading habits proliferated.

Specifically, the origin of public opinion derived from the—at that time—growing reach of the press and other printed formats (magazines, books, etc.) among the citizenry, in addition to the emergence of radio and television media. This allowed citizens to gain new knowledge beyond books. For Habermas (1994), this led to the “politicization of social life” (p. 4). In principle, in the 19th century, the “opinion” press served as a powerful resource for political publicity to position interests, ideals, and other elements of interest. For Habermas (1994), there is a peculiar discrepancy when referring to public opinion, in that he suggests that, although the public may denote pluralism, it rather implies the uniqueness of the whole set of “opinions.” Thus, in constructing an analogy, for the author, public opinion is seen as a tree and ignores the set of roots, stems, and leaves (etc.) that compose it. Public opinion homogenizes—in this case—information, ignoring potential ramifications and paying greater attention to the communicative interest that appears to be dominant.

To understand the behavior of public opinion, it is necessary to glimpse the dual relationship between the sender and the receiver: under classic visions of leader-public (Habermas, 1994), dominant-dominated (Bourdieu, 2001), oligarchic bloc-popular bloc (Svampa, 2019) and even fatalistic views such as Lippmann’s (1931) elite-mass view, where the receiving public is conceived as passive, without the ability to provide feedback and/or critically filter the information received through the mass media.

Added to these views are positions such as that of Valenzuela (2017), who refers to the public under the category of ‘users’, in a vision of the digital ecosystem that encompasses new forms of interaction through social networks, to which digital media are added, broadening their information spectrum beyond television, radio, and the press, as was customary. Thus, this group of users is mobilized by newsworthy content (Trilling *et al.*, 2017) and constructed, from the point of view of *framing* theory, under the framework of Human Interest (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000), in an effort “to personalize the news, dramatize or ‘emotionalize’ the news, to capture the interest of the audience” (p. 96).

In summary, rather than defining the concept of public opinion, this section presents a very general overview of the main authors who have worked on its understanding. To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to understand public opinion as a phenomenon of constructing frameworks of social meaning, as “moments of generalized vibration” (p. 229) that are present in that “symbolic space of confrontation” (p. 227); or, that “world of life” referred to by Habermas (1994) and which is inherent to public opinion and the Bourdieuan political field (the parameters that govern the behavior of the individual in the ordinary social world, represented by the political class) (Bourdieu, 2001).

Public opinion and its applications in international relations

Currently, given the acceleration and transformation of media ecosystems, marked by the expansion of Information and Communication Technologies and the development of artificial intelligence, it is becoming increasingly less viable to think of public opinion solely in national and analog terms. On the contrary, it is necessary to incorporate the notion of the digital public sphere and its insertion into an increasingly interdependent international order (Carriquiry, 2024; Valle de Frutos and Díaz-Maroto, 2025). In this sense, the concept of the lifeworld proposed by Habermas (1994) has incorporated a more visible virtual component since the emergence and spread of COVID-19, when many processes of daily life were digitized, the media reinforced their digital channels, and multiple sectors of the economy (from large conglomerates to SMEs) had to opt for remote working (Mila-Maldonado, 2024).

In this context, various authors have explored the meaning of digital democracy as a set of new forms of political dispute that complement, rather than replace, the classic forms of activism proposed by McAdam *et al.* (2005). The figure of the user proposed by Valenzuela (2017) illustrates this transition, in that new audiences can alternate between the roles of sender and receiver in the construction of microclimates of opinion around topics of common interest. This is where the concept of subaltern counter-publics, proposed by Fraser (1997), gains strength, with greater visibility in times of social media and digital technologies (Melo and Alboreda, 2023).

In a context more directly linked to international relations, the dynamics of globalization and media interdependence have led to the consolidation of the concept of “international public opinion.” Authors such as Calduch (1991) highlight that contemporary international society is increasingly conditioned by the influence of the media in the formation of opinions and perceptions on transnational issues. This phenomenon does not arise spontaneously, but is constituted by complex communicative processes in which political, social, economic, and international actors participate in close interaction with the media itself.

From this perspective, public opinion can function as an element of pressure or legitimization on states and international organizations, influencing foreign policy positions and the social acceptance of certain decisions (Calduch, 1991). Beyond the genre of ‘international news’, international public opinion can be referred to as the set of communication processes involving political and social actors, the media, pressure groups, and major leaders on issues whose interest goes beyond specific borders (Baltar-Moreno *et al.*, 2024). In this scenario, public diplomacy becomes relevant as a tool for shaping external perceptions. Oliver-González (2023) points out that states combine public relations and communication strategies to influence their relationship with third countries; thus, states:

(...) Use public diplomacy to influence public opinion in other countries and to build positive international relations. Public diplomacy efforts include organizing cultural events, publishing informational material, and conducting academic exchanges, addressing different perceptions of the state and civil society. (p. 306)

Within this same framework, a final noteworthy aspect of this relationship between international relations and public opinion is the approach that has been taken based on the contributions of the so-called Almond-Lippmann Consensus and its three main postulates: the volatility of public opinion, its lack of structure and coherence with regard to foreign affairs, and its limited impact on the conduct of foreign policy (Lippmann, 1922; 1955), which became a benchmark for public opinion studies and foreign policy researchers. Although these postulates have subsequently been questioned and superseded, they served as a starting point for consolidating the *linkage* between foreign policy and public opinion. More recent research has shown that under certain historical and political conditions, public opinion can acquire stabi-

lity, structure, and even causal capacity over the direction and legitimacy of the external action of states (Foyle, 1999; Baum and Potter, 2008), demonstrating that the public can indeed be informed and have relatively stable opinions on foreign policy (Mila-Maldonado, 2022).

It should be noted that, during the decade 2010–2020, Latin America developed research exploring the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy based on the implementation of opinion studies focused on the foreign policy of countries in the region. In particular, research driven by specialized studies such as “Las Américas y el Mundo” (The Americas and the World) showed that citizens combine national pride with interest and support for active participation in the international system (Zepeda and Verdesoto, 2011; Kahhat, 2022; Morales Castillo and Schiavon, 2015). These findings reinforce the thesis of the structuring weight of public opinion, revealing stable preferences (Mexico) and concrete demands for regional integration and protection of migrants (Ecuador and Peru) (Zepeda and Verdesoto, 2011; Kahhat, 2022; Morales Castillo and Schiavon, 2015).

Although it is important to consider the relationship between foreign policy and public opinion, this article reviews the literature on the explicit link between the keywords “public opinion” and “international relations” as applied to research focused locally and regionally on “Latin America” (taken, then, as the third term to be incorporated into the search for scientific output from the last five years in the Scopus databases).

Materials and methods

The objective of this article is to conduct a systematic review of the literature on the relationship between public opinion and international relations in Latin America, based on research from the Scopus database for the period 2020–2025. Linking these relevant topics will allow us to understand how the media, political and economic actors, and citizens interact in the construction of opinion climates that influence the foreign policy framework of Latin American states, both in regional and global contexts.

Two specific objectives stem from this general objective: first, to identify the main criteria for the disciplinary relationship between international relations and public opinion in Latin America; and second, to identify the main lines of research that link both disciplines.

Based on these objectives, the following guiding questions were formulated to guide the review of research linking international relations with public opinion:

- To what extent does research in Latin America over the last five years (2020-2025) link International Relations with public opinion?
- What are the main topics addressed by this research?
- Are hegemony and new global actors the predominant themes?
- What are the potential lines of research that emerge from the systematic review of the literature?

Thus, based on the PRISMA methodology, the information was compiled from the Scopus database, using search terms in Spanish and a time frame starting in 2020. The approach of studies in Spanish responds to the need to promote the use of Spanish as a language of scientific communication, while the time frame seeks to ensure the relevance and pertinence of the sources, as well as to identify the main recent trends in the linking of these three keywords (public opinion, international relations, and Latin America) in high-impact studies (Codina, 2018). The relevance of using this methodological precept is based on its application in other works that have examined the behavior of different phenomena of study in various geographical areas, whether local or regional (López-López *et al.*, 2023).

Likewise, the methodological approach is fundamentally qualitative, given that the analysis focuses on the discussion and interpretation of the main research findings, beyond presenting the frequency of occurrence of certain topics compared to others (presented as context for the discussion). Therefore, this work is descriptive in nature, as it only seeks to characterize, from a theoretical point of view, the relationship between the three topics in previous research, and is not experimental, since it does not involve the formulation and testing of hypotheses (Hernández-Sampieri *et al.*, 2014).

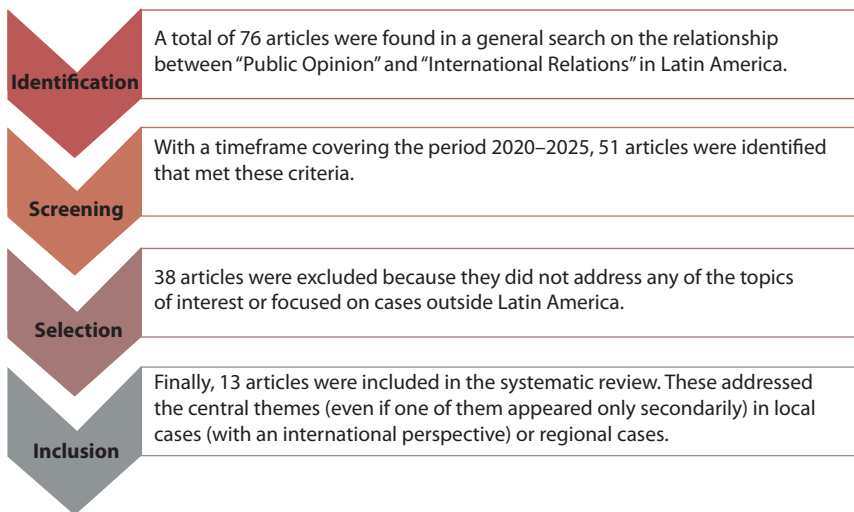
In the first phase, an initial search was conducted in the Scopus search engine—considered one of the most important today (Gusenbauer and Haddaway, 2020)—based on the presence of the terms in the content of scientific contributions in Spanish. This search yielded a total of 137 documents published since 1999. From this broad set, a subset of 89 documents produced since 2021 was selected.

In a second phase, given the lack of research in which the three terms appear in the title—and even the low number of contributions that relate two of the three keywords (Arnau and Sala, 2020)—it was decided to limit the search to research in Spanish that includes the three keywords and is related to the field of social sciences. This criterion of thematic relevance led to the exclusion of works belonging to areas such as Health Sciences, Engineering, and Exact Sciences, resulting in a total of 76 documents. Of these, 51 are available in open access in scientific journals belonging mainly to institutions in Latin American countries, which will be used for the literature review.

Below is a detailed presentation of the application in this work of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology, used in review studies to identify, screen, select, and include research in databases and academic sources in line with the authors' interests and the object of study, for subsequent analysis (Barquero Morales, 2022; Valle-Cruz and Gil-García, 2022).

Figure 1

Application of the PRISMA methodology for searching for articles



Note. Prepared by the author based on the Scopus database.

As shown in the diagram above, based on keyword searches and the application of relevance and impact criteria, a total of 76 articles were identified in the Scopus database since 2000, of which 51 belong to the period 2020-2025. In turn, among these 51, 13 were selected that explicitly or substantively address the relationship between public opinion and international relations in Latin America. These articles form the basis for constructing the discussion around four analytical axes, as detailed in the following section.

Results: research related to public opinion and international relations in Latin America

Table 1

List of article citations

No. of citations	No. of cases
0	24
1	9
2	5
3	3
4	4
7	7
8	3
TOTAL	51

Note: Prepared by the author based on the Scopus database.

First, with regard to the number of citations, and taking into account the results of the previous table, the average number of citations per article is 1.02, which is not conclusive in terms of the impact of these topics on the scientific community. However, finding results for 51 articles with the search for the three keywords allows us to infer their potential in the study of the relation-

ship between public opinion and international relations in Latin America. It is a question, as observed, of an incipient approach, but with potential that appears as an opportunity to build new lines of interdisciplinary research. It should be noted that, although the time frame covers 2020, the results found in this regard would not be determinative—much less deductive—of their actual potential impact, but rather aim to illustrate the use of metrics by the scientific community indexed in Scopus. The following tables present the main themes and subthemes related to the articles under study:

Table 2
Main topics of the articles

Theme	Amount
International Relations	14
Communication	12
Democracy	6
Right to communication	1
Environmental rights	1
Economics	1
Migration	3
Miscellaneous	1
Public Policy	5
Religion and/or Ideology	1
Security	6
TOTAL	51

Note: Prepared by the authors based on the Scopus database.

Table 3
Main subtopics of the articles

Sub-theme	Amount
Election campaigns	4
Democracy	4
Law	5
Economics	4
Education	3
Governance	9
Minority groups	2
Freedom of expression	1
Communication	6
Migration	1
Pandemic	3
Foreign Policy	3
Public Policy	4
International Relations	1
Security	1
TOTAL	51

Note: Prepared by the author based on the Scopus database.

When analyzing both issues, initially taken as general areas, International Relations and Communication appear as the disciplines most addressed in the research—perhaps evident given the nature of the search. However, it is striking how they are linked to issues such as security and democracy. Likewise, with regard to sub-themes, the main one is governance, in many cases emphasizing bilateral or multilateral relations, not only between Latin American states, but also incorporating states that are influential in regional geopolitics, such as China and the United States.

Of the 51 articles selected for this study, only 13 cover, either fully or partially, the topics of international relations and public opinion in Latin America. In many cases, these topics appear when citing research related to the area and do not constitute the central focus of the analysis.

The table below provides a thematic overview of the 13 articles that are directly related to the topics under study, with the aim of understanding their current approach, identifying their main limitations, and proposing possible future lines of research. Four main recurring lines of research are identified in the articles analyzed: a) hegemony and new global actors; b) social consensus and its impact on foreign policy; c) communication, propaganda, and the media; and d) social, environmental, and transnational issues.

Table 4
Article analysis matrix

No.	Article	Hegemonies and new global actors	Social consensus and its impact on foreign policy	Communication, propaganda, and the media	Transnational social and environmental issues
1	Mexico's Elusive Partnership with China: The Search for Explanations (Tzili-Apango and Legler, 2020)	√	√		
2	Global Studies: Latin American Contributions in a Globalized World (Chenou and Quiliconi, 2020)	√			
3	The Role of Local Governments in Migration Research in Argentina (Nicolao, 2020)	√	√		√
4	Legal regulation of electoral polls: theoretical and comparative analysis (Marshall <i>et al.</i> , 2021)		√	√	
5	The contemporary content and scope of the right to access environmental participation (Aguilar, 2020)	√	√		√
6	Do all roads lead to Washington? Latin America's path toward a free trade agreement with the United States (1990-2015) (Cuevas Ossandón and Morillo Remesnitzky, 2020)	√	√		
7	Colombian presidential campaign on Twitter (2018): Appropriation, communication, and subjectivities (Acosta Valencia <i>et al.</i> , 2021)		√	√	

No.	Article	Hegemonies and new global actors	Social consensus and its impact on foreign policy	Communication, propaganda, and the media	Transnational social and environmental issues
8	Control of public opinion in the Canary Islands during the Great War (1914-1918): propaganda and foreign diplomacy (García Cabrera, 2022)	√	√	√	
9	Foundations, realities, and challenges of Colombian internationalization. The 1991 Constitution and its 30 years of history (Penagos Forero and Niño Amézquita, 2021)	√			
10	The evolution of Ecuadorian foreign policy during the 21st century: analysis from the perspective of peripheral realism theory (Paradela López and Jima González, 2023)	√			
11	Deployment of Chinese soft power in Latin America and its reception in the countries of the region (Brito Munita and Tagle Monti, 2023)	√	√		
12	What do Latin Americans think about the global system? (Luján, 2024)	√	√		
13	El Hispano Americano and Peruvian propaganda in Panama during the War of the Pacific (Ibarra Cifuentes, 2024)	√	√	√	

Note: Prepared by the author based on the Scopus database.

Discussion. Link between international relations and public opinion in Latin America

In the 13 articles analyzed, the link between public opinion and international relations in Latin America is structured around four main themes. The first focuses on the disputes over hegemony between the United States and Latin America's place in that scenario. The second theme analyzes how social consensus and public perceptions condition the foreign policy of states. The third examines the role of the media, propaganda, and social networks in shaping public opinion. Finally, the fourth axis incorporates social and environmental

perspectives, showing how public opinion influences transnational policies such as migration and environmental governance. These axes are discussed below in light of the concepts addressed and the research questions posed.

Hegemonies and new global actors

First, the reviewed works show that the relationship between public opinion and international relations in Latin America is mainly articulated around disputes over hegemony and the region's place in the global system. Chenou and Quiliconi (2020) offer a relevant starting point by positioning Latin America as a producer of knowledge in the field of international relations, questioning Eurocentrism and the preeminence of scientific production from the so-called Global North. Although their analysis does not focus specifically on public opinion, their contribution allows us to understand that knowledge production is part of perceptions about the dynamics of the international order, power hierarchies, and links between the great powers, thus shaping a field of symbolic dispute in which Latin America is not only a recipient but also a generator of interpretive frameworks.

In this context, a significant portion of the articles reviewed focus on China's growing relevance as an economic and geopolitical actor in the region, and how public opinion seems to be moving toward perceiving China as a source of dispute with US hegemony. Tzili-Apango and Legler (2020) highlight that, in the case of Mexico, Mexican public perceptions of China reveal mistrust and certain stigmas, which could hinder the deepening of bilateral relations despite economic incentives. This finding is relevant because it explicitly links public opinion with Mexican foreign policy, while exposing the tension between US hegemony and the emergence of China as an alternative.

Along the same lines, Brito and Tagle (2023) also explore the possibilities arising from a strengthening of trade relations between China and Latin America, reinforcing the idea that this is an alternative to US hegemony through the exercise of soft power, demonstrating that efforts are not only transferred to the economic sphere, but also to the realm of perceptions, narratives, and symbolic legitimacy. In contrast, Cuevas and Morillo (2020) analyze the reasons why several Latin American countries entered into free trade agreements (FTAs), highlighting that the main incentive was the expectation of market benefits associated with the relationship with the United

States. Although public opinion is not the central focus, the study suggests that political elites must make efforts to efficiently manage trade dependence and internal perceptions of the United States as a partner.

Taken together, these studies reinforce the idea that, although China is consolidating its position as a potential partner, the United States continues to have a strong presence in the region, especially in the trade structure, and that Latin America is shaping up to be an arena of hegemonic struggle for both actors. In this sense, public perceptions can be used to restrict or legitimize foreign policy decisions.

On a broader level, Luján (2024) integrates citizen perceptions from various Latin American countries regarding the role of the major economic powers. Among his findings, he highlights Latin America's potential to position itself as a global actor, provided it achieves greater regional cohesion. He also emphasizes how public perceptions of other powers influence the strategic orientation of political elites, making public opinion a key filter for foreign policy decision-making. Complementarily, the study by Ibarra Cifuentes (2024) shows how, during the War of the Pacific, the Peruvian state sought to project narratives aligned with its interests in Latin American countries, with the aim of gaining support and breaking the neutrality of certain actors in the conflict, showing that the dispute for hegemony is also communicative: appealing to regional identity and certain war-mongering narratives can serve as a resource to capture external audiences and shape sympathies.

Read together, these contributions show that, with regard to the United States and China, public perceptions tend to be stable and operate along lines of trust/distrust—thus confirming the first postulate of the Almond-Lippmann consensus (1955). At the same time, they show that Latin American states and elites are aware of this and have certain tools at their disposal to actively influence public opinion in the region.

Social consensus and its impact on foreign policy

Secondly, the articles reviewed show that public perceptions, the construction of political narratives, and the regulatory framework influence the way in which Latin American states articulate their international ties. This second line of research shows that so-called social consensus not only legi-

timizes strategic decisions, but can also be instrumentalized to position national interests in electoral campaigns, regulatory processes, or migration policies, especially when addressing the intermestic dimension of foreign and domestic policy (Manning, 1977).

Research such as that of Paradela and Jima (2023) shows how some governments in Ecuador prioritized relations with the great powers “at the expense” of what could be considered national interests. This can be understood within a broader ideological framework within the Correa-anti-Correa divide, which, according to the authors, generated an uncritical alignment that does not respond to a state strategy, but rather to disputes over internal legitimacy. Thus, in the absence of minimum agreements on the national interest, foreign policy is instrumentalized to become a mechanism for domestic political validation.

On the other hand, Nicolao (2020) highlights the importance of paradiplomacy in foreign policy, particularly in Argentina, emphasizing the need for further research into the role of local governments in the formulation and implementation of migration policies. These findings show that the boundaries between the internal and the external are blurred, as are perceptions, and that citizens' perceptions and expectations condition the way in which international commitments are implemented in the territory.

At the regulatory level, Marshall *et al.* (2021) analyze the application of legal regulations surrounding electoral polls, discussing the limits of censorship and transparency in the collection of opinion data. Although the emphasis of this study is on democratic quality, its findings suggest that the conditions under which public opinion is measured and communicated are important, as they can influence debates on public policy orientations, including foreign policy. Although the regulation of polls does not define the content of foreign policy, it can shape the way elites invoke what citizens think, whether in favor of or against certain international decisions.

This second line of research suggests that social consensus and public perceptions are also linked to foreign policy when elites perceive public opinion as a terrain for shaping or invoking the opinions of citizens to justify international orientations, especially when these are linked to internal cleavages and the management of transnational issues such as migration.

Electoral communication, political propaganda, and digital media

Thirdly, the articles by Marshall *et al.* (2021), Acosta Valencia *et al.* (2021), García Cabrera (2022), and Ibarra Cifuentes (2024) agree that public opinion is not a neutral effect of reality, but rather a space for symbolic dispute in which different actors compete to influence the perceptions, emotions, and decisions of citizens. These works show that the dispute unfolds both in electoral contexts and in scenarios of international conflict, and that it cuts across traditional media and digital platforms.

Marshall *et al.* (2021) argue that the publication of election polls affects the quality of democracy by potentially influencing voters' decisions. From this perspective, they propose the need to regulate them in order to mitigate undesirable effects on electoral behavior and ensure minimum conditions of transparency in information. In line with this concern about mediation devices, Acosta Valencia *et al.* (2021) analyze the role of social media, particularly Twitter, in the 2018 Colombian presidential campaign. Their results are in line with other recent studies that position "foreign policy considerations" (Acosta *et al.*, 2019), showing how Venezuelan migration has become a foreign policy *issue*, a means of opposition to the government of Nicolás Maduro, and a resource for electoral campaigns (Valera and Miranda, 2023). In this context, they show that narratives such as "Castrochavism" operate as polarizing ideological frameworks aimed at shaping public opinion in terms of political confrontation.

For their part, García Cabrera (2022) and Ibarra Cifuentes (2024) address the link between public opinion, propaganda, and international relations from a historical perspective. Both studies analyze how different states used the press as an instrument of foreign propaganda, seeking to shape international public opinion in favor of their strategic interests. As noted in the first section, in the case of the War of the Pacific, the construction of narratives about just cause, regional identity, or the attribution of characteristics to the enemy became a diplomatic resource for gaining support.

These articles show how traditional media and social networks act as mediators of public opinion, not only as inputs for politics, but also as strategic actors that influence both local processes and the international projection of states. This axis reinforces the aforementioned idea that the public sphere, both analog and digital, constitutes a communicative battlefield in which

domestic and international interests intersect, and in which public opinion can contribute to tension and questioning of issues related to foreign policy.

Social and environmental perspectives

Fourth and finally, the articles by Nicolao (2020) and Aguilar Cavallo (2020) introduce a social and environmental dimension. Both works emphasize that issues such as migration and environmental conflicts cannot be conceived solely from a state-centric perspective, but must be understood as regional and transnational phenomena, shaped by international regulatory frameworks and citizen participation dynamics.

In the case of Nicolao (2020), it is mentioned that local governments are the first actors to address the issue of migration, but that, ultimately, it is spaces such as Mercosur or transnational regulatory frameworks that decisively condition the regulation and management of these flows. This highlights the tensions between citizen demands and decisions made within broader regional and international frameworks.

For its part, the article by Aguilar Cavallo (2020) analyzes environmental governance in terms of participation rights. He points out that, although global governance instruments exist in the field of ecology, their effectiveness depends on the incorporation of participatory standards at the domestic level. When states adopt these standards, the relationship between citizens and public policy is reconfigured, and public opinion becomes a normative and procedural component of environmental policies, conditioning their legitimacy and implementation.

Both authors agree on the need for a multilevel governance approach. Nicolao (2020) presents this in terms of intergovernmental coordination between the state, provinces, and municipalities to implement migration policies with a paradiplomacy approach, while Aguilar Cavallo (2020) expands on this logic, pointing out that effective governance requires interaction between local, national, and regional levels, and that participation must be adapted to the sociocultural characteristics and specific vulnerabilities of each community.

In summary, a joint reading of these works suggests that, in Latin America, the effectiveness of policies on transnational social and environmental issues depends on the articulation between international frameworks, citizen participation and local management capacity, and the configuration of opinion climates around issues such as migration or the environment.

Conclusions, limitations, and future research perspectives

The analysis of the 13 selected articles provides an overview of the current state of analysis of the relationship between public opinion and international relations in Latin America over the last five years in high-impact journals. The findings highlight the nascent, fragmented, and still poorly consolidated nature of this area of study. Although there is academic interest in exploring the interrelationship between the two phenomena, most of the studies reviewed address public opinion tangentially, as a contextual factor rather than a central analytical variable. This trend suggests a theoretical weakness and the absence of robust conceptual frameworks that systematically articulate the role of public opinion in the processes of foreign policy formulation, implementation, and legitimization.

However, there are specific contributions that open up promising avenues for the future development of the field. Some studies focus on social perceptions of specific international actors, such as China or the United States, and demonstrate how these imaginaries influence cooperation decisions or the construction of strategic alliances (Tzili-Apango and Legler, 2020; Brito Munita and Tagle Monti, 2023; Luján, 2024). Other works highlight the instrumentalization of public opinion by governments, either through the use of polarizing narratives in electoral campaigns (Acosta Valencia *et al.*, 2021) or through communication strategies for propaganda purposes in conflict contexts (Ibarra Cifuentes, 2024; García Cabrera, 2022).

Likewise, studies have been identified that analyze public opinion as a factor of pressure, validation, or restraint in foreign policy, as evidenced in mechanisms such as referendums (Cuevas Ossandón and Morillo Remesnitzky, 2020), environmental citizen participation (r the regulation of polls as a guarantee of democratic transparency (Aguilar Cavallo, 2020). (Marshall *et al.*, 2021). These approaches provide valuable insights into the role that citizens can play in the international arena, beyond the institutionalized channels of state diplomacy.

In response to the research questions, in several areas: the link between IR and public opinion is not explicit, but is present in the positioning of global issues in places such as the press or, specifically, in citizens' perceptions of global actors such as the United States of America or China. Likewise, the main themes of the articles under study refer specifically to communication (14), communication (12), democracy (6), among others, which shows that

the research mainly focuses on one of the two disciplines under study. The articles position an important debate between US influence and the potential for diversifying relations with other economic actors such as China, which gives rise to new lines of research on new global actors and local potential, not only from an economic point of view, but also at a cultural level, to give another example.

However, significant limitations persist that hinder a more structured and comparative understanding of the phenomenon. First, most of the studies analyzed do not address the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy in an integrated and explicit manner, which limits the ability to construct generalizable theoretical inferences. Second, there is a geographical concentration on countries such as Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, and Argentina, while other regions of the continent, particularly Central America and the Caribbean, remain virtually absent from the academic debate. Third, qualitative methodologies or conceptual review approaches prevail, with little use of quantitative empirical tools that would allow for the operationalization of the variables involved and the exploration of systematic correlations or causalities.

Given this situation, there is an urgent need to update and move towards a more articulated and comparative research agenda. It would be particularly valuable to encourage studies that analyze the differential impact of public opinion on foreign policy in different national contexts, considering variables such as the political regime, the degree of democratic institutionalization, press freedom, and the structure of the media ecosystem. In addition, the development of interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks that integrate elements of political science, international studies, communication sociology, and political psychology could provide more robust tools for interpreting how citizens' perceptions of the outside world are formed and how these perceptions directly or indirectly influence states' international decisions.

In conclusion, the systematic review—which is purely descriptive and dialogical in nature—shows that the relationship between public opinion and international relations in Latin America has rarely been addressed from an integrated perspective. It also shows that most of the studies identified focus on the period 2010-2020 and that, for the most part, they have not been published in Scopus-indexed journals.

Although there are some relevant contributions, the field continues to show weak theoretical articulation, limited methodological diversity, and in-

sufficient geographical coverage. Nevertheless, the set of articles analyzed allows us to affirm that there is significant potential for the consolidation of this line of research, especially if progress is made toward interdisciplinary approaches, comparative studies, and mixed methodological approaches that allow us to capture both the institutional structures and the social dynamics that permeate Latin American foreign policy. In this context, public opinion, far from being a passive actor, is presented as a dynamic component with the capacity to influence, strain, or legitimize the international relations of the countries in the region. The development of theoretical and empirical tools that allow for an understanding of this complex relationship is undoubtedly a pending challenge and, at the same time, an opportunity to renew international studies from and for Latin America.

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Declaration of Authorship - CRediT Taxonomy	
Authors	Contributions
Andrea Mila-Maldonado	Conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; project management; supervision; validation; writing—review and editing.
Juan Arturo Mila-Maldonado	Conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; validation.
Iván López-Díaz	Visualization.

Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence
The authors DECLARE that, in the preparation of the article <i>Citizen Perceptions and International Relations in Latin America: A Systematic Review of the Literature (2020-2025)</i> , the use of artificial intelligence was limited exclusively to searching and verifying sources, as well as supporting the spelling and style review of the manuscript (detecting redundancies, correcting spelling errors, among other formal aspects). In no case was artificial intelligence used to generate academic or substantive content for the article.

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