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LATIN AMERICA AND THE UNITED STATES

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Introduction

This chapter traces the study of the relationship between Latin America and the United States. Approaches have evolved in terms of orientation, theoretical perspective, and methodology. As a political scientist, I spend most – though not all – of my space discussing scholarship in that discipline. I touch on only a minuscule fraction of the thousands of books and articles published on the subject, so by necessity I leave out many such works.[1]

The chapter concludes with a discussion with suggestions for where future research might fruitfully go. In a roughly chronological manner, the chapter shows how a predominantly pro-US policy literature became intensely critical after the US response to the Cuban Revolution. Yet after the end of the Cold War, that perspective shifted again as younger scholars questioned whether the critical approach downplayed Latin American agency. Within that discussion of changes over time, the chapter shows how US-based analyses differed from those coming from Latin America. The orientation and methodologies employed have been different. Latin America is much less concerned with security, while scholars in the United States pay too little attention to the works published in Latin America. Making these comparisons allows for a clearer sense of what avenues future work could take.

Background

Prior to World War II, few scholars paid much attention to US-Latin American relations. Historians wrote first and tended to offer up straightforward narrative history. Significantly, US scholars took for granted that the United States was a positive force in the region and that it should intervene for the benefit of Latin American countries. This came at a time when the United States intervened and even occupied multiple Latin American countries, which continued well into the 20th century. Aside from the notion that US "assistance" was a boost for the region, these works did not explore causal relationships. They were descriptive and simply assumed good intentions.

In 1899, historian John Holladay Latané gave a series of lectures published the following year as *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States and Spanish America* (Latané, 1900). His book concludes with a favourable assessment of the Monroe Doctrine. The same easy acceptance of

US benevolence is evident throughout the first textbook on the topic, by diplomatic historian Samuel Flagg Bemis (1943), who invoked "protective imperialism" as a wholly salutary outcome of US policy.

The study of US policy toward Latin America mushroomed after the Cold War began in the late 1940s and for a time scholarly works remained complimentary. The 1959 Cuban Revolution quickly shifted the approving view of US policy toward a critical stance. During the 1960s, a new generation of scholars stopped accepting the US government's public statements on foreign policy and questioned US government motives. Ironically, many of them did so while receiving federal funding for that research. Indeed, administrations deeply dedicated to fighting Communism funded fieldwork by US scholars that yielded highly condemnatory published studies. They saw the imbalance of power between the two regions not as a source of protection but rather as aggression from a domineering state.

After the Cuban Revolution: focus on power

One result of the Cuban Revolution was a spate of military coups that ushered in repressive dictatorships, with the 1964 Brazilian coup as a watershed. Conservative military leaders labelled virtually all progressive movements as subversive and toppled democratic governments, arguing they were saving the country from Communist rule. Without fail, the US government lent its support to those governments, which generated more scholarly backlash. Especially after the coup that overthrew the democratically elected government in Chile of Salvador Allende in 1973 and the outrage it generated, books and articles proliferated at a dizzying pace. As graduate students or young assistant professors, scholars came of age at a time when distrust of US foreign policy generally was high, and when evidence of chronic wrongdoing was being unearthed for the first time. Overwhelmingly, these historians and political scientists were critical of US policy, especially with regard to support (or more accurately lack thereof) for democracy and human rights.

Realism emerged as a major theoretical approach in International Relations and was used extensively to explain the relationship between the United States and Latin America. There are many variants of realist theory but in its simplest form it posits, "Self-help is necessarily the principle of action in an anarchic order" (Waltz, 1979: 111). The options of any given state are conditioned by their capacity, or power, to pursue actions based on self-interest. In the context of US-Latin American relations, this meant analysis of power imbalance. As one prominent textbook noted, it entailed "how the United States has chosen to apply and exercise its perennial predominance" (Smith, 2008: 5). Similarly, the "history of U.S.-Latin American relations has always been characterized and shaped by significant differences in military and economic capabilities and the absence of international institutions to constrain the actions of the United States" (Weeks, 2015: 2). For the most part, this meant discussing US efforts to use its hegemonic position to Latin America's disadvantage, and the ways in which governments in the region responded.

Saving the region from Communism was not the focal point for Latin American scholars. Dependency theory was a Latin American theoretical counterpoint, where US hegemony was explained as a structural outcome of global capitalism. The core, which in the 20th century meant the United States, extracted primary products from Latin America while exporting finished manufactured goods. This unequal arrangement prevented independent Latin American economic development. US policy was therefore considered part of an economic imperial project. For dependency theorists, Latin American agency was tightly constrained and conditioned by the power of US capital and the US government that supported its expansion. Andre Gunder

Frank (1986: 114), for example, argued that "metropolis-satellite relations are not limited to the imperial or international level but penetrate and structure the very economic, political, and social life of the Latin American colonies and countries." Dependency theory consumption dropped off around the 1980s in the United States, whereas in Latin America the core assumptions of the dependency approach, if not always the theory itself, have remained more analytically relevant. Notably, dependency-oriented arguments appear periodically in the statements of leftist Latin American leaders.

The Cold War context reinforced US-centered scholarly orientation. Fundamental assumptions in the literature were that the United States was politically hegemonic, economically dominant, and aggressive. Dependency theory emerged from those assumptions, as did a deluge of critical works, sometimes Marxist, often based largely on documents showing evidence of US wrongdoing in the cases of Cuba (Williams, 1962), Chile (Petras and Morley, 1975), and Central America (Pearce, 1982). These and many other works tended to view relations in terms of US empire. The analytic result, however, was often to subsume Latin American agency within US power.

Since Cuba was at the centre of the Latin American Cold War, and because Fidel and then Raúl Castro continued to rule the country long after that international conflict ended, the literature on US-Cuban relations is vast (Schoultz, 2009 offers a good overview and analysis). From many different ideological angles, most of these works examined some element of the interaction of US power and Cuban resistance. Cuba is of special interest to scholars because of its perceived strategic importance combined with fascination (or frustration, depending on your viewpoint) with Fidel Castro's ability to thumb his nose at the US government and persevere against great odds.

The same extensive scholarly treatment is true for Central America, which suffered extreme levels of violence and political instability, particularly in the 1980s. The United States fought a covert war against the Nicaraguan government, overtly funded a genocidal military dictatorship in Guatemala, and supported a repressive government and army in El Salvador. President Ronald Reagan was fixated on the region, arguing that he was promoting democracy and fighting Communism even while his allies sponsored widespread violence. Not surprisingly, the academic response was harsh (e.g. see LaFeber, 1993).

End of the Cold War

The Soviet Union's fall in 1990–1991 fundamentally shifted the study of US-Latin American relations. Within a short time frame, not only did the spectre of Soviet encroachment disappear, but the Sandinistas in Nicaragua were voted out, the Salvadoran government and rebels signed a peace treaty, the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet left power, and the Cuban dictatorship floundered without an external patron. The absence of threat to the United States created space for researchers, especially in the United States, to question long-held assumptions and probe new areas.

Analytically, the end of the Cold War prompted many to question the primacy of power to understand the dynamics of US-Latin American relationships. Kathryn Sikkink's (2004) work on the power of human rights ideas is an important example, as she demonstrated that ideas can have their own influence independent of the power of even a hegemon. As human rights abuses became publicized, with the activism of international non-governmental organizations they received more attention both globally and in the US Congress. Over time, this meant US policy makers could not ignore their importance and policy changed accordingly. The imbalance of power between the United States and Latin America certainly mattered, but it did not necessarily determine outcomes as much as previously assumed.

The 2000s marked a new generational shift in the United States, as scholars who were not even alive at the time of the Cuban Revolution entered academia. To criticisms of US policy they added Latin American agency and questioned whether *everything* the US government did was harmful almost all the time. As Tanya Harmer (2011: 274) wrote about the Chilean coup, "And it was, in the end, other Chileans who let this happen." When Russell Crandall (2006: 4) asserted, "we must ask whether U.S. bayonets helped lead to more democracy, not less," it was not the argument of an ideologue. Even established scholars began to question the assumption that some combination of national security and economic self-interest drove US policy. In fact, other variables like Latin American lobbying mattered a lot (Grow, 2008).

In both History and Political Science, US-published studies brought Latin American agency more into the picture, with the logic that "Mononational research tends to produce mononational explanations and to ignore the role of players from countries other than those whose words are examined" (Crandall, 2006: 4). A number of authors pushed back on the power imbalance emphasis and showed how Latin American governments mattered more than generally appreciated (Long, 2015; Mora and Hey, 2003; McPherson, 2013). They were not passive actors having power exerted on them, but rather were instrumental in shaping outcomes. Even efforts during the Cold War both by the US and the Soviet Union to co-opt and control Latin American intellectuals was frustrated by their ability to define their own version of nationalism that was beholden to neither (Iber, 2015).

At the same time, the ongoing declassification of US government documents fostered rich and highly critical analyses of Cold War policy. In particular, President Bill Clinton's Chile Declassification Project released approximately 23,000 documents related to US-Chilean relations. Examples of publications using such documents include Kornbluh (2003) and Morley and McGillion (2015) on US policy toward the Pinochet dictatorship; Harmer (2011) on US policy toward Salvador Allende; McSherry (2005) on Operation Condor; LeoGrande and Kornbluh (2014) on US-Cuban relations; and the US role in the 1964 Brazilian coup (Pereira, 2018). No doubt these will continue to emerge and will lead to reassessment of the US role in Latin American political crises.

Thematically, one area that received increased attention was the US-led "drug war," which entailed securitized policies of military training, coca eradication, and interdiction. Colombia received particular attention (Crandall, 2002) but Bolivia and the rest of the Andean region did as well (Loveman, 2006). US military aid to these countries, with Plan Colombia and Operation Blast Furnace in Bolivia, were large-scale operations aimed at destroying drugs with a supply side policy focus. The thrust of most of this literature was that US policy was counterproductive and harmful, and rarely if ever considered local realities. Attacking the source, such as destroying coca plants, uprooted not only the plants but entire communities, and remained too blind to the demand side, which was the US consumer of cocaine and other narcotics.

In the past decade, the study of US policy expanded to include the themes of criminal gangs and their ties to immigration. In the 1980s, migrants from El Salvador formed gangs (most notably MS-18) in Los Angeles, which over time spread back to El Salvador and across the United States. Works include the effects of past US policy, as the US funded the violence that drove Salvadorans out of their country (García, 2006); problems of hardline (so-called *mano dura*) policies (Cruz, 2010); the rise of children migrating (Donato and Sisk, 2015); and the negative effects of deportation (Menjívar, Morris, and Rodríguez, 2017). Similar to works on narcotrafficking, they emphasized the destructive outcomes of US policy, but also Latin American policies when they adopted hardline, militarized measures.

After Hugo Chávez's election in 1998, US-Venezuelan relations received considerable attention. He came to office with a clear message of rejecting US policy and forging socialist policies

to reduce poverty and income inequality. The George W. Bush administration in particular was hostile, and in 2002 applauded the coup that briefly removed Chávez from power. From then, bilateral relations were especially tense. The literature includes analyses that place the bilateral relationship in historical perspective (Kelly and Romero, 2002); of Venezuela's efforts to balance US power (Corrales, 2009); and use of oil revenue to challenge US hegemony (Clem and Maingot, 2011). Similar to studies of US-Cuban relations, the ideological bent of such works varies widely, but the vast majority reflect power imbalance, where for example Venezuela resists US policy preferences and forges international alliances and organizations that consciously exclude the United States.

That development has gone hand in hand with studies of China's rising influence in Latin America and how that affects the United States (Roett and Paz, 2008; Gallagher, 2016; Denoon, 2017). The Chinese economic presence in Latin America is considerable but still relatively new so its long-term impact on US-Latin American relations remains mostly a matter of speculation. Latin America views the Chinese influence largely through the lens of trade and economic calculation. Chinese trade with Latin America increased 22-fold between 2000 and 2015, and Foreign Direct Investment reached into the tens of billions (OECD, 2015). In the United States, the focus is often on how China may threaten US security and hegemony. At times these can veer into alarmism, and assume Latin America passivity in the face of Chinese influence, which the United State should counter.

Studies on the Barack Obama presidency have focused on his doctrine of engagement (Kassab and Rosen, 2016) and use of soft power (Weeks, 2016) but there are also critics on the left who argue that President Obama showed more substantive continuity than change with the George W. Bush presidency (e.g. Buxton, 2011). The latter criticisms became less common after 2014, when Obama thawed diplomatic relations with Cuba, but even more so after the election of Donald Trump. Trump, whose presidency is too new for publication of academic works at the time of this writing, based his initial Latin America policy on racial slurs, insults toward allies and adversaries alike, harsh criticisms of NAFTA, and partial rolling back of Obama's Cuba policy. When former Chilean President Ricardo Lagos said that Trump's election "was not good news for the world" he spoke for many Latin Americans (quoted in Romero, 2016).

Methodology

This chapter has covered the substance of the literature but we need also to consider methodology. One constant has been qualitative methods. Of course, this is to be expected for work by historians, but it is also true of political scientists, whose discipline has otherwise been moving in a decidedly quantitative direction. As Mariano Bertucci (2013) points out after an extensive study of peer-reviewed books and articles, the study of US-Latin American relations does not reflect broader trends in international relations research. This fact has been noted in Latin America as well, where the use of quantitative political science has grown (Merke and Reynoso, 2016).

There are various possible answers to this question. Authors have tended to provide considerable historical context to explain US-Latin American relations, which leads towards more historical (and thus qualitative) analyses. Nonetheless, in Political Science we might expect more mixed methods approaches, which would reflect trends in the discipline in this direction, but in general those have been the exception. General International Relations literature focuses extensively on interstate conflict and terrorism, which are much less prevalent in Latin America than elsewhere in recent years. Latin America has the lowest incidents of interstate war of any region in the world. The worst guerrilla conflicts, such as the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) or the Peruvian Shining Path, were negotiated to an end and defeated militarily,

respectively. Current levels of violence in Latin America are strongly tied to narcotrafficking and the wide availability of guns, neither of which has been a major topic for general IR scholars.

General treatments of US-Latin American relations are without exception qualitative and typically contain considerable historical background, complete with primary documents, to provide context. Foci have included how US policy makers denigrated Latin Americans (Schoultz, 1998); how US policy was part of a global project (Grandin, 2006; Loveman, 2010); how the US relentlessly promoted a policy of globalization (O'Brien, 2007); the extent of intervention (Livingstone, 2009); and ways in which Latin America challenges hegemony (Tulchin, 2016). The underlying assumption is that broad historical context is required to understand political and economic development. That requires careful examination of how US policy developed over time, with qualitative narratives showing the ebbs and flows of US intervention and the use of US military and economic power.

Nonetheless, a number of studies of the US impact on the Colombian conflict have been quantitative. That was possible in large part because the Colombian government and the United Nations collected coca cultivation data, while the United States provides data on foreign aid. Examples include the effects of military aid on conflict (Dube and Naidu, 2015; Jadoon, 2017); effect of aid on coca cultivation (Rouse and Arce, 2006); and the effects of Plan Colombia more generally (Banks and Sokolowski, 2009; Franz, 2016). It is worth noting, however, that there is an enormous literature on these topics and it remains overwhelmingly qualitative. The qualitative literature is also almost entirely critical, paying close attention to the human cost of the conflict.

Another area that has been more quantitative analysis is trade, which is the one area of US-Latin American relations relevant to economists, both from the US and from Latin America. It has been more conducive to quantitative methods because international institutions in particular (e.g. the World Bank and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, or CEPAL) have produced publicly available data for years. The US pushed Latin American countries to liberalize their economies after the debt crisis of the 1980s and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed by the US, Canada, and Mexico, went into effect in 1994. Similar agreements gradually spread throughout the region for over 20 years, though the election of Donald Trump, who harshly criticized NAFTA, stalled such efforts. US political and economic influence flowed through both international institutions like the United States Agency for International Development (Scott and Steele, 2011) but also through economics training at US universities, which facilitated the flow of neoliberal thought to Latin American political elites (e.g. Biglaiser, 2002).

Trade openness receives attention (Avelino, Brown, and Hunter, 2005), as does the North American Free Trade Agreement (Caliendo and Parro, 2015; Campos-Vázquez, 2013; Hassan and Nassar, 2017) and free trade agreements in general (Baier, Bergstrand, and Vidal, 2007). The quantitative studies tend to be positive about the aggregate effects of trade. The volume of qualitative studies is much larger and tends to be more negative, focusing on those Latin Americans who have not benefited or have even become worse off because of free trade.

Within Latin America itself, the study of International Relations is relatively new. Of course, the dependency school came directly out of the region, specifically from CEPAL. The immediate concern of IR scholars was autonomy, in particular from the United States, though the exclusive focus on resisting dependence slowed by the 1990s (Tickner, 2003). In South America, Latin American IR scholarship expanded rapidly in the 2000s, heavily influenced by US approaches. As one recent study found, the three theories found most commonly in published works were liberalism, realism, and constructivism (Madeiros, Barnabé, Albuquerque, and Lima, 2016). Further, qualitative methods were predominant, but gradually being overtaken by quantitative ones.

Latin American studies of bilateral relations are overwhelmingly qualitative, unless they focus squarely on trade.

In an excellent literature review, Giacalone (2012) outlines the approaches of Foreign Policy Analysis in the larger Southern Cone countries. With variation, Latin American scholars have tended to use US theoretical models but adapt them to local realities and infuse those more with normative arguments, often founded on Marxist principles. Across all countries, autonomy was an important variable. Overall, Latin American studies of International Relations are often interdisciplinary and transnational, as one extensive review of Mexican articles showed (Cid Capetillo, 2008). US studies are not. Not surprisingly, Latin American perspectives are often highly sceptical of the motives behind US policy, such that even prominent outlets like *Foreign Affairs en Español* publish articles referring to lies as a principle of US policy toward Latin America (Boron, 2006).

Another important difference between US and Latin American scholars is the issue of security. For US-based scholars, the concept is framed primarily in terms of how the current US administration defines it. That shifted from the Cold War to the drug war, and then also to organized crime and transnational terrorism. US researchers pay little attention to how Latin American policy makers define security, and how it differs from security assumptions in the United States. Given that foreign policy decisions flow in part from calculations of opportunities and security concerns, this represents a major shortcoming.

Perhaps more significantly, Latin American governments sometimes consider US policy and actions to be part of a threat they face. Certainly, this is the case with a number of leftist governments, especially Venezuela, where the Bush administration supported the 2002 coup and the relationship has been entirely adversarial since. But some Latin American countries, for example Bolivia, also came to view the traditionally militarized US response to the drug war as a threat to its citizens. Even more recently, many governments in the region believe climate change to be a major threat to security, whereas the Trump administration declares it to be false science.

Hey (1997: 652) conducted an extensive literature review on studies of Latin American foreign policy and concludes that "[w]hen the core deems a policy area salient, it is likely that core pressure will affect Latin American foreign policy in the desired direction." In other words, US policy preferences – she looks at the market-driven "Washington Consensus" in particular – were decisive even for Latin American foreign policy decisions. She argues that the literature ignored Latin American foreign policy bureaucracies as too unprofessional and underskilled to merit inclusion into any overarching argument. Hey concludes with a call for more theory-building.

Indeed, the US-centric nature of the field poses potential obstacles to a fuller understanding of the US-Latin American relationship. To a large degree, data collection centres on the United States: interviews with US policy makers, analyses of US aid programs, public opinion data, government-generated data, archival documents, and the like. In the past, some of this stemmed from the lack of reliable data in Latin America, especially during eras of repressive military regimes, but that has changed significantly. Latin American data is now more available, but IR scholars have been slower to utilize it.

It may be that many found the language skills, time, and resources required to do extensive fieldwork in Latin America to be too onerous and expensive. US-published works contain considerable reference to interviews with US policy makers. Former cabinet secretaries, assistant secretaries, ambassadors, national security advisors, and members of Congress become rich sources of information about US foreign policy. However, the other side of "international relations," namely Latin American policy makers, gets very little attention. These can only be found in case studies generally published in the country itself (e.g. Bywaters, 2014; Fernández de

Castro, 2015; Tickner, 2016). To be fair, many (perhaps even most) analyses of Latin American foreign policy toward the United States use official documents and statements much more than interviews as well, so in general this is an underused resource.

Only recently have Latin American public opinion data become available and used to understand US-Latin American relations. These have focused on sources of "anti-Americanism" (Baker and Cupery, 2013, Azpuru and Boniface, 2015) and whether US influence is diminishing (Azpuru, 2016). They questioned assumptions about how Latin Americans perceive the United States, which in fact is more positive than conventional wisdom would suggest (perhaps at least until Donald Trump's election). These analyses were made possible by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University, which has been conducting surveys in the region regularly since 2004. These works also point to a different methodological approach, which combine qualitative and quantitative methods. A mixed methods approach takes advantage of newly available data but infuses it with the context that has made qualitative work so valuable. Until recently, researchers have used LAPOP data primarily to understand Latin American domestic politics, so the extension to US-Latin American relations is a welcome, albeit nascent, development.

Future research

The study of US-Latin American relations has come a long way and has gained in nuance as time goes on, but there is still work to be done. There is tremendous variety of approach, methodology, and theoretical perspective. That diversity is essential for understanding the new era of US-Latin American relations we are in, characterized by Latin America reaching out to other parts of the world for trade and other kinds of exchange while US attention wanders or, in the case of Donald Trump, even becomes unpredictably hostile.

Especially in a (mostly) democratic era in Latin America, where so many resources are now publicly available, researchers should maintain and even expand having the Latin American perspective front and centre. In large part, this will entail increased use of sources from individual countries, both primary and secondary. Yet especially for US researchers, it requires shedding a long-held belief that US power is overwhelming to the point of losing sight of Latin American agency.

More attention should be paid to the differing definitions of security in the United States versus Latin America. Too narrow a focus on Latin American resistance to US policy obscures the fact that policy makers in the region are viewing policy choices through a lens that keeps local issues more in mind. Especially through the efforts of Hugo Chávez, new international organizations like the South American Union (UNASUR) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, are defining regional priorities without US participation. Scholars should examine how these define new notions of security and how much they diffuse throughout the region and affect US-Latin American relations. At the same time, US policy makers and domestic politics should receive more attention and ideally placed in theoretical context. For US presidents, Latin America has not been a major priority, which means policy gets made in large part by lower level cabinet and National Security Council appointees.

From a methodological standpoint, the increased quantification of International Relation studies has barely touched US-Latin American relations. In and of itself, this is not a problem since different types of research questions are best suited to different methods. Some issues require qualitative case studies to explain historical context and complex interplay between different political actors. Nonetheless, the dearth of quantitative work should at least give us pause. In particular, this would be an opportune time for exploration of what mixed methods might

accomplish. The study of Latin American public opinion toward the United States points one direction that this might take.

Finally, scholars should more deliberately apply theoretical perspectives from the subfield of International Relations, regardless of methodology. The wealth of largely descriptive studies offers considerable insight, but do not always build upon past literature to develop new theoretical insights. Moreover, US scholars would benefit greatly from greater attention to the literature produced in Latin America, which is heavily influenced by theories generated in the United States but which retains its own flavour and develops its own insights based upon local contexts.

Note

1 In other words, I apologize if I do not cite the publications of whoever happens to be reading this.

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