

Brazil's global aspirations and the public: an assessment on perspectives, drivers and consistency
As aspirações globais do Brasil e o público: uma avaliação sobre perspectivas, motivações e coerência
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Abstract: The goal of this article is to build on, and contribute to, the debate on foreign policy and public opinion by determining whether Brazilians react positively or negatively to a higher level of integration with the world, whether their opinion is influenced by their political orientation or socio-economic variables, and to assess the coherence of those opinions. We found through a regression analysis that even though Brazilians have a positive view of internationalization processes in general, it is hard to determine what influences their perceptions. Social class was the only variable found in the literature with some correlation to people's views, pointing to the need for more data. Nevertheless, responses showed coherence and consistency regarding immigration policy, therefore exposing some of the limitations of the Almond-Lippmann consensus.

Keywords: Foreign policy. Globalization. Public opinion.

Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é contribuir para o debate sobre política externa e opinião pública, determinando se brasileiros reagem positiva ou negativamente a um alto nível de integração com o mundo, se suas opiniões são influenciadas por orientações políticas ou variáveis socioeconômicas e avaliar a coerência dessas opiniões. Descobrimos através de análises de regressão que apesar de brasileiros terem uma visão positiva de processos de internacionalização em geral, é difícil determinar o que influencia tais percepções. Classe social foi a única variável encontrada na literatura correlacionada à percepção dos indivíduos, apontando para a necessidade de mais dados. No entanto, respostas mostraram coerência e consistência no que diz respeito às políticas imigratórias, expondo, desta forma, algumas das limitações do consenso Almond-Lippmann.

Palavras-chave: Globalização. Opinião pública. Política externa.

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1. Introduction

Public opinion and foreign affairs are by themselves challenging research objects. Together, they may be an even more controversial, yet promising area of inquiry. In the United States (USA), scientific public opinion polling has been developing since World War II (Holsti, 1992). Nevertheless, it is still an incipient (or peripheral, depending on the viewpoint) research area in Brazil, and pushing it forward is of utmost importance. More information on how the public perceive foreign policy has the potential to increase accountability, and therefore a government's legitimacy and bargaining power in the international arena (Faria, 2008). Another positive outcome of a research agenda more focused on public opinion would be the possibility of replicating (or not) results found in other countries (ibid.), such as the disconnection between foreign policy and public opinion detected by Benjamin Page and Marshall Bouton (2006), contributing to the development of a much needed cross-national research agenda (Holsti, 1992). This article aims at contributing to a growing body of research on public opinion and foreign affairs in Brazil by determining (i) whether Brazilians react positively or negatively to a higher level of

integration with the world, (ii) whether opinions are incoherent and inconsistent as posed by the Almond-Lippmann consensus, and (iii) what might motivate such opinions. We find it necessary to clarify that our intention is not to investigate whether public opinion impacts foreign policy - the object of this analysis are the opinions themselves and their drivers. The next sections will provide a brief review of the literature on public opinion and foreign policy internationally and in Brazil, and present the results of our empirical analysis of Brazilians' opinion about internationalization

2. Foreign policy and public opinion in the world

The first two decades after World War II were marked by the "Almond-Lippmann consensus" on the volatility, lack of structure, and little impact of public opinion on foreign policy (Holsti, 1992). In a seminal work, Gabriel Almond (1960) identified three issues with public opinion: it was not well-informed, it was highly volatile, and it was prone to changes during crises. His conclusion was that the amount of information needed for foreign policy opinions to be formed was simply too much for the average American. Similarly, Walter Lippmann (2010),

reaffirmed the public's inability to form coherent opinions, labelling public opinion an illusion, and posited that political action should be informed and carried out by a few knowledgeable people.

Research in the following decades has, nevertheless, challenged each of those assumptions. Richard Sobel (2001), for instance, analyzed four major USA interventions to assert the influence of public opinion on foreign policy, and Page and Shapiro (1983) found a correlation between public opinion shifts and policy shifts. Regarding public opinion's volatility and structure, Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro (1988) showed that, even though the public may misjudge situations, policy preferences are stable and change as a response to events. Samuel Popkin (1991) relied on a theory of low information rationality to explain how voters use the limited information available to infer a broader narrative and make decisions. We engage in this debate by looking at the opinions of Brazilians on foreign policy, testing their consistency, or lack thereof.

Further research developments in the field tend to investigate the sources of foreign policy opinions (Holsti, 1992), providing us with a second line of inquiry. The literature analyses the role

of several variables in determining opinions, such as age/generation (Converse, 1987), gender (Fite, Genest, and Wilcox, 1990), race, religion, social class, and education (Bouton and Page, 2006), as well as international trust (Brewer, Gross, Aday, and Willnat, 2004). Variables that may trump social characteristics include “the foreign policy goals that individuals say should be important, the threats they perceive as critical, their feelings about foreign countries and leaders, and the vital interests they perceive around the world” (Bouton and Page, 2006, p. 239), which are part of a belief system. However, the dominant explaining variables in the North American literature, and generally confirmed by survey data, are ideology and political party affiliation (which became prominent specially after the Vietnam war) (Holsti, 1992). In this article we apply the variables above to the Brazilian case, in order to understand whether they can explain the drivers of foreign policy opinions in the country.

Notwithstanding its concision, this literature overview exposes a few of the myriad hypotheses put forward in the past 70 years trying to explain the interaction between what the public thinks and foreign policies advanced specially by the USA. Building on and expanding this body of knowledge is not

only a great intellectual challenge, but also paramount for an in-depth analysis of recent developments that affect the international order. The skepticism with which Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, and the British referendum to leave the European Union were greeted, and the heightened importance of foreign affairs in each case, are telltale signs that there is still a long way to go if we are to truly understand people's perceptions, needs and fears in a globalized world.

3. Venezuelan Regionalism and Neighbours' Resistance

For over a century Brazil has sought to play a role in the international arena consonant with its continental proportions and natural regional leadership, as well as with its desire for independence and vocation for multilateralism. In the new millennium the country has managed to consolidate its status as a middle power, a standard-bearer for South-South cooperation, and as part of the BRICS in their attempt to create an international order parallel to the one established by the traditional western powers. It has also managed to bring new elements to long-established foreign policy directives - "The inclusion of the social agenda as a major topic of foreign affairs was one of the first and most important innovations" (Hirst and de Lima, 2006, p. 22).

A lot less clear is how much Brazilians would like to open the country to the outside world, what factors influence their preferences, and how Brazilian citizens perceive the impact of the country's international aspirations in their lives. Perception is a key word, in that it can show more how people feel than an accurate picture of reality. Take economic optimism for instance, according to the Economist magazine (The Data Team, 2017), a Pew report found that "49% of left-leaning Venezuelans... think the economy is performing well, compared with just 11% of conservatives". Venezuela also provides an example of how foreign policy interacts with domestic issues. A crisis in the country has led to an increased number of Venezuelans seeking asylum in Brazil. The situation came to a point where, according to researchers from Igarapé Institute (Folly and Nogueira, 2017), a mayor suggested that Brazil close its borders to their neighbor, as "many officials fear that assistance to migrants is an electoral liability". Assessing Brazilians' openness to internationalization is therefore a key issue, as it may influence decision-making on a diverse range of policies, including the ones on regional integration, economic development, and welcoming refugees and economic immigrants.

Until recently, most of the literature aimed at understanding how the public in the country perceive foreign policy focused more on the role of elites and leaderships - political, economical or intellectual - and interest groups (Lima and Cheibub, 1996; Souza, 2002; Oliveira and Albuquerque, 2005; Oliveira and Onuki, 2007), and the perspective "that Brazilian voters are either not interested or not capable of organizing structured political views about foreign policy" (Loureiro, Guimarães, and Schor, 2015, p. 101). There is, however, a growing body of work pointing to the opposite direction. The Americas and the World, for instance, is an initiative headed by Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) in Mexico that partnered with researchers in several Latin American countries to apply a set of standard questions on foreign policy. In Brazil it was found that, unlike in the USA, there is a connection between policy and public opinion - both leaders and the general public favor multilateralism and soft power, which have long been a staple of Brazilian foreign policy (de Almeida, Onuki, and Carneiro, 2014). A historical analysis on public opinion during the João Goulart government (1961-1964), has also found a degree of coherence, with the populations supporting redistributive reforms in the domestic arena and a

neutral approach internationally (Loureiro, Guimarães, and Schor, 2015).

The role of domestic issues in foreign policy opinion is particularly relevant in the Brazilian context, due to the country's relative insulation from regional pressures, afforded by its continental proportions. Guimarães, Fernandes and Maldonado (2019, p. 01), for instance, point to the need for the literature to "incorporate the level of domestic support to understand its implications to the exercise of regional leadership". Moreover, Lopes and Faria (2014), highlight that the salience of specific foreign policy issues will determine public mobilization, that is, the importance the public gives to an issue will determine their involvement in foreign policy and, consequently, the involvement of their representatives. We, therefore, selected for the survey analysis questions that, in addition to covering broad topics concerning foreign investment, exports and access to technology, also cover issues that deeply affect the population in a personal level, such as employment, safety, and immigration.

4. Methods and findings

In order to assess how the public believe globalization impacts their lives, and test the hypotheses formulated by foreign policy and public opinion

scholars presented in the literature review above, we ran a series of logistic regressions on the set of six questions below. They were posed to 1,250 Brazilians by *Latinobarómetro* in 2015². Participants were asked if Brazil's strategy of integration with the world impacted positively or negatively on:

1. Employment/sources of work
2. Foreign investment in your country
3. Exports of your country abroad
4. The access of your country to technology
5. The citizens' safety in your country
6. Personal/family's situation

Analyzing which factors are more relevant in determining the answers to those questions, we follow the literature pointing to political preferences and affiliation as chief variables explaining public opinion on foreign policies. Given the large number of political parties in Brazil and the fact that almost 70% of the interviewees do not mention specific political party affiliations, we focus on ideology for this analysis. In the past few years, there has been a perception of deep polarization between left and right leaning preferences in the country after very tight results in the 2014 presidential election, and a successful impeachment process that

followed suit. We therefore believe that a scale of 0 to 10 in which respondents position themselves as being more left-wing (0) or right-wing (10) is an appropriate measure to assert political preferences.

Control variables consisted of social and personal characteristics found in the literature to influence public opinion to a lesser extent - gender, education, age, and social class³. Lastly, we also control for opinions on immigration. People's reactions to immigrants is a good proxy for how they react to globalization, especially considering the increased number of asylum seekers and economic migrants in Brazil. We used two questions regarding the issue: What impact, if any, do the citizens of other countries who come to live in Brazil have on your country? 1. They come to compete for our jobs; 2. There ought to be laws to prevent immigrants from entering into Brazil. This helps us establish whether there is consistency on the public opinion about foreign policy.

The first thing we notice is the lack of knowledge and/or interest of the

² Questionnaires and databases are available at <http://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp>

³ *Latinobarómetro's* questionnaire does not enquire about income, providing instead a social class self-assessment and the perception of the interviewer on the respondent's socioeconomic status. Notwithstanding the subjectivity of these measures, we chose to include them given the particular importance of social class and high levels of inequality in the Brazilian context.

Brazilian public on foreign policy issues. Around one quarter of the respondents either did not answer the questions about integration strategies or said they did not know how to answer. This is consistent with results found by other polls (de Almeida et al., 2014). Nevertheless, those who answered the questions have a generally positive view of integration processes (figure 1). The exception is safety: here results invert and over 60% of respondents affirm that

integration has a negative impact on citizen's safety. This is not surprising considering that surveys have consistently shown that safety is among Brazilian's top concerns (along with corruption and access to education and health), and that Brazil is indeed one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Moreover, those responses show the importance of Page's (2006) belief systems, and the threats individuals perceive as critical.

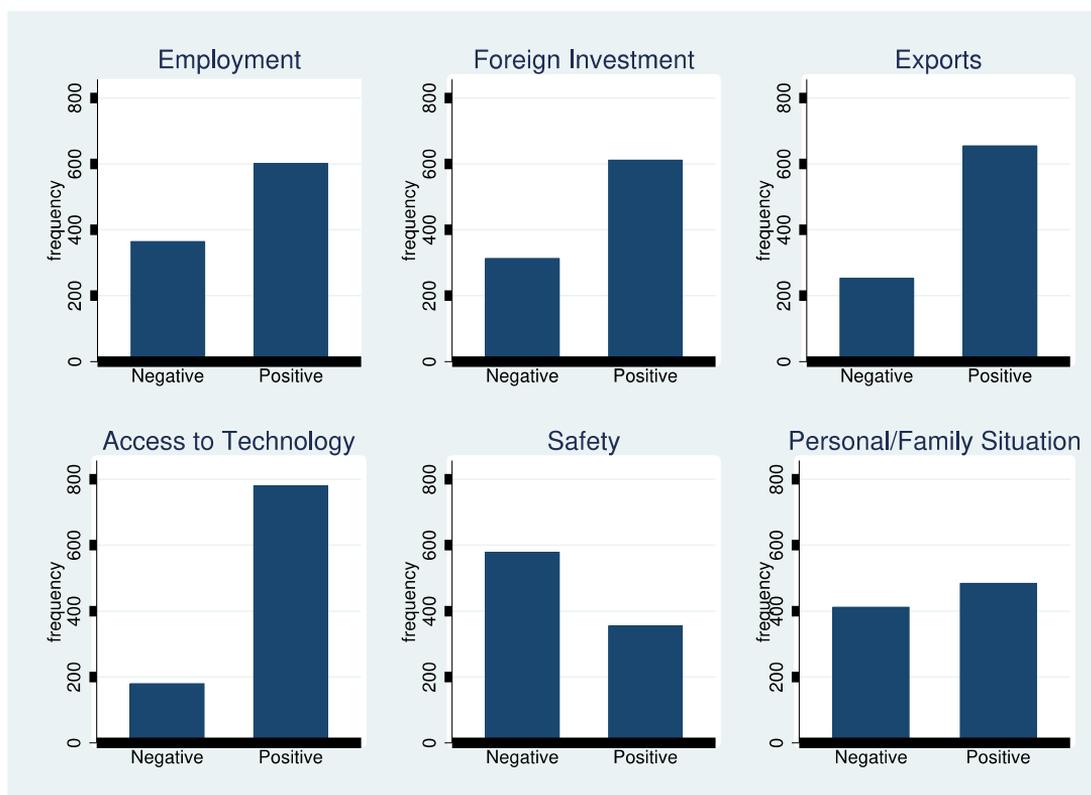


Figure 1: Respondents' assessment of the impact of Brazil's integration with the world on six issues.

Having established how people see integration processes, we must enquire which elements are behind those perceptions. Nonetheless, the answer is quite more challenging than it would seem at first. After running regressions using the variables highlighted in the literature, we found that they are not enough to explain Brazilian's positive views on integration with the world. As we can see on table 1, neither political preferences (a self-assessment on being left or right-wing) nor gender, education and age have a correlation with foreign policy preferences. Once more, the exception is connected to an unfortunate Brazilian characteristic: socio-economic inequality. Social class was significant in

predicting individuals' reactions globalization's impact on employment or sources of work, their personal or family situation, and safety. A lot more data on income and socio-economic status is necessary, and at this point we can only make conjectures. One may assume that the higher a person's socio-economic status, the less threatened by competition they will be by immigrants, for instance. They may also feel that such migrants can contribute to an unstable and unsafe society. On the other hand, most individuals with a bad socio-economic level according to the interviewer, and thus probably already living in an unsafe environment, saw the impact of integration on citizens' safety as positive.

Table 1: Logistic regression analyses: effects of socio-economic characteristics, opinion about immigration, and political preferences on individual's perceptions about how integration with the world affects six issues

	Employment	Foreign investment	Exports	Technology access	Safety	Personal situation
Gender	.949 (.18)	.064 (.19)	.823 (.20)	.957 (.22)	.772 (.18)	.942 (.18)
Education	.171 (.06)	.954 (.06)	.108 (.07)	.577 (.07)	.713 (.06)	.645 (.06)
Age	.053 (.10)	.339 (.11)	.410 (.11)	.093 (.13)	.635 (.10)	.567 (.10)
Social class (self-assessment)	.180 (.11)	.068 (.11)	.071 (.12)	.549 (.13)	.729 (.11)	.013* (.11)
Social class (interviewer)	.016* (.12)	.962 (.13)	.866 (.14)	.083 (.15)	.003** (.12)	.355 (.12)
Immigration (labor competition)	.593 (.09)	.272 (.09)	.165 (.09)	.217 (.10)	.123 (.08)	.192 (.08)
Immigration (limitation law)	.000*** (.09)	.001** (.09)	.006** (.09)	.025* (.10)	.000*** (.09)	.003** (.08)
Political preference	.469 (.11)	.084 (.12)	.551 (.12)	.108 (.14)	.298 (.11)	.689 (.11)
Constant	.066 (.79)	.766 (.82)	.389 (.86)	.296 (.95)	.005** (.79)	.146 (.78)

Notes: Values correspond to the p-values (*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001) and standard errors (in parenthesis). There was no multicollinearity among the variables.

We did, nevertheless, find that the respondents' opinion about laws limiting immigration was a strong predictable of their views on integration (table 1). Apart from issues concerning safety, respondents who were against laws restricting immigration were generally pro-integration (figure 2). The opposite was also true: respondents who favored a limitation on immigration were the majority of those who systematically saw integration as a

negative thing. This could be yet another finding showing the limitations of the Almond-Lippmann consensus regarding the lack of structure and consistency of public opinion on foreign policy issues. It shows the public may indeed use some sort of moral compass to guide their answers, which are not random, but a result of the use of proxies to fill in for lack of knowledge or information.

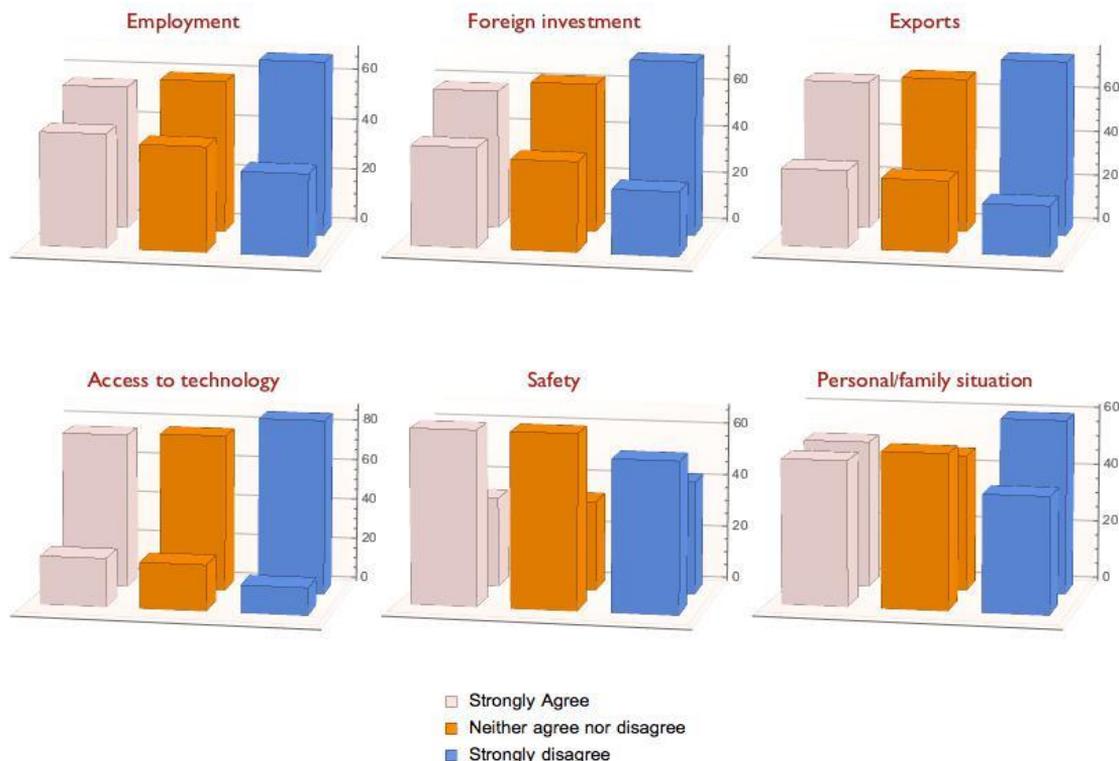


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents with a negative or positive perception of integration's impact on six areas, and their level of agreement with a law limiting immigration. *negative = front row; *positive = back row.

Concluding remarks

The need for more data on the perception of the Brazilian public about foreign policy is clear. Long-term, cross-national surveys such as the above-mentioned Las Américas must be encouraged, not only for us to know people's opinions - or lack thereof - but also understand the mechanisms behind those opinions. The Brazilian society has specificities with the potential to enrich the current literature, and elucidate aspects of public opinion on foreign policy in middle-income countries.

We can highlight at least two future research avenues based on the results presented in this article. Firstly, more attention should be given to social class as a variable in forthcoming research. It

was the only relevant socio-economic variable we found to correlate with people's opinions, but using subjective categories is obviously not ideal. More specific questions on income would allow us to fine tune answers and generate more reliable correlations. Secondly, foreign policy surveys could use a bigger focus on immigration. It is a variable people can easily connect with and that can potentially explain other positions on foreign policy. It is paramount that we understand what influences the public's views on immigration, and how they believe it impacts their lives, specially considering there are policymakers out there suggesting we limit it.

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