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Maria Victoria Alvarez

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## Opposing regional integration in comparative perspective

*Understanding opposition of public opinion to  
regional integration in Europe and Latin America*

**María Victoria ALVAREZ**

National University of Rosario (Argentina)

[maria.alvarez@fcpolit.unr.edu.ar](mailto:maria.alvarez@fcpolit.unr.edu.ar)

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## **Opposing regional integration in comparative perspective. Understanding opposition of public opinion to regional integration in Europe and Latin America**

### **Abstract**

*Until now, the literature on opposition or resistance to regional integration has concentrated on the European Union (EU). So far, no systematic attempt has been pursued to explain opposition to regional integration in Latin America and identify its main influential factors. Based on Latinobarometro surveys, two main findings have emerged from this paper. First, opposition to regional integration is not a generalised attitude among Latin Americans. Secondly, the way in which citizens across Latin America evaluate regional integration is strongly influenced by the same predictors as in the EU: citizens' assessments of economic performance (both at the individual and national level), education, ideology, age, and income. Thus, socio-economic variables have proven to be directly linked to support for/opposition to economic integration. If Latin America continues along its recent path of economic growth these findings imply that it will likely see stable high support for regional integration. Conversely, the less that Latin America prospers from regional trade and the more that its economies deteriorate, the lesser support there will be for economic integration.<sup>1</sup>*

**Keywords:** Regional integration, Public opinion, Opposition, Latin America, Europe.

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## Introduction

European integration has entered a new and more difficult phase of its existence. The economic crisis, the unpopular bailouts and the refugee crisis have increased the visibility of the European Union (EU) and provided fertile ground for the galvanization of Euroscepticism. Populist and radical parties were successful at the 2014 and 2019 European elections and recent national elections while anti-EU rhetoric is no longer the hallmark of fringe parties. Moreover, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the EU represents one of the biggest blows to the European project since the founding of the Common Market in 1958.

Outside Europe, nowhere but in Latin America have integration attempts and thinking developed so extensively across space and so consistently over time. However, the idea of social change and development that inspired regional integration efforts in Latin America during the 1950s and 1960s has been replaced by different logics and visions. Alternative or anti-neoliberal projects such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA, Spanish acronym) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) are now being dismantled, after a decade coexisting with projects like the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) or the Andean Community and seeing how the Pacific Alliance gains momentum.

In this particular context, it is more important than ever to study the oppositions to regional integration and their implications. Indeed, such analysis can shed light on the integration process as such as well as on the dissenting actors.

This research relies on quantitative and qualitative methods and a comparative framework. Comparative integration studies are as old as integration projects. EU studies emerged from the efforts of intellectuals who used the European case as a basis to develop a general theory of regional integration. In addition, integration theory arrived in Latin America through the impulse of these very same neofunctionalist scholars such as E. Haas and P. Schmitter who first developed grand theories of the integration process in Europe (Malamud 2010; Warleigh-Lack and Rosamond 2010).

Such a comparative framework has great methodological benefits because it liberates from the “N=1” problem, particularly infamous among EU scholars who tend to being parochially European in their focus (Warleigh-Lack and Rosamond 2010). We will therefore benefit by using the European experience in comparative regional integration studies but by using the Latin American case to nuance hypothesis developed exclusively in the EU case so far.

Until now, the literature on resistance to regional integration –and more generally on politicization and legitimation of regional integration– has concentrated on the EU. Research has developed exponentially in order to understand and explain the variety of attitudes of actors towards integration but with an exclusive EU focus. This is not surprising since the EU is the most institutionalized case of regional integration and the one that engendered complex and highly visible oppositions at both the mass and elite levels.

However, so far, no systematic attempt has been pursued to define opposition or resistances to regional integration in Latin America. This should not come as a surprise at least for three

reasons. First, Latin American regionalism is mainly an elite-driven or top-down phenomenon relying on both a generally positive opinion at the mass level and an almost monolithic pro-integration propensity among political elites. Second, low rates of mobilisation are found on regional integration issues compared to other policy issues, and finally, public opinion surveys have not developed extensively in the region.<sup>2</sup>

A comparison between the European and the Latin American cases can be particularly fruitful to have an in-depth understanding of the resistances engendered by regional integration and of their consequences for the legitimacy of the integration process. Although each case of regional integration is obviously different in terms of institutionalization, context and political culture, such differences are usually exaggerated and do not in themselves preclude comparative analysis (Söderbaum 2009). Finally, as noted by A. Malamud (2010), Latin America has been an interesting laboratory for scholars on regionalism to test hypotheses drawn from the European experience on various issues, including the nature of politicization and legitimization. This article examines the opposition to regional economic integration in Latin America among public opinion.

For opposition to appear first politicization needs to develop. Politicization in general terms means the demand for or the act of transporting an issue into the field of politics – making previously apolitical matters political. In brief, politicization entails making a matter a subject of public regulation and/or a subject of public discussion (De Wilde and Zürn, 2012). In an effort to avoid the shortcomings of some studies on politicization of the European integration, we start out with the basic argument that in the case of Latin American regionalism it is not an increase in the authority that generates controversiality (De Wilde and Zürn, 2012: 141), but rather the governments' attempts to open national markets and liberalize trade. This is so since in the Latin American case there is no such a move from a market integration project to a political union as is the case of the EU.

Region building in Latin America is driven as much by political as economic factors although issues of trade and investment appear to dominate the policy agenda (Grugel, 2006: 215). However, we dodge this debate since our focus is not politicization but rather the opposition to regional integration. Therefore, we assume that opposition implies an already politicized process (with politicized topics in public debates).

The remainder of this article is organized accordingly: in the first section we provide an overview of the main conceptual debates about Euroscepticism within the field of EU studies and political science, and critically examine the typologies developed on the EU case. We also offer a synopsis of the (rather scarce) Latin American literature on opposition to regional integration. In the third section we develop the analytical framework to operationalize and adapt the notion of resistance/opposition/Euroscepticism in Europe to apply it to the Latin American case. This is followed by a presentation of hypotheses, data and methods. Next, we present the results from our study, whereas the final section offers our conclusion.

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<sup>2</sup> Over the years, there have been demonstrations against potential multilateral trade agreements - especially in sectors such as agriculture, labour unions and other social organizations. Nevertheless, we are not interested in studying the opposition to free trade agreements (FTA) but to regional schemes.

## I. Previous Research on Euroscepticism and EU resistance: a critical assessment

The term Euroscepticism can be traced back to the mid-1980s journalist discourse in the UK. It is a catchall generic label for negative attitudes to the EU. As Flood argues, “Euroscepticism remains a somewhat elusive phenomenon with unclear contours and borderlines” (Flood, 2002: 2): it can be used to refer to Greek communists, Hungarian neo-Nazis, Dutch Christian conservatives, Greens, farmers, workers and even national institutions (Leruth, Startin and Usherwood, 2018: 4).<sup>3</sup>

Euroscepticism has proven highly elusive, at least in three dimensions. First, Euroscepticism is a dynamic phenomenon, which makes it difficult to apprehend: it has changed over time as it has evolved with the integration process itself (Leconte 2010: 4). This raises the question of “how to assess trends in Euroscepticism over time, given that the Europe about which one might be sceptical is in effect a moving target” (Katz, 2008: 156).

Second, there are numerous actors whose preferences may manifest Euroscepticism: citizens, political parties, the media, national institutions and civil society. The phenomenon can be studied from different perspectives, depending on which actor one places the focus on.

Finally, Euroscepticism is a notion compatible with different ideologies in the political spectrum, which extends from the extreme right to the extreme left. Eurosceptic parties may even exist at the political centre. It is obviously not a unique or homogeneous ideology (Leconte, 2010: 4). Most importantly, Eurosceptic parties may differ in the intensity of their opposition to European integration and the arguments and reasons put forward for opposing it. However, Eurosceptic parties converge in the criticism of the process and propose, in the extreme cases, the dissolution of the EU, or the withdrawal of a Member State. In other cases, political parties question the values underlying the EU political system, as market economy, free competition, as well as its principles, such as the delegation of national powers to supranational institutions, or the primacy of EU law over national norms (Leconte, 2010: 8).

Euroscepticism has generated a great wealth of academic studies.<sup>4</sup> This literature is dominated by the study of the way the phenomenon plays out in party politics (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2017), with Taggart’s (1998) much cited definition of party-based Euroscepticism as an encompassing term that expresses the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to European integration. This definition rescues the notion that the opposition of Eurosceptic parties to European integration can be distinguished by the intensity and the arguments of their opposition, especially as the parties aim their criticism at different aspects or “targets” of the European project. This work –

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<sup>3</sup> This diversity reflects the absence of a commonly agreed definition of Euroscepticism. Even the terms that intend to play as synonyms are debateable. Especially in Francophone contributions we could find related notions such as “*souverainisme*”, a term borrowed from Quebec’s emancipation movement against Canadian tutelage (Le Dréau 2009) rooted in the legacy of republicanism and/or Gaullism (Rozenberg 2011). Also, “*Euromondialisme*”, coined by the *Front National* and used by radical right parties to mark their opposition to the European project (Startin 2018); “*alter-mondialisme*”, which considers the EU as the ‘Trojan horse of neo-liberal globalization’ (Crespy and Verschuere, 2009: 382); or “*alter-européisme*” (Wassenberg, Clavert, and Hamman 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Note that the literature cited in this section is representative, but by no means exhaustive.

together with the studies co-edited with Szczerbiak (e.g. Szczerbiak and Taggart 2000, 2001, 2002, 2008) – defined many of the parameters in the area. Their ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ categorisation still constitutes the main frame of reference (Leruth, Startin and Usherwood, 2018: 5).<sup>5</sup>

Scholars have highlighted the heterogeneity and complexity of attitudes towards the European project and the influence of institutional, cultural, ideological and strategic factors (Hooghe and Marks 2007; Leconte 2010; Mudde 2011; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008). There is also an important body of literature on Euroscepticism in public opinion (Franklin et al. 1995; McLaren 2006, among others). Only recently, scholars working on Euroscepticism have broadened their research agendas, beyond political parties, to new actors such as the media, grassroots movements and civil society organizations (Koopmans 2007; Fitzgibbon 2013).<sup>6</sup>

Studies on the opposition to European integration, however, have not defined or characterized the object of that opposition. Most of the literature has excluded the question of what kind of actor the EU is (or wants to be), on which Euroscepticism revolves. In other words, one can inquire what “opposition to Europe” means. As Mair asks,

“Is this equivalent to contesting, say, France, or Italy? Can we be against an individual country’s political system in the same way that we can be ‘against’ Europe, and, if not, what does that tell us about the nature and character of Euroscepticism?” (2007: 3).

Some studies suggest going beyond the much too simplistic pro-/anti-EU cleavage, and replacing the study of Euroscepticism with the study of resistances against European integration (Crespy and Verschuere 2009).<sup>7</sup> As noted by Guieu (2009), much remains to be done to clarify the terminology needed to designate attitudes of opposition to the construction of Europe.

From a Francophone point of view (and making a critical assessment), Anglophone literature refers to implicit normative categories that rarely account for the complexity of multiple forms of resistance towards the EU (Crespy and Verschuere 2009: 389). Instead, according to this vision, the notion of resistance to European integration presents a series of advantages compared to the notion of Euroscepticism. It makes possible to take into account a multiplicity of actors in their diversity (associations, media, unions, intellectuals, etc.), dynamic processes, and the opposition that appeared from the origins of the process (not only the last decades).

The notion of Euroscepticism is rather incompatible with an exercise of comparison with the Latin American experience. In particular, if we build a critical appraisal on the literature on

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<sup>5</sup> Though criticized for its lack of nuance, only a few competing typologies have emerged to rival the ‘hard/soft’ model as the basic building block of Eurosceptic analysis with more fine-grained classifications (Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Flood 2002; Vasilopoulou 2009). Others focus on the drivers, or motivators, of Euroscepticism (Sørensen 2008; Leconte 2010; Skinner 2012). Kopecký and Mudde (2002) distinguish between ‘diffuse’ and ‘specific’ support for European integration and create a four-field matrix. The most comprehensive attempt to develop a classificatory schema that encompasses a range of party positions on Europe is Flood’s (2002) with a six-point continuum of party positions, ranging from simple rejection of the EU to a maximalist position advocating a federal Europe.

<sup>6</sup> Another set of research has focused on EU institutions and has examined the impact of Euroscepticism within those institutions (especially the European Parliament).

<sup>7</sup> Crespy and Verschuere (2009: 383) define resistances as “manifestations of hostility towards one (or several) aspect(s) of European integration perceived as a threat with respect to one’s values.”



Euroscepticism and its usefulness for comparative purposes, it is possible to claim that neither the distinction between hard and soft Euroscepticism nor the number of more refined categorisations (e.g. Kopecky and Mudde 2002; Flood 2002) seem possible to operationalize for a comparison with the Latin American case. These typologies of Euroscepticism use over-inclusive categories that are difficult to operationalize. For example, if we take the notion of hard Eurosceptics, we are in front of actors that are opposed in principle to integration and to transfer of national sovereignty. That is a category not applicable to any Latin American integration processes since they have not succeeded at developing any concrete form of supranational institutions that would or do impinge on national sovereignty and the traditional state system.

Moreover, both Anglophone and Francophone categories linked to opposition or dissatisfaction with European integration are exclusively connected to the EU and have no intention to be applied in other contexts. At the same time, the refusal of Francophone authors to use the term Euroscepticism does not lead to a unified theorization that can be elicited by an alternative concept.

Typologies such as those of Taggart and Szcerbiak (2001), Flood (2002), and Kopecky and Mudde (2002) attempt to capture different *degrees* of opposition to the EU, but they do not consider the *targets* aimed with scepticism in much detail. Even if one accepts that the most extremist opponents contest the entire process of regional integration, one can distinguish several objects of scepticism in the scholarly literature and in popular political discourse.

The target of dissatisfaction may vary from the very idea of European integration, to EU institutions, EU policies or its politicians. Even if concepts such as Euroscepticism struggle to grasp this complexity, it may offer clues that could be the starting point to a comparative exercise. If we avoid viewing the EU in terms of its end goal – that is, a supranational political union – but instead consider it as a political system ‘in the making’ (Hix, 2007), the focus will be placed on the EU polity rather than a specific European model. In this sense, Euroscepticism might inform views of regional integration more generally, including in Latin America.

## **II. Reviewing the (scarce) Latin American Literature**

Most of the literature devoted to Latin American regionalism stresses the role of pro-integration forces and relativizes the voices of opposition. According to Rivarola Puntigliano and Briceño-Ruiz, “Despite the hurdles, integration remains a firm issue in the official agenda of Latin American countries, and regardless of ideological divisions, no government rejects the integration idea” (2013: 3).

Some authors acknowledge the resistance to pursuing further integration as an important feature of the internal political debates in each country –in some cases fearing the hegemonic role of Brazil, in others trying to avoid a linkage to any kind of supranational dimension or diversion of international trade (Rivarola Puntigliano, 2013: 43)–. However, in general, the literature on the topic tends to ignore opposition. The study of opposition to regional



integration is relevant not only due to its political implications but also because it helps explain citizens' basic ways of thinking about it.

The literature about legitimacy, democracy and politicization in Latin American integration processes is scarce. The focus of research has been on economic matters such as trade and investment. Summarizing this (limited) academic literature, two sets of studies can be separated for analysis. On the one hand, the literature on opposition to integration processes in Latin America does not constitute a consistent body but comprises scattered works (e.g. Grugel 2005, 2006; Hurrelmann and Schneider 2015; Ramos 2011, 2013; Pasquariello Mariano et al. 2000). With the exception of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the role of public opinion in regional economic schemes in Latin America has been largely devoid of study (for some rare exceptions see Seligson 1999 and Jara Ibarra 2014). Apart from a few studies conducted by Latinobarometro, Latin Americans' support of/opposition to integration has not been substantially explored.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, there are studies mostly focused on the role of civil society organizations *vis-à-vis* regional integration processes in the Americas. This literature knows essentially two successive waves: the first derives from the creation of Mercosur in 1991 and the second from the start of negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in the early 2000's and the debates around it (which ended when the process stalled). Apart from these few particular moments, hardly any attention has been devoted to regional integration among the general public. The main unit of analysis of this body of literature is civil society and civil society organizations, not opposition to regional integration processes (Grandi and Bizzozero 1997, 1998; Junqueira Bothelo 2003; Korzeniewicz and Smith 2003; Ostry 2002; Pearce 2004).

### **III. Analytical Framework**

As we have seen in the previous section, the notions of Anglophone Euroscepticism and Francophone resistances do not perfectly suit the parameters for a comparative exercise. The complexity of the EU system and its policies add to this challenge. The character of Euroscepticism can become multidimensional. It may be defined in terms of modes of opposition (diffuse, specific), targets of opposition (authorities, regime, community), intensity of opposition (hard, soft), indicators of opposition (principle, practice, future of integration) and type of opposition (utilitarian, sovereignty-based, democratic, social) (Vasilopoulou, 2018: 26).

What might be missing here is the possibility to distinguish between different moments in the process of European integration. As we have noted earlier, Euroscepticism never stands still. The target of opposition is always evolving (Leruth, Startin and Usherwood, 2018: 3). This is a methodological problem since we are dealing with a moving target. Focusing on its dynamic nature, opposition to European integration has evolved in parallel to the process itself. Thus, one can argue that the meaning of Euroscepticism varies across time (Leconte, 2010: 4), as the policy agenda changes (Hix, 2007: 138). Resistance to the project of the common market in the 1950s is not comparable to the opposition to political integration (with an EU

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<sup>8</sup> Especially in terms of multivariate analysis. An exception is a study by Seligson (1999).

citizenship, a common currency and a common foreign and defence policy) embodied in the Maastricht treaty in the 1990s. In the first period, hostility to the European project was expressed either because integration was regarded as a capitalist project—where member states were obliged to liberalize their markets and open up to capital mobility<sup>9</sup> and/or because it was seen as being incompatible with national sovereignty (Leconte, 2010: 101).

In this sense, opposition to regional integration in Latin America could mirror the hostility to the European project in its first stages, when the project was an economic enterprise aiming at integrating markets through trade liberalization and free movement of factors of production. Thus, in the Latin American case, we focus on opposition to economic integration. Since integration processes in Latin America have not evolved towards supranationality or other complex forms of governance, we can consider them as economic endeavours with practically unchanging goals, unlike the EU.

In this sense, we avoid looking into the principles upon which the integration process is based, the government or its policies on the integration realm. Rather, we focus on the integration process as a whole. In particular, this article examines the opposition to regional economic integration<sup>10</sup> in Latin America among public opinion and the factors that can be identified to determine citizens' attitudes towards it.

#### **IV. Public Opinion and Regional Integration**

While political parties have developed considerably in their expression of Eurosceptic or oppositional views, they are not the only way in which opposition has been articulated. Public opinion plays a prominent role in political contestation over the EU. Even if neglected for decades when a 'permissive consensus' (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970) prevailed, public opinion started to manifest disapproval over European integration and a 'constraining dissensus' emerged (Hooghe and Marks, 2008). The 1992 rejection by Danish voters of the Maastricht treaty showed that without public support, progress on the integration process could be suspended or even reversed (Seligson, 1999: 131).

Within the far-reaching literature on public opinion towards the EU and the process of European integration, two perspectives dominate the discussion: the utilitarian and the national identity approaches.<sup>11</sup> Utilitarian theory is reliant on self-interested or macro explanations of political attitudes, and suggests that citizens are more likely to support integration if it results in a net benefit to the national economy or to their own pockets

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<sup>9</sup> Gabel claims that liberalization increases the value of the assets possessed by those with higher incomes and higher levels of education. As a result, citizens who possess high levels of 'human capital' (economic assets and education) are less likely to be anti-European than citizens with lower levels of human capital (Gabel 1998), as we note in section V.

<sup>10</sup> Note that 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2016 Latinobarometro's surveys not only ask interviewees about their attitudes on economic integration, but also on political cooperation or political integration among Latin American countries. This last question was excluded from our analysis in order to maintain its homogeneity and coherence.

<sup>11</sup> Although the literature proposes a larger number of explanations. Gabel (1998) for instance suggests that there are five individual-level theories about public support for European integration: cognitive mobilisation, political values, utilitarian appraisals, class partisanship and support for national government. Sørensen (2008) proposes a typology of four motivators that underpin attitudes towards Europe: economic utilitarian perspectives, sovereignty-based critiques, democratic and social Euroscepticism (Grimm, Pollock and Ellison 2018).

(Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Gabel, 1998; Gabel and Palmer, 1995). Sørensen (2008) has contributed to this literature by examining the nature of Euroscepticism from a public opinion perspective. She has identified and empirically substantiated four types of public Euroscepticism, including economic, sovereignty, democratic and socio-political. These categories essentially describe popular evaluations of the EU in terms of economic benefits and costs, infringing national sovereignty, its perceived democratic (in)adequacy and the perceived regulatory paradigm that the EU follows (Vasilopoulou, 2013: 155). Gabel (1998) demonstrates this at the micro level by showing that those who directly benefit from these economic gains, for example the highly educated, highly skilled or farmers, exhibit greater levels of support.

Hence, from a utilitarian perspective, generic support for European integration is determined by a rational cost–benefit analysis: those who benefit economically from European integration (particularly trade liberalization) are supportive, whereas those who stand to lose are more hostile (Gabel 1998; Gabel and Palmer 1995; McLaren 2006).

Studies of support for the euro have also found that sociotropic economic concerns play a role: citizens in countries that benefit economically, or are perceived to benefit economically, from membership of the EU are more supportive of the euro (Banducci et al. 2003, 2009; Hobolt and Leblond 2014; Kaltenthaler and Anderson 2001 as cited in Hobolt and Wratil, 2015: 240). In short, support is given when individuals have favourable egocentric and/or national sociotropic evaluations.

Hooghe and Marks (2004) postulate that economic interest variables account for 15% of total variance in public opinion regarding the EU but the influence of these factors is overshadowed by identity variables, i.e. exclusive national identity, multiculturalism, and national attachment. Together, these variables explain 20.8% of support for the EU (Hooghe and Marks, 2004: 417). According to these scholars, most researchers have conceptualized European integration as an economic phenomenon, and therefore considered public opinion as a function of the distributional consequences of market liberalization.<sup>12</sup>

Integration processes in Latin America are mainly free trade endeavours: a clear preference for intergovernmentalism and low levels of institutionalization, as well as for preserving sovereignty and autonomy in the national realm. Latin American integration governance is very much driven by collective intergovernmental presidentialism. These features are independent of ideological cleavages, national leaderships, and political cycles (Sanahuja, 2017: 118).

Latin American governments have focused only in establishing an economic interregional interchange whereas public opinion has been completely neglected (Manenteau-Horta 1979 as cited in Jara Ibarra, 2014: 38). Although as from the 2000s the integration process debate has gone beyond the economic dimension to include social issues –especially in the Southern

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<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, the EU is also a supranational polity and it is plausible that European integration engages national identities. In this paper we do not consider the alternative explanation for the variation in support for European integration, which focuses less on economic self-interest and more on the threat that European integration can pose to national identity and a country's symbols and values (Hooghe and Marks 2004; McLaren 2006).

Cone–, the latter still require further elaboration and presence within both the political and the academic discussion in Latin America.

## V. Hypotheses

As we have established before, Latin America has been an interesting laboratory for scholars on regionalism to test hypotheses drawn from the European experience on various issues. We will then gain benefits by using the Latin American case to nuance hypothesis developed exclusively in the EU case so far.

Subjective economic evaluations can be expected to influence public opinion on European integration. Citizens who feel confident about the economic future – personally and for their country – are likely to regard European integration in a positive light, whereas those who are fearful will lean towards Euroscepticism (personal economic prospects and national economic prospects) (Hooghe and Marks, 2005: 422).

***Hypothesis 1:** Those who feel that their national economy is not doing well, and that they personally are not doing well economically, are less supportive of integration.*

We also include background variables that have proven to be of relevance to support for European integration, such as an individual’s level of educational attainment, occupation and socio-economic position. Immediate pocketbook issues clearly have their impact on support integration, but underlying socio-economic and demographic play a role. The human capital hypothesis (Gable 1998) suggests that less educated people are more sceptical towards the EU. In Europe, those with higher education are all more supportive of integration than those with lower education.

***Hypothesis 2:** Those with lower levels of education are less supportive of regional integration than those who have completed university degrees.*

Utilitarian models distinguish between ‘losers’ and ‘winners’ of integration and suggest that education and skills may influence the level of support for the EU. Privileged people are expected to be more favourable to European integration than lower strata categories since the former have better opportunities to act in the international setting (Gabel and Palmer 1995). Highly qualified citizens are more resilient in the EU’s neo-liberal economic environment. Citizens with lower or no skill sets find themselves increasingly excluded from full labour market participation. In a simplified assumption, we expect unskilled workers to be against integration and managers or professionals to be supportive. Research in Europe has often found that professionals are more supportive of integration than blue-collar workers (Seligson, 1999: 143).

***Hypothesis 3:** Among those with the lowest level professional occupations, support is lower than among higher-level professional occupations.*

The last socio-economic variable linked to support for integration is wealth. Some studies find that well-off, more highly educated and highly skilled citizens are much more likely to favour

European integration than Europeans with lower incomes, lower levels of educational attainment and those who work in the manual, lower-skilled professions. In particular, studies show that income is likely to affect positive attitudes towards the EU (Guerra 2018: 204).

***Hypothesis 4:** Those whose socio-economic level is higher are supportive of integration whilst those whose level is lower tend to be against it.*

Studies show that age groups can show different patterns across member states, but young people are generally more positive towards the EU integration process (Inglehart 1970; Gabel 1998; Di Mauro and Fraile 2012 as cited in Guerra 2018). Nonetheless, high expectations and low deliveries can affect attitudes when the EU is mostly perceived as an economic organization (Guerra 2018). The EU can represent economic benefits at the country and personal levels, but when expectations meet low delivery, the costs of long-term recession can impact on young citizens' attitudes and disengage them from the EU integration project (Guerra 2018).

***Hypothesis 5:** Those who are older are more supportive than younger people.*

The left–right dimension is an enduring marker of ideological positions and continues to structure political choice in domestic politics in Europe. While left-right ideology remains a powerful factor in how Europeans view key policy questions, the evidence has not been consistent. There is a link between left–right self-placement and attitudes towards Europe. However, we do not expect a uniform picture concerning this association. For some, right-wing people are more supportive of the EU since they expect profits from European integration owing to liberal market policies (Deflem and Pampel 1996).

***Hypothesis 6:** Those who tend to align with left-leaning parties are less supportive than those who identify with traditional parties on the right or centre.*

## **VI. Methodology and Data**

As we set out to examine the alleged opposition to Latin American regional integration processes, we need to decide on what type of data to gather in order to test the hypotheses outlined above. Within the region, revealing information can be found in Latinobarometro's reports. The Latinobarometro, modelled after the Eurobarometer on which so much European research has been based, covers all of the mainland countries from Mexico to the tip of South America, with the exception of Belize, Surinam and the Guianas.

Opposition to regional integration can be operationalized using a variety of different measures. Latinobarometro's database was used for carrying out this study. The technical details of each survey included in this study are mentioned in Annex I. We have used twelve of the available surveys on the Latinobarometro official webpage, from 1995 to 2017.

We rely on the 'economic integration' question, which asks respondents if they are in favour of, or against, the economic integration of the countries of Latin America. This question maps whether citizens hold positive or negative views of regional (economic) integration. Individuals are able to choose their position on a four-point scale ranging from "very in

favour” (1) to “very against” (4). From the first 1995 Latinobarometro to the last one in 2017 we have recorded 132,028 observations.

There are certain drawbacks, nonetheless, associated with the use of Latinobarometro surveys. First, the Latinobarometro lacks three years: 1999, 2012 and 2014. Second, unlike Eurobarometer, not all standard questions in the Latinobarometro recur over long periods of time. Even if Latinobarometro conducted several surveys about popular support for integration in Latin America, the question disappeared from the questionnaire in the 2000, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2011, 2013 and 2015 surveys.

Third, in the surveys that included this question, the choices for the respondents were slightly different from one survey to another. Sometimes it was formulated in these terms: “Are you in favour or against the integration of your country with other countries in the region?” In other surveys the question was “Are you very much in favour, somewhat in favour, somewhat against or very much against economic integration?”<sup>13</sup>

Since changes in the wordings of questions make the comparability of the data across time and space problematic, we have recoded the main variable so that lower scores reflect more support for integration, while higher scores indicate greater opposition. We have conducted a logistic regression analysis on a recoded, dichotomous version of our variable. For the analysis we have distinguished between individuals holding positive views of integration (scoring 1 and 2, here recoded as 0), and the rest of respondents (values 3 to 4, here recoded as 1).<sup>14</sup>

The data analysis then focuses on the factors that relate to higher or lower opposition to integration among Latin Americans, and concludes with a logistic regression analysis of those factors. The data analysis focuses on the factors that can relate to higher or lower support for integration: socio-economic and demographic variables (age, years of education, socio-economic situation,<sup>15</sup> and occupation), economic variables such as the citizens’ perceptions of their national and individual economy, and political variables, which target here only ideology (left-right).<sup>16</sup>

Note that to incorporate the variables of interest in the model, a recoding was needed, since most of them were categorical variables, not quantitative variables (creation of dummies). In model 1 that considers all variables, the variable “occupation” was not significant; i.e., the interviewee’s occupation did not interfere with the opinion she/he has about regional

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<sup>13</sup> The response option for the question was dualistic in the 1995 and 1996 surveys.

<sup>14</sup> The “Don’t know/ Don’t answer” (DK/DA) responses are first excluded from the database so that the focus from this point on is on those who hold an opinion.

<sup>15</sup> As in many surveys, the Latinobarometro did not ask directly about income since many respondents refuse to answer this question or provide a deceptive answer. A better measure of the respondent’s socio-economic level is obtained by the perception of the interviewer.

<sup>16</sup> Even though there have been several changes in the wordings of the questions, these are some examples of the questions that tackle our main variables. National economy: In general, how would you describe the present economic situation of the country? Would you say that it is very good, fairly good, about average, fairly bad, or very bad? Individual economy: In general, how would you describe your present economic situation and that of your family? Would you say that it is very good, good, about average, bad or very bad? Education: Years in education of respondent, Occupation: Respondent actual occupation. Age. Socioeconomic level. Very good, good, average, bad, very bad. Ideology: In politics, people normally speak of ‘left’ and ‘right’. On a scale where 0 is left and 10 is right, where would you place yourself?

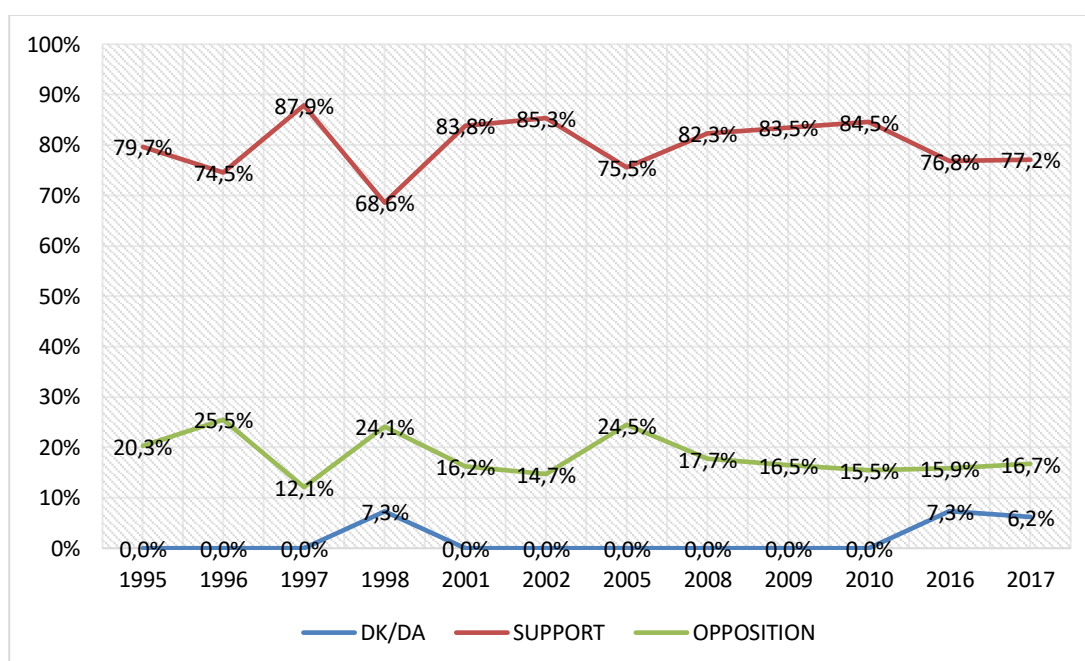


integration. Then, a new model (model 2) was set disregarding the occupation of the interviewee and all variables were significant. The results of the regression estimations are presented in Table 1.

## VII. Results

The data analysed about the opinions of Latin American citizens demonstrate a generic support for integration. It is not surprising though that the attitudes of public opinion towards integration has oscillated over time (Graph 1). Opposition hit the highest point in 1996 and it raised again in 1998 and 2005.<sup>17</sup> However, opposition to regional integration has never reached the 25.5% nadir of 1996 again. It is nowadays around 16%.

**Graph 1. Opposition/support integration (1995-2017)**



**Source:** Author's elaboration based on Latinobarometro

Even though the experience with economic integration in Latin America is more recent and more limited than in the European case, the individual-level patterns we find in this analysis mirror closely those uncovered in Europe. The results show a clear and strong relationship between Latin Americans' perception of their nation's and their own economic situation and support for integration, which is clear from Table 1. Conversely, those most pessimistic about their personal and national economy are against integration. So, H1 is confirmed.

The other socio-economic and demographic variables shown in the regression analysis are significant predictors. Our study has identified systematic impact on individual-level support for integration of literacy (H2), socio-economic level (H4), age (H5) and political values (H6). Results show a very high correlation between those respondents who were the highly educated people and whose socio-economic situation is good and those supportive of integration. Also,

<sup>17</sup> We have found no pattern linking the super cycle of commodities and the negative attitudes towards regional economic integration in 2005.



those who are older, and who are in the centre or right of the political spectrum, are significantly more supportive of regional integration.

Overall, the stark differences predicted by the occupation theories are not present in these data. This result supports evidence from previous observations (e.g. Seligson 1999): occupation played only a small role (if at all) in determining support/opposition. It also reflects the results of Zizumbo-Colunga and Seligson (1992) who found that there does not seem to be a clear skilled-unskilled divide in citizens' attitude about economic endeavours, in their case, Free Trade Agreements. The lack of an occupation effect is, perhaps, surprising. Our view, however, is that this makes sense in relation to the dominant importance of more-direct experiential variables such as the individual economic situation or the country's economic situation.

**Table 1. Perceptions on Integration**

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2
	12,001(<0,001)***	11,357(<0,001)***
<b>YEAR</b>	-0,005(<0,001)***	-0,005(<0,001)***
<b>Country econ situation 1</b>	-1,106(<0,001)***	-1,124(<0,001)***
<b>Country econ situation 2</b>	-0,976(<0,001)***	-0,991(<0,001)***
<b>Country econ situation 3</b>	-0,847(<0,001)***	-0,859(<0,001)***
<b>Country econ situation 4</b>	-0,772(<0,001)***	-0,784(<0,001)***
<b>Country econ situation 5</b>	-0,694(<0,001)***	-0,707(<0,001)***
<b>Individ. econ situation 1</b>	-0,6821(<0,001)***	-0,688(<0,001)***
<b>Individ. econ situation 2</b>	-0,515(<0,001)***	-0,52(<0,001)***
<b>Individ. econ situation 3</b>	-0,227(0,001)**	-0,232(<0,001)***
<b>Right/Left 1</b>	-0,15(<0,001)***	-0,163(<0,001)***
<b>Right/Left 2</b>	-0,35(<0,001)***	-0,359(<0,001)***
<b>Right/Left 3</b>	-0,467(<0,001)***	-0,478(<0,001)***
<b>Education 1</b>	-1,5391(<0,001)***	-1,521(<0,001)***
<b>Education 2</b>	-1,725(<0,001)***	-1,713(<0,001)***
<b>Education 3</b>	-1,693(<0,001)***	-1,679(<0,001)***
<b>Education 4</b>	-1,616(<0,001)***	-1,606(<0,001)***
<b>Education 5</b>	-1,731(<0,001)***	-1,724(<0,001)***
<b>Education 6</b>	-1,848(<0,001)***	-1,842(<0,001)***
<b>Education 7</b>	-1,835(<0,001)***	-1,832(<0,001)***
<b>Education 8</b>	-1,956(<0,001)***	-1,954(<0,001)***
<b>Education 9</b>	-1,877(<0,001)***	-1,877(<0,001)***
<b>Education 10</b>	-1,943(<0,001)***	-1,946(<0,001)***
<b>Education 11</b>	-1,956(<0,001)***	-1,958(<0,001)***
<b>Education 12</b>	-2,157(<0,001)***	-2,16(<0,001)***
<b>Education 13</b>	-2,183(<0,001)***	-2,19(<0,001)***
<b>Education 14</b>	-2,282(<0,001)***	-2,288(<0,001)***
<b>Education 15</b>	-2,347(<0,001)***	-2,358(<0,001)***
<b>Education 16</b>	-2,281(<0,001)***	-2,287(<0,001)***
<b>Education 17</b>	-2,492(<0,001)***	-2,503(<0,001)***
<b>SOCIO-ECON LEVEL 1</b>	0,744(0,001)**	0,745(0,001)**
<b>SOCIO-ECON LEVEL 2</b>	0,0778(<0,001)***	0,78(<0,001)***
<b>SOCIO-ECON LEVEL 3</b>	0,865(<0,001)***	0,871(<0,001)***

<b>SOCIO-ECON LEVEL 4</b>	0,941(<0,001)***	0,949(<0,001)***
<b>SOCIO-ECON LEVEL 5</b>	0,984(<0,001)***	0,997(<0,001)***
<b>AGE</b>	-0,004(<0,001)***	-0,005(<0,001)***
<b>Occupation 1</b>	-0,11(0,338)	
<b>Occupation 2</b>	-0,14(0,162)	
<b>Occupation 3</b>	0,031(0,771)	
<b>Occupation 4</b>	-0,043(0,670)	
<b>Occupation 5</b>	0,021(0,844)	
<b>Occupation 6</b>	-0,019(0,908)	
<b>Occupation 7</b>	-0,017(0,879)	
<b>Occupation 8</b>	-0,061(0,546)	
<b>Occupation 9</b>	-0,045(0,664)	
<b>Occupation 10</b>	-0,045(0,665)	
<b>Occupation 11</b>	0,096(0,344)	
<b>Occupation 12</b>	0,001(0,992)	
<b>N</b>	132028	132028

**Source:** Author's elaboration based on Latinobarometro surveys

**Notes:** Ordered logistic regression, standard errors in parentheses. '\*\*\*' 0,001 / '\*\*' 0,01 / '\*' 0,05 / '.' 0,1 / '' 1

In summary, these results suggest that individuals that consider that the country economic situation is good, that the personal economic situation is good, who are older, and who are in the centre or right of the political spectrum, are significantly more supportive of regional integration. Also those who have higher average level of education (measured by years in school), with a very good socio-economic situation are more supportive.

Inversely, those interviewed who consider that the economic situation in the country is bad, think that their individual economic situation is bad, who are young and tend to vote left parties, are expected to be opposed to economic integration. Those with a basic level of education, and whose socio-economic level is low are also less supportive.

## Conclusion

Regional integration schemes are not all the same. The difference between them is not ontological, but rather of degree – the degree of scope and depth of cooperation and integration, the degree of institutionalization, the degree of supranationality, and state of development. In Latin America, despite national traditions of collective action, sub-regional mobilization is thinner and weaker.

Until now, the literature on resistance to regional integration has concentrated on the EU. There has not yet been much systematic research on attitudes towards regional integration in Latin America. We have benefited by using the Latin American case to nuance hypothesis developed exclusively in the EU case so far. After a critical review of the contemporary literature on the Euroscepticism, we argued that this notion is quite incompatible with an exercise of comparison with the Latin American experience. Both Anglophone and Francophone categories are exclusively connected to the EU and have no intention to be applied in other contexts.

However, Euroscepticism might inform views of regional integration more generally, if one points to its changing nature over time, recalling that the EU has been primarily an economic project driven by the premise of creating a common market in goods, services, labour and capital. Political and economic integration might be differentiated and so is opposition to these dimensions.

The findings from this study intends to make a (small) contribution to the current literature. Combining the information gleaned from the survey items analysed, two main conclusions can be drawn. First, opposition to regional integration is not a generalised attitude among Latin Americans. State-led, presidential-driven integration has been a persistent feature of Latin American integration, as has been the low level of involvement of citizenship. In this sense, Latin American integration enjoys some kind of “permissive consensus” (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970) among its citizens.

Secondly, socio-economic variables have proven to be directly linked to support for/opposition to economic integration. If Latin America continues along its recent path of economic growth these findings imply that it will likely see stable high support for regional integration. Conversely, the less that Latin America prospers from regional trade and the more that its economies deteriorate, the lesser support there will be for economic integration.

The present study lays the ground for future research into other factors rather than utilitarian variables to explain opposition to regional integration, such as identity-based arguments. The effect of emotions and affective considerations on the public opinion of Latin American countries should be incorporated to move the debate forward. New and more specific questions need to be asked that would allow us to better map different attitudes –and their causes– so that we have a fuller understanding of the phenomenon.

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## Appendix

### Annex I. Latinobarometro Database Observations (1995-2017)

Survey	Countries	N cases	Sampling error (average)*
1995	Argentina Brazil Chile Mexico Paraguay Peru Uruguay Venezuela	8949	3,025%
1996	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Colombia Costa Rica Chile Ecuador El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Mexico Nicaragua Panama Paraguay Peru Uruguay Venezuela Spain	1177,72	NS
1997	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Colombia Costa Rica Chile Ecuador El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Mexico Nicaragua Panama Paraguay Peru Uruguay Venezuela	1042,05	3,23%
1998	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Colombia Costa Rica Chile Ecuador El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Mexico Nicaragua Panama Paraguay Peru Uruguay Venezuela	990,52	3,21%
2001	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Colombia Costa Rica Chile Ecuador El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Mexico Nicaragua Panama Paraguay Peru Uruguay Venezuela	1068	3,04%
2002	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Colombia Costa Rica Chile Ecuador El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Mexico Nicaragua Panama Paraguay Peru Uruguay Venezuela	1100,7	3,04%
2005	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Colombia Costa Rica Chile Ecuador El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Mexico Nicaragua Panama Paraguay Peru Uruguay Venezuela Dominican Republic	1123,44	2,91%
2008	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Colombia Costa Rica Chile Ecuador El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Mexico Nicaragua Panama Paraguay Peru Uruguay Venezuela Dominican Republic	No data	No data

<b>2009</b>	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Colombia Costa Rica Chile Ecuador El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Mexico Nicaragua Panama Paraguay Peru Uruguay Vene- zuela Dominican Republic	No data	No data
<b>2010</b>	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Colombia Costa Rica Chile Ecuador El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Mexico Nicaragua Panama Paraguay Peru Uruguay Vene- zuela Dominican Republic	No data	No data
<b>2016</b>	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Colombia Costa Rica Chile Ecuador El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Mexico Nicaragua Panama Paraguay Peru Uruguay Vene- zuela Dominican Republic	No data	No data
<b>2017</b>	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Colombia Costa Rica Chile Ecuador El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Mexico Nicaragua Panama Paraguay Peru Uruguay Vene- zuela Dominican Republic	No data	No data

**Source:** Author's elaboration based on Latinobarometro

\*With a confidence level of 95%



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### **Directeur de publication :**

Bruno Palier

### **Comité de rédaction :**

Carolina Alban Paredes, Andreana Khristova

Sciences Po - LIEPP  
27 rue Saint Guillaume  
75007 Paris - France  
+33(0)1.45.49.83.61  
[liepp@sciencespo.fr](mailto:liepp@sciencespo.fr)

