

Political Leaders' Role in Latin American Foreign Policy: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This article systematically reviews the current state of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) in Latin America, focusing on political leaders, especially presidents, highlighting the region's significant but often overlooked contributions to the field. It analyses scholarly articles from both Western and Latin American journals to explore who is involved in the decision-making process, the elements that shape decision-making, and the types of decisions analysed in the region. Additionally, the review sheds light on where the knowledge originates and where it is published, underscoring the underrepresentation of Latin American perspectives in International Relations literature. It concludes by stressing the advancements in regional FPA research and the importance of integrating these diverse Latin American viewpoints to enhance the field, as the region offers rich empirical data that supports theory-building and comparative analysis.

Keywords: Foreign Policy Analysis, Systematic review, presidential decision-making, Policymakers, International Relations

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Introduction

What is the current state of research on political leaders in Latin America, and how does it connect with broader studies on leaders and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA)? Political leaders, more specifically presidents, have a pivotal role in shaping foreign policy decision-making in the region due to the prevalence of presidential regimes that grant these actors ample control and power over foreign policy matters. For this reason, scholarly works produced about the region have the potential to enrich the study of leaders by incorporating insights from Latin America, which often go overlooked due to a predominant focus on the Global North in International Relations (IR). The concern that studies from Latin America are often disregarded in Western literature is highlighted by several scholars. Books on key thinkers in the discipline scarcely include Latin American theorists (Villanueva et al. 2024). Brun et al. (2022) also note a significant disconnect and oversight of scholarship from the region. To this end, this article aims to synthesise the diverse research produced in Latin America and articulate its contributions to understanding leaders from a foreign policy perspective.

To achieve this goal, I systematically reviewed the literature on FPA and leaders, examining articles from relevant journals from Western and Latin American countries. This approach offers a more comprehensive overview of the scholarship in this field.

The question about the extent of scholarship on the region and the problematisation of the low representation of voices from the Global South in the Social Sciences, particularly in IR, is not new. The Western epistemic hegemony in the Social Sciences, which is reflected in the dominance of scholarship from Europe and North America, has been increasingly challenged by several scholars. This dominance is seen as problematic for advancing any discipline within this field. Recently, Castro Torres and Alburez-Gutierrez (2022) highlighted that academic production in the Social Sciences from the Global North often claims an unwarranted universality, potentially leading to diminished recognition of studies from the Global South. They reached this conclusion after analysing the phrasing of 560,893 academic article titles and finding that works about the Global North are less likely to mention the country's name in their titles than those concerning the Global South. In this respect, studies on the Global North are often treated as “default cases,” perpetuating a misleading notion of universality.

This sense of universality is evident in the IR field, where the discipline is recognised as dominated by the West. Villanueva et al. (2024) observe that the orthodox view of the discipline, as illustrated by the “Great Debates”, reinforces this perception by highlighting that leading scholars primarily come from the United States (US) or the United Kingdom (UK). Scholars have also critiqued how mainstream IR frameworks constrain analysis, highlighting their failure to represent non-core regions adequately and emphasising the need to transcend Western narratives to advance and complement theoretical debates (e.g., Dikmen-Alsancak and Mine Nur 2021; Quiliconi and Castro Silva 2024; Villanueva 2024). In the subfield of FPA, Klaus Brummer and Valerie Hudson (2017) edited a special issue that questioned the boundedness of FPA theory, including whether there is a North American bias in using theoretical frameworks. They conclude that understanding foreign policymaking outside North America does not require a completely new set of analytical tools. However, they argue that mainstream theories of FPA could be refined and made more precise by incorporating perspectives from non-Western countries (Brummer and Hudson 2017). In this context, this article aims to provide an updated overview of the current state of the art in the FPA field, focusing on leaders. Furthermore, it seeks to illuminate the broader landscape of this scholarship by addressing questions such as where the knowledge is coming from, the languages used, and the academic journals that feature the most publications on Latin America and FPA.

This article contributes to the broader field of FPA by highlighting how insights from Latin America can complement and expand existing theoretical frameworks. By examining leadership dynamics in a region marked by diverse political systems, varying institutional strengths, and distinct ideological trajectories, the study emphasises the adaptability of mainstream FPA approaches to non-Western contexts. While the focus remains on Latin

America, the findings have broader applicability, particularly for regions where leaders play a central role in shaping foreign policy amid diverse institutional or structural constraints. This piece is organised as follows. The first part provides a brief review of previous work addressing similar questions, allowing for comparing and identifying potential advancements and challenges. The methods used for the systematic review are detailed in the second section, followed by an analysis of the findings. The conclusion reflects on the main results, acknowledges limitations, and suggests avenues for future research.

Tracing Foreign Policy Analysis Research in Latin America

Previous scholarly works have highlighted the importance of reviewing the evolution of FPA in the Latin American region to better understand the role of domestic factors in shaping foreign policy. Giacalone (2012) primarily examined developments up to the early 2000s, highlighting the challenges of generalising across the region without considering the unique cultural-institutional contexts of each country. Her analysis focused on the distinct FPA trajectories in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela. Giacalone (2012) noticed that most theory-driven FPA studies in the region that appeared during the 1980s largely concentrated on the possibility of pursuing an autonomous foreign policy. However, she asserts that this is no longer the central debate in the discipline, as by the 2000s, the “black box” of Latin American foreign policy started to be “opened much wider than in the past century” (Giacalone 2015: 32). This new phase incorporates analysis at the individual and group decision-making levels, as well as domestic politics, public opinion, and national identity. Overall, she observes that the regional scholarship aligns with the mainstream evolution of FPA, albeit somewhat belatedly.

Bertucci (2013) examined the scope, objectives, and research methods employed in studying US-Latin American relations from 1989 to 2008. His analysis covered articles published in fifteen leading International Relations and Area Studies journals and non-edited books. He discovered that most research in this period focused on “foreign policy analysis”, adopting mainly descriptive approaches and qualitative methods (98.1% of the studies). Bertucci (2013) also observed that research trends seemed detached from the broader field of IR. A downside of the article is that it mentions “foreign policy analysis” without clearly defining whether it refers to FPA as a distinct subfield or, more broadly, to the analysis of foreign policy. This ambiguity leaves the specific state of the FPA field unclear.

The significant role of political leaders, particularly presidents, in foreign policy decision-making in the region is widely acknowledged by scholars. Malamud (2015) argues that presidents typically enjoy considerable leeway to navigate institutional and political constraints in foreign policy, possessing enough power to overcome or bypass veto players within the cabinet, congress, national autocracies, and regional institutions. For instance, presidents have played a pivotal role in managing regional organisations like the Southern

Common Market (MERCOSUR), where their intervention “has become a structural element of the integration process” (Malamud 2005: 159). Similarly, Brun et al. (2022) discuss how decision-making in foreign policy is often centralised around the leader, especially in the case of populist figures. Beyond possessing the usual powers of executive heads in Latin America, they note that these leaders frequently sideline the traditional diplomatic service—which they view as part of the denounced elite—in favour of a more eclectic group of advisers on international issues. They also note that while there is a recognised body of regional theory about populist governments, the current research landscape shows a notable lack of publications from Latin America on this topic. There is also minimal critical engagement with the growing body of literature on similar cases elsewhere.

Merke, Reynoso, and Schenoni (2020) provide a valuable analysis of the role of presidents by examining patterns of continuity and change in Latin American foreign policies. They explored why states in Latin America change their foreign policies and, through an expert survey on regional foreign policy preferences from 1980 to 2014, discovered that presidential ideology is the primary factor driving foreign policy change. They concluded that presidents almost exclusively define these changes and that shifts in their ideology, rather than in their power, are the main drivers of policy change. Additionally, they posit that while strong bureaucracies may constrain presidents, they may also act capriciously during presidential crises when their power is threatened (Merke, Reynoso, and Schenoni 2020).

While leaders in Latin America play a crucial role in foreign policy-making, it is essential to note that, in line with research within the FPA field, presidents operate within the constraints of institutions and bureaucracies. Latin American countries vary in the strength of their domestic institutions, which affects the extent to which leaders can steer foreign policy according to their interests. For instance, well-established foreign policy bureaucracies can counter leaders’ agendas in countries like Brazil or Chile. For instance, Belém Lopes, Carvalho, and Santos (2022) show that during Bolsonaro’s presidency, foreign policy achievements were minimal, primarily restrained by Brazil’s legislative and judiciary branches, with any shifts being mostly rhetorical rather than structural. Similarly, Minke Contreras (2021) examines the interplay between foreign policy and development in Ecuador and Chile and concludes that bureaucratic institutions like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decentralise decision-making, limiting presidential personalism and promoting long-term policy coherence, whereas, in Ecuador, weak institutional constraints allow presidents like Rafael Correa to dominate foreign policy, using it for regime survival rather than development.

The study of the Latin American region faces several challenges that can affect both the quantity and quality of scholarship. For example, restricted access to certain types of information can limit scholars’ ability to employ diverse methodological approaches.

Specifically, accessing governmental documents, leaders' speeches, or interviews is often difficult due to a lack of public records or archives on websites. Information frequently becomes lost once governments leave office, with available data scattered across various websites, archives, ministries, and personal libraries (Thiers 2020). Giacalone (2012) highlighted this challenge in Brazil, noting that studies of Brazilian international behaviour were compromised until the mid-90s due to restricted access to government archives during the military regime. This problem extends to other Latin American countries, such as Argentina and Chile, which experienced dictatorships in the 1970s. These dictatorships significantly hindered the development of scholarship across the Social Sciences and Humanities, exacerbated by severe censorship and repression, the persecution and exile of scholars, and institutional control by the governments.

Methodology

While the important works previously mentioned lay a strong foundation for understanding the landscape of the study of foreign policies in Latin American countries, they tend to either focus on historical perspectives, concentrate on a single country, or lack a systematic review of existing research. This article addresses these gaps by employing a systematic review methodology to provide a comprehensive overview of the latest developments in the study of leaders within the region. A systematic review was chosen over other methods, such as meta-analysis, primarily due to the heterogeneity in designs, methodologies, frameworks, and measures among studies in the region, making statistical analysis impractical. Instead, the focus is on providing a preliminary, comprehensive overview of the literature.

The review was carried out in four stages, each providing insights into the current research on FPA and leaders in Latin America. It covered articles published in eighteen journals (listed in Tables 1 and 2) from 2020 to 2024. This short time frame was chosen to capture the most recent research in the field, ensuring an up-to-date account of scholarship in the region. I used the Scimago Journal and Country Rank (SJR) to select these journals to identify the highest-ranked outlets in the International Relations category. An exception was made for the journal *Foreign Policy Analysis*, which, although not among the top journals, was included due to its obvious relevance to this review. While ranking does not always guarantee the highest quality or inclusivity of all relevant scholarship, focusing on high-rated journals helps capture widely recognised research and key debates within the field. Although this selection excludes some important journals that offer relevant scholarship on the region, it aligns with the study's objectives and the practical constraints of conducting a systematic review, given the vast amount of data involved. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the entire scope of research in the region but provide a reasonable overview given the constraints, acknowledging the limitations in making broader generalisations.

The search was organised into three categories: (1) International Relations journals based in Western countries, (2) Journals from Latin American countries covering both Politics

and International Relations, and (3) Area Studies journals focused on the region based in Western countries. The search included articles in both English and Spanish.

First Mapping

In this initial phase, I manually reviewed all the publications in each of the eighteen journals from 2020 to 2024, selecting those that met the specific criteria. The selection criteria varied across different categories of journals to ensure a comprehensive overview of the region’s coverage. During this stage, 3,013 articles were screened based on the information in their titles and abstracts. Articles related to populism require a more detailed examination as they usually focus on the leader, even if they do not explicitly mention them in the title or abstracts. Thus, a quick search within the paper’s body was carried out to check whether the content was potentially relevant.

To gain a general overview of research on Latin America, despite the specific focus, the revision began by searching International Relations journals that were not based in the region. This process included all publications that mentioned any Latin American country or political leader, offering a broader perspective on how the region is represented in general academic outlets. Table 1 presents the results of this screening, showing the number of studies on Latin America found in general International Relations journals.

Table 1. Articles in General International Relations Journals

Journal	Country	Total Articles	Articles meeting criteria	% of total articles about Latin America
World Politics	US	98	15	15.3%
International Organization	UK	146	2	1.4%
Foreign Policy Analysis	US	175	10	5.7%
European Journal of International Relations	UK	210	7	3.3%
International Security	US	84	3	3.6%
International Studies Quarterly	US	467	23	4.9%
International Affairs	UK	421	26	6.2%
Review of International Studies	UK	207	17	8.2%
TOTAL		1808	103	5.7%

The second screening focused on journals based in Latin America and Area Studies outlets from other regions. This search was more specific, targeting articles that mentioned any Latin American political leader, foreign policy, or terms like “populist,” “executive,” “president,” and “authoritarian,” along with their variations (e.g., “populism,” “presidential”). Table 2 presents the studies that reference leaders, foreign policy, and related terms.

Table 2. Articles in Journals Based in Latin America and Area Studies

Journal	Country	Total Articles	Articles meeting criteria	%
Revista de Ciencia Política	Chile	105	55	52.4%
Latin American Politics and Society	US	126	27	21.4%
Estudios Fronterizos	Mexico	106	3	2.8%
Revista Científica General José María Córdova	Colombia	202	13	6.4%
Journal of Politics in Latin America	Germany	69	27	39.1%
Política y Gobierno	Mexico	56	17	30.4%
Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional	Brazil	106	23	21.7%
Latin American Research Review	US	200	26	13.0%
Latin American Policy	UK	131	29	22.1%
Canadian Journal of LA and Caribbean Studies	Canada	104	9	8.7%
TOTAL		1205	229	19%

Second Mapping

This stage involved screening the 332 articles in all the journals meeting the criteria mentioned in the first mapping. Articles that contained the relevant search terms but did not directly address foreign policy issues in their titles or abstracts, or those that mentioned Latin America but primarily analysed foreign policy from the perspective of different actors (e.g., US foreign policy towards the region), were excluded. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Articles that Address Foreign Policy Issues

Journal	Articles meeting criteria
Foreign Policy Analysis	8
International Organization	1
World Politics	1
Revista de Ciencia Política	10
Latin American Politics and Society	6
Estudios Fronterizos	1
Revista científica General José María Córdova	7
Journal of Politics in Latin America	3
European Journal of International Relations	1
International Security	0
Política y Gobierno	0
International Studies Quarterly	9
Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional	20
Latin American Research Review	5
Review of International Studies	5
International Affairs	12
Latin American Policy	14
Canadian Journal of LA and Caribbean Studies	1
TOTAL	104

Third Mapping

This phase involved screening the full texts of 104 articles that met the previously mentioned criteria. Only those that referenced Foreign Policy Analysis as a framework guiding their analysis were included. Exceptions were made for articles that did not explicitly mention FPA but were published in the journal Foreign Policy Analysis or were part of a special issue dedicated to FPA. While the review identifies several works that discuss leaders and their role in shaping foreign policy without explicitly mentioning FPA as a framework, focusing on studies that reference it offers a clearer sense of the field’s current state in the region, which still appears to be quite niche. This review resulted in twenty-six articles, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Articles Mentioning FPA

Journal	Articles
Foreign Policy Analysis	8
Latin American Politics and Society	2
Revista científica General José María Córdova	1
Journal of Politics in LA	1
International Studies Quarterly	1
Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional	8
Latin American Research Review	1
International Affairs	2
Latin American Policy	2
TOTAL	26

Fourth Mapping

A total of 26 articles were analysed in-depth to synthesise the existing research on Latin America within the field. The analysis addressed the following questions: 1. Who is involved in the decision-making process? 2. What elements shape decision-making? 3. What type of decisions are being analysed? 4. What about the leader shapes decision-making? 5. What is the methodology employed in the study? 6. What are the methods and data used in the study? 7. What countries are being studied? 8. What is the research question? 9. What are the affiliations of the author(s)? and 10. In which language was the article written?

Findings

Overview of the General Situation of Studies Conducted on Latin America

In general terms, the initial search indicates an underrepresentation of the region in Western International Relations journals, with only 5.7% of the scholarship focusing on Latin America. Of the studies addressing Latin American foreign policy across all reviewed journals, 25% employ FPA as an analytical framework.

The majority of the research on leaders and foreign policy appears in the journal *Foreign Policy Analysis* (31%) and *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* (31%), followed by *Latin American Politics and Society* (8%), *International Affairs* (8%), and *Latin American Policy* (8%). Of the twenty-six articles reviewed, only one was written in Spanish, with the remainder in English, suggesting that access to scholarship on this topic might be limited for non-English speaking scholars from the region. It is relevant to point out that the low number of articles in Spanish appears to be more related to the limited scholarship produced in the IR field rather than a definitive statement about the lack of scholarship published in this language, as most of the studies written in Spanish found in the journals were in the field of Politics and not International Relations.

Concerning where scholarship about the region on FPA and leaders comes from, the review indicates that 46% originates from Latin American institutions, followed by 31% from European institutions. Additionally, 12% comes from collaborations between European and Latin American institutions, while North American and African institutions contribute 8% and 4%, respectively. The authors of these articles are primarily affiliated with institutions in Brazil (50%), with others based in the UK (16%), Germany (7%), the US (7%), Argentina (5%), and Colombia (5%).

This review highlights a strong emphasis on Brazil, as it is the most frequently studied country, and it is involved in 61.5% of the articles. Argentina, Venezuela, and Paraguay also appear in some studies, each mentioned in 15.4% of the articles. Other countries are mentioned less frequently, such as Bolivia (8%) or in a single study (Chile, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, Colombia). Note that some studies include more than one country. The underrepresentation of some countries can have several potential explanations. First, it might be that scholars in the IR field in these countries are either not particularly interested in or unfamiliar with FPA. Alternatively, these scholars may publish their work in other journals not highly rated by the Scimago Journal and Country Rank (SJR) and, therefore, were not included in this review.

Overview of Methodology and Methods

This review also examines the main methodological approaches used in these studies to understand how FPA is being applied in Latin America. The results show that 65% of the articles employed qualitative methodologies. Within this group, studies used a variety of methods, including qualitative content analysis, process tracing, ethnographic observations, document analysis, and qualitative reviews. Another 31% of the studies used quantitative methodologies involving statistical analysis, regressions, and quantitative content analysis. Finally, 4% of the revised works employed mixed methods, typically combining statistical analysis with qualitative content analysis of interviews and documents.

The data employed to conduct the analyses vary and combine the use of speeches and public statements, interviews with stakeholders, documents, media, and databases. Other far-less-used data sources come from experiments.

What Does Latin American Scholarship Have to Say About FPA and Leaders?

Key Agents in Foreign Policy Decisions

The review indicates that 81% of the studies recognise the figure of the president as the central agent involved in foreign policy decision-making, even though this is not always explicitly mentioned. Leaders who have attracted the most attention from scholars align with the strong focus on Brazil; the most studied presidents are Jair Bolsonaro and Dilma Rousseff. The Foreign Affairs Minister and Ministry are mentioned in 50% of the articles. However, they predominantly highlight the president as the one who ultimately has the power to make decisions, for instance, in appointing for these positions. Some studies mention foreign policy elites, including diplomats, as relevant in decision-making (15%).

Studies focusing on the role of interest groups, public opinion, and civil society make up 15% of the articles. While some of these studies employ new methodologies to evaluate the relevance of public opinion in the region, the exact influence on decision-making remains ambiguous. Despite recognising the importance of public opinion and successfully assessing it, these studies struggle to clearly define its impact on policy decisions. This challenge is not unique to this region but is commonly encountered in research at this level of analysis. Conversely, there is more evidence supporting the influence of interest groups, especially economic ones, on decision-making processes in the region. Additionally, the roles played by the legislative branch and military advisors are mentioned.

Types of Foreign Policy Decisions

The foreign policy decisions analysed in the reviewed studies span a wide range of topics. This information falls into three main categories:

The first category, policy changes and adjustments, accounts for 46% of the articles reviewed. It focuses on explaining the shifts in direction, emphasis, and execution of foreign policy. It covers various aspects, from the politicisation of foreign policy, which can affect domestic and international perceptions, to strategic adjustments to adapt to global changes or correct previous policies. This category underscores the dynamic evolution of foreign policy stances in Latin American countries and the internal deliberations that lead to significant policy modifications.

The second one, international cooperation and leadership, represents 35% of the studies and involves decisions that strengthen international relations through cooperation or assert a country's leadership on the global stage. It includes contributions to international peacekeeping, engagement in global climate initiatives, and leadership in regional or international organisations. These decisions aim to build a positive international identity, enhance bilateral relations, and participate in international agreements that shape global governance.

The third category, security and diplomacy, comprises 19% of the studies and focuses on decisions related to managing national security threats, resolving conflicts, and handling diplomatic challenges. It covers direct security-related activities, such as military crises and conflict resolution, and broader diplomatic manoeuvres, including managing sovereign debt and restructuring diplomatic guidelines.

Drivers of Foreign Policy Decision-Making

Regarding what influences foreign policy decision-making in the Latin American context, the studies are categorised into three main factors:

The first category can be identified as leadership traits, ideologies, and styles. This category, comprising 46% of the studies, focuses on personal attributes and psychological factors of leaders that impact their decision-making. It includes leaders' emotions, cognitive styles, personal ideologies, and perceptions of identity as central drivers.

The second category, domestic dynamics, representing 42% of the articles, covers internal factors within the country, such as regime types, legislative processes, bureaucracies, economic conditions, and public opinion, all of which influence foreign policy decisions.

The third one, multilevel influences, making up 12% of the works reviewed, studies in this category examine the interaction and influence of various factors across different layers or levels. They consider the interplay between the executive, bureaucracies, and pressure groups and the effects of international transformations and responses to international peers and pressures from the West.

Leader-Specific Influences on Foreign Policy

These studies, focusing specifically on leaders and the factors considered important in shaping foreign policy, often overlap, making it challenging to assign precise percentages or draw clear distinctions. However, the studies can be grouped into two main clusters namely 1) the psychology of the leaders; and 2) strategic and opportunistic behaviour.

Psychology of the leader includes personality traits, ideologies (particularly those related to populism), identity, and emotional and cognitive factors such as beliefs. Strategic and opportunistic behaviour focuses on the calculated use of foreign policy to achieve broader political objectives. It includes strategies to enhance national prestige, handle domestic opposition, and utilise foreign policy as a platform to stabilise their leadership or manipulate political landscapes to their advantage.

Topics Covered

While the number of studies focusing on FPA and leaders is relatively small, they explore a broad array of topics and research questions. These studies are closely linked to the issues of foreign policy that are salient in each country. This specificity can be seen as a strength because

it provides tailored explanations for foreign policy decision-making. However, it also poses a challenge as generalisations and broader theories are more complicated to develop. This issue and the tendency to concentrate on a single policy issue or event align with observations made by Merke et al. (2020).

For instance, studies about Brazil in the last four years have concentrated on the changes in foreign policy resulting from the significant shifts in presidential leadership and Brazil's role as a regional leader (e.g., Guimarães, Fernandes, and Maldonado 2020; Silva 2022; Pecequilo 2022; Doctor 2023). Meanwhile, research on Argentina has continued along the lines identified by Giacalone (2012) in the 2000s, focusing on the country's financial crisis. In the last four years, these studies have explored how domestic economic issues affect Argentina's global position (Fouquet 2023) and its public diplomacy in the bilateral relationship with Brazil (Darnton 2020). Studies on Venezuela have centred on populism and its impact on the country's foreign policy, reflecting the nature of its governments since the late 1990s (e.g., Jenne 2021; Friedrichs 2022; Thiers and Wehner 2022). Giacalone (2012) noted that this focus began in the 2000s in response to the need to evaluate the significant shifts in foreign policy.

Considering the diversity of topics covered in these studies, summarising the main findings inevitably results in a simplification of these works. However, below, I outline three broad categories that capture the principal themes and patterns identified in the literature on FPA and leaders in Latin America.

1. Leader's influence and ideological drivers in foreign policy: Leaders' characteristics, emotions, and ideologies play a pivotal role in shaping foreign policy decisions across various countries in the Latin American region. The studies consistently show how personal attributes and political ideologies of leaders, particularly in populist contexts, influence foreign policy dynamics. For example, Morales's emotions had a significant impact on Bolivia's foreign policy towards Chile (Thiers 2024), while populist leaders such as Kirchner, Bolsonaro, and far-right figures exhibited foreign policy behaviours driven by ideological predispositions (De Sá Guimarães and De Oliveira E Silva 2021) and opportunistic decision-making (Fouquet 2023). These findings underscore the strong link between individual leaders' characteristics and broader foreign policy orientations in the region. The methodologies employed in these studies are akin to those used by FPA researchers in general; studies utilise Leadership Trait Analysis, surveys, and content analysis of leaders' speeches to examine their personalities, ideologies, and beliefs.
2. Domestic politics and public perception as determinants of foreign policy: Domestic political conditions and public perceptions are also shown to be relevant in shaping foreign policy decisions in the region. The studies reviewed indicate that domestic political stability, public support, and inter-governmental relations significantly influence the conduct of foreign policy. The two-level game approach is also featured in research on Latin America. For example, the ratification of international

agreements was found to be contingent upon domestic political alignments and legislative dynamics, as observed in Paraguay (Araujo, 2024). Furthermore, as evidenced in Brazil's handling of the World Cup and regional leadership initiatives, public support or opposition can impact foreign policy actions and regional influence (van der Westhuizen 2021).

3. Strategic responses and international relations dynamics: Foreign policy in the region is also significantly affected by strategic considerations and international relations dynamics, which are influenced by both regional and global interactions. Research illustrates how geopolitical strategies, such as Brazil's foreign policy overstretch (Schenoni et al. 2022) or the Russo-Venezuelan alliance (Boersner Herrera and Haluani 2023), respond to internal and external pressures. These policies are often shaped by the need to manage international relationships, economic crises, and global status, complexities further intensified by events like the Cold War and shifts in global power dynamics.

Conclusion

The central premise of FPA—that domestic dynamics and leaders are pivotal in foreign policymaking—is clearly demonstrated by research in Latin America. This review reveals that the beliefs, personality, and particularly the ideology of the president are crucial in shaping decision-making. Thus, foreign policy often mirrors personal rather than purely national interests. Understanding the psychological and ideological composition of leaders can, therefore, offer predictive insights into foreign policy decisions in the region.

Furthermore, the results confirm that although leaders are crucial in shaping policies in Latin America, they operate within a complex network of other actors. Leaders also have to deal with bureaucracies, address contestation, negotiate with pressure groups, counter opposition, and gauge public opinion. Moreover, international constraints and national interests also shape foreign policy outcomes. The impact of these factors on policymaking varies with the strength and stability of institutions and bureaucracies across the region. Therefore, scholarly work analysing foreign policy in Latin America not only aligns with research from other regions but also highlights the relevance of FPA, illustrating both universal and region-specific dynamics.

Current studies in FPA and leaders in the region address each country's current events and needs, demonstrating that FPA is a relevant and useful approach for conducting research and explaining foreign policy issues in Latin America. This also shows that research produced about and from the region is flexible and responsive to the latest developments in both the country and the discipline. For instance, consistent with the finding that Latin American presidents are a main factor in foreign policy making (Merke, Reynoso, and Schenoni 2020), research in this field strongly focuses on presidential influence, indicating a scholarship that has adjusted and adapted to the region's realities.

The discipline advances in the various methods employed and the topics covered compared to previous studies. For instance, current theory-driven FPA studies have moved away from the earlier focus on achieving an autonomous foreign policy, a trend noted by Giacalone (2012) in studies from the 1980s. Recent research now addresses a broad range of domestic topics relevant to each country. Additionally, there has been a noticeable shift from the previous emphasis on US-Latin American relations. Researchers now employ diverse methods and data, contrasting with Bertucci's (2013) findings from 1989 to 2008, when most studies relied on qualitative work based on descriptions and narratives.

A key observation from this study is that research on Latin America does not significantly diverge from mainstream FPA or consider variables too far from conventional approaches. This aligns with Brummer's and Hudson's (2017) observation that there is nothing intrinsic to FPA analytical tools that confines their use to North American contexts. Consequently, knowledge produced in and about the region can help refine and expand FPA by incorporating new perspectives that reflect the unique characteristics of Latin American countries.

Due to the region's diversity, one of the main contributions of Latin America to the advancement of IR and FPA is the multitude of empirical cases it offers, particularly concerning leaders and their roles in decision-making processes. The region boasts decades of experience with right- and left-wing populist leaders, dictators, and democratic presidents, providing rich case studies on leadership dynamics. Furthermore, Latin America's unique political and social landscape yields a wealth of empirical data that can further enrich the discipline. For instance, Latin America's history of transitioning from authoritarian regimes to democracies offers valuable insights into how countries reintegrate into the international system after periods of dictatorship. This reintegration process involves navigating challenges and strategies related to international cooperation, participation in international organisations, and efforts to maintain regional peace and stability. Additionally, Latin America's experiences with economic crises, social movements, and human rights issues add layers of complexity to the study of foreign policy. These factors influence how countries in the region navigate international relations, balance domestic and international pressures, and formulate foreign policies.

While research on Latin America holds significant potential to contribute to the discipline, it is important to acknowledge some challenges. As observed from the results of this review, the region is underrepresented in top-rated general International Relations journals. Several factors could explain this outcome, including language barriers, the quality of research, limited theoretical development, epistemological differences, a predominance of empirical and descriptive analyses, financial constraints and limited resources to support research, restricted access to data, and possibly a smaller number of scholars specialising in the region. Additionally, the scant use of the FPA approach may stem from similar issues and a potential lack of interest or familiarity with FPA, which could be linked to its limited coverage in Latin American International Relations programs. Given the explicit or implicit recognition of the importance of leaders in foreign policy decision-making in the region, it would be

mutually beneficial for scholars using FPA to make their research more accessible to those interested in foreign policy issues. Efforts to present work in Latin American institutions and collaborate on projects with regional scholars could enhance the exchange of ideas and foster more comprehensive research.

While this study provides a general overview of the state of the art of FPA in Latin America, it has some clear limitations. The number of journals reviewed was limited to eighteen, which narrows the scope of the analysis. Additionally, the selection focused on International Relations journals, excluding important Political Science outlets that might feature articles on International Relations and FPA in the region, such as the *American Political Science Review* or the *American Journal of Political Science*. The emphasis on top-ranked journals in the Scimago Journal and Country Rank (SJR) across all categories further restricted the search. Other relevant outlets where scholars typically publish their work, such as *Third World Quarterly* and the *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, are excluded. The exclusion of some journals from these rankings, or the absence of publications in them, does not necessarily reflect the quality of the research. Other factors, such as language barriers or difficulties navigating the Western publishing landscape, also play a role. Additionally, this study's in-depth analysis focused solely on articles that explicitly mention FPA, leaving out research that, though not framed within the FPA approach, still addresses domestic factors influencing foreign policy decision-making.

Given these limitations, it is important to conduct further systematic reviews incorporating additional relevant journals and research that, even without explicitly referencing FPA, examines the role of domestic variables in foreign policy. This would help provide a broader perspective and highlight contributions from the region. Future research on Latin America using FPA could benefit from more studies focusing on the individual level of analysis, building on the well-established importance of leaders in the region. Such research could deepen our understanding of how decision-maker's psychology shapes foreign policy. Additionally, the instability and institutional weaknesses in some countries in the region could enrich FPA scholarship further by elucidating decision-making in unstable political environments where leaders have more room for manoeuvre and bureaucracies can be undermined. Finally, examining Latin American countries' strategic responses to assert their autonomy and navigate dependencies in a global context can guide more nuanced theories on regional power dynamics and international negotiations. All these efforts would facilitate comparisons and theory building.

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