

AmericasBarometer: Topical Brief – June 3, 2013

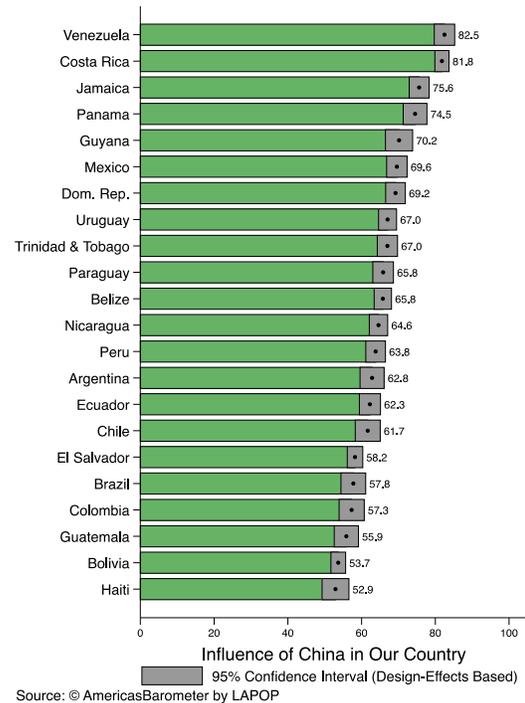
What Do Citizens of the Americas Think of China?

By Brian M. Faughnan and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, Vanderbilt University

Chinese President Xi Jinping is currently engaged in a four-country visit to the Americas. Between May 31 and June 6, he will visit Trinidad & Tobago, Costa Rica, and Mexico, and then finish in the U.S. It is well-known that economic relations between China and the region have increased significantly over the last decade.¹ But what do citizens of the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region think of China? In this *Topical Brief* we provide a portrait of opinion toward China based on results from the 2012 AmericasBarometer survey.²

China's influence in the region has not gone unnoticed by the public. Rather, the average individual in the LAC region perceives China to have "some" influence in her country. This result is based on a question that asked whether China has "none" (0), "a little" (33), "some" (66), or "a lot" of influence in the

Figure 1. Mean Perceptions of the Extent of China's Influence, 2012



respondent's country. The average for the region is 66 units on this 0-100 scale, though Figure 1 shows significant variation across countries.³ The three LAC countries hosting the

¹ See, e.g., the IADB's *Ten Years After the Take-Off* (<http://www.iadb.org/en/publications/publication-detail,7101.html?id=7809>).

² The China attitudes module was asked in 22 of the 26 countries included in the 2012 study and, for each country, of a split sample (half) of the respondents. Support for this module came from the China Research Center at Duke University. Additional funding for the 2012 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and, as well, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University. Prior issues in the *Insights* series can be found at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>. The data on which they are based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>.

³ FOR6. "And thinking now only of our country, how much influence do you think that China has in our country?" Coded so that 0=none; 33=a little; 66=some; 100=a lot. Non-respondents (16%) are not analyzed in Figure 1. Analyses in this report are weighted to account for the complex sample design and each country is weighted equally.

Chinese president's visit – Costa Rica, Mexico, and Trinidad & Tobago – are in the grouping of countries whose citizens perceive a comparatively high degree of Chinese influence. The mean scores for these countries are 81.8, 69.2, and 67, respectively. Joining Costa Rica at the top is Venezuela (82.5), while at the bottom are Bolivia (53.7) and Haiti (52.9).

But, what do citizens of the region think of the *quality* of this influence? Figure 2 presents the distribution of responses to a question that asked whether China's influence is positive, neither positive nor negative, or negative.⁴ The modal category is positive (63%). Thus, on average citizens in the LAC region are of the opinion that China's influence in their country is beneficial.

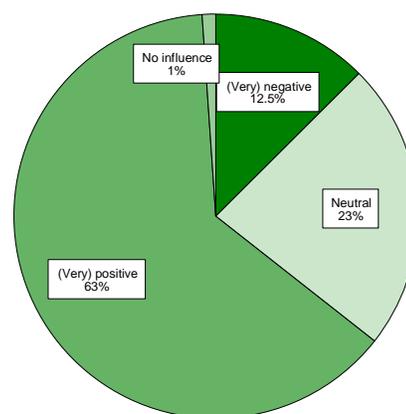
Once again, this general portrait masks interesting cross-national variation. When we examine opinions on the quality of China's influence by country, we find that the countries with the highest proportion of citizens who believe China's influence to be positive are the Dominican Republic (80%), Jamaica (80%), and Paraguay (77%). Both Costa Rica (73%) and Trinidad & Tobago (65%) are also in the upper-ranking of countries in terms of assessments of the quality of influence. Conversely, Mexico, which ranks near the top of in terms of quantity of influence (see Figure 1), is among a group of five countries in which only 50% or fewer evaluate China's influence as positive.⁵

Thus, it appears that the Chinese president will meet two different types of publics during his visit: one quite positively disposed toward China (Costa Rica and Trinidad & Tobago) and the one that perceives a strong influence, but is

⁴ FOR7. "In general, the influence that China has on our country is very positive, positive, neither positive nor negative, negative, very negative?" For this report, we combine the "very positive and positive" and "very negative and negative" categories. The 4.5% of respondents who did not answer the question are excluded.

⁵ Of those who responded to the question, 50% of those surveyed in Guatemala, Argentina, and Chile gave positive responses. This figure is 47% in Mexico and 41% in Bolivia.

Figure 2. Region-wide Assessments of the Quality of China's Influence, 2012



Perceptions of China's Influence in the Country

Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP; v47; for7; not including NR

more critical of the quality of that influence (Mexico).

Finally, we note that we find a substantial amount of non-response to many of the questions in the China attitudes battery (see footnote 3). One interpretation of this comparatively high non-response is that opinion in Latin America and the Caribbean toward China has yet to consolidate. It may well be, then, that the visit by President Xi will leave an important imprint on public opinion in the countries hosting his visit and, possibly, the region more generally.

Brian M. Faughnan is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science and an affiliate of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University. He can be contacted at: brian.m.faughnan@vanderbilt.edu.

Dr. Elizabeth J. Zechmeister is Associate Director of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and Associate Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University. She can be contacted at: liz.zechmeister@vanderbilt.edu.

More information on the AmericasBarometer can be found at www.LapopSurveys.org. The datasets are available for online analysis or download at no cost.