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Can Latin America play a more influential role in a shifting world order?

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Latin America has played a secondary role in international challenges to a unipolar world order in today's space for influence in managing the critical challenges transnational security and conflict. This article relations with a focus on Latin America's role in the relations between Latin America and the great global systemic configuration. So, it analyzes Latin strategic vision, and narratives towards the rest that derive from its economic competition, energy of nearshoring, internal and international security, to the region. Finally, it will attempt to answer the rising impact of the Global South, the influence countries, and political and ideological changes, to play a more important role than in the past.

KEYWORDS

Latin America, geopolitics, international relations, world order, great powers

1 Introduction

Latin America is a region marked by diverse economies and political landscapes, that has to date not been able to effectively represent its strategic and humanitarian interests on the global agenda. Its business card is a set of often unaligned positions and disassociated agendas that demonstrate a lack of unity. Its natural resources, cultural diversity, geographic advantages in an era of “nearshoring” and absence of inter-state armed conflict all provide the region with significant advantages. Yet, it has not been able to adequately leverage these strengths as a regional actor in the international community due to challenges including effective governance, economic development, income inequality, ideological divides, and organized crime.

Defining an increased role for Latin America in world affairs in an emerging multipolar world order will be a complex challenge. The entire region has long been overshadowed by U.S. political and economic dominance. The very concept of Latin America, an amalgam of ethnic, historical, and linguistic entities, of both indigenous and imported cultures, is also not easy to define. Here will simply look at the Western Hemisphere, beginning in Mexico and ending at Tierra del Fuego, itself a geographical entity shared by two nations. This is a space occupied by a wide variety of actors, including large and emerging economic powers, stable and failing states, micro-nations, and diverse political systems. Some of these aspire to play a more fundamental role in world affairs, while others scarcely have or need an active foreign policy beyond routine elements of relations with their neighbors.

The startling pace of changes to the world order, with the rise of challenges to the “unipolar” world dominated by the United States and its allies, will provide both opportunity and the need to make hard choices for many Latin American nations. Some nations will clearly wish to stay under the continued tutelage of the U.S. and its allies or

will simply have to do so out of economic necessity. Others will want to seek new levels of relations with countries like China and even the Russian Federation, as well as a broad range of actors in Europe, Africa, and other Asian countries. Some may wish to assume genuine leadership roles. Even now, the Latin American region maintains a complex triangular dynamic between Latin America, the U.S. and China (Hirst et al., 2024). It will be increasingly important that Latin America places its relationship with the European Union and the Global South, the latter as exemplified by BRICS on a level approaching this dynamic.

A few Latin American nations may find themselves able to maintain relative neutrality, far from the clamor of international conflicts, and carry on with what are mostly routine relations with neighboring states through bilateral contact and regional fora. These may be able to focus on domestic economic issues, social programs, migration, drug trafficking, transnational organized crime and other themes directly relevant to their populations without weighing in on issues like crises in Ukraine, the Middle East, or the South China Sea. These can avoid the efforts of great powers to set up military bases on their territory, sell them arms, insist on their political condemnation of one or another country, or influence their sovereign rights to deal with other nations as they see fit.

Many, however, given such elements as their resource-rich geography, access to Atlantic and Pacific trade corridors, increasing populations, and ideological and political aspirations will either want or need to take a more activist approach to the world beyond the confines of the Western Hemisphere. They will be able to join with individual powers from other parts of the so-called “Global South” to this end. They will also be able to use emerging alliances like BRICS, and potential reforms in the United Nations to enhance their voice. This is happening around the world, in nations such as Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, India, Indonesia and South Africa, who have found that they can have a far more profound influence than in earlier decades. There are a lot of reasons to believe that Latin American nations can do the same.

This paper will focus on ways in which the region could play a more influential role in world affairs. We will consider the most significant elements affecting the potential for Latin America to assume an increased role. These will include, existing political and economic relations with the great powers, including above all the U.S. but also China, the Russian Federation, the European Union, and that amorphous mass encompassing the Global South. The turn to the left in much of Latin America will be a recurring theme, as both ideological and more practical economic and security considerations contribute to the evolution of Latin American approaches to new global realities.

As a result of these assumptions, we will look at the global interests of Latin America that could drive changes in how Latin America engages with the world. These include economic competitiveness factors including specific issues such as nearshoring, the presence of major energy and other national resources, and decision-making mechanisms on how to manage these. We will also discuss other internal and international security factors such as combating organized crime, narcotics and arms trafficking and ensuring territorial integrity. Ideological factors will again play a role here in our examination of how Latin American nations see these as a factor in determining with which actors they should engage and

how such interactions will support their sovereign and regional interests.

Then we will conclude by assessing the potential for Latin America to play a more active role in international affairs. Part of this discussion will be to look at those nations that could play a significant leadership role, and how they might enlist the support of other nations both in the hemisphere and further abroad to promote such an enhanced role. Potential and often quite significant obstacles to this vision exist. The opportunities for Latin America in the new world order are profound; how much may be achieved is the crux of the problem.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 International relations: Latin America and great powers

Latin America must carefully balance its engagement with the great powers in the context of broader global political-economic competition among these powers. Due to their proximity and traditional influence, we will begin by devoting significant attention to the U.S., while also highlighting the role of China and the Russian Federation, the European Union, and the Global South. This work is the result of a documentary research that considers, on the one hand, the characteristics of the great powers and an analysis of their actions and relations with the different Latin American countries. On the other hand, it seeks to explain how Latin America as a whole can play an important role as an actor. The hypothesis is that Latin America can play a more influential role in a changing world order.

2.2 Great power relations: the United States

The foreign policy of the United States is still a dominant factor in shaping foreign relations throughout the hemisphere. The role of the U.S. is clearly defined by its geographic proximity and political, military, and economic engagement in the region. The Monroe Doctrine, elaborated in 1823 as a declaration that the U.S. would not tolerate European interventions in Latin America, has not always been “enforced,” but is still very much a tenet of U.S. policy even if it now relates more to Chinese economic investments and Russian politico-military alliances with Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua. While in the chaos of the U.S. Civil War the U.S. did not react to the French intervention in Mexico of 1862, the Cuban missile crisis 100 years later proved that the U.S. would intervene if it felt that military “red lines” had been crossed.

The U.S. has suffered a string of losses of allies in Latin America, due to the great wave of leftist victories in most of Latin America and differences in approaches related to migration and drug trafficking. Even such staunch allies in Colombia have changed their approach to the U.S., with the ascendance of Gustavo Petro as President in 2022. A rise in cocaine production and trafficking, domestic instability, and increasingly distant prospects of “total peace” in Colombia have now replaced the euphoria of an extended period of deep cooperation with the U.S. Colombia, at least while Petro is in office, has replaced eulogies of bilateral cooperation with bitter condemnations of the costs of the decades-long war on drugs led by the U.S. He was joined

in this critique by Mexican president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO).

For his part, AMLO took every opportunity while in office until September 2024 to express Mexico's sovereignty toward the United States, to critique "hegemonic powers," and to insist on neutrality in dealing with other great powers. This included his stance toward Russia and the war in Ukraine, and China as an investor with ever-rising influence in the hemisphere. For the United States, overt criticism of AMLO's political and economic policies was muted at the highest levels.

Turning to Mexico to begin our review of the region, at least during the American presidential election season, the U.S. appeared in general not to be seeking at the highest levels of government to intensify ideological disputes with AMLO's successor Claudia Sheinbaum and the continuance of the "4 T" plan for transforming Mexico. There have indeed been criticisms of Mexican government energy policies, perceived anti-democratic measures such as his attempts to neutralize the National Electoral Institute (INE) and successful adoption of judicial reform in September 2024. Criticisms of the clear deterioration in bilateral counter-narcotics cooperation mandated by AMLO have also led to an increased willingness to rely on unilateral law enforcement activity, such as the *de facto* kidnapping of cartel leader Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada in August 2024.

U.S. during the review of the USMCA/TMEC treaty in 2026, of the U.S. and Canada perceive that their companies are not able to compete effectively in Mexico. President Sheinbaum's declared emphasis on sovereignty as a national priority will both cause concern in the U.S. and enhance its appeal to partners in the global south.

Central America continues to experience significant problems of poverty, climate change, organized crime, corruption, and emigration. In Guatemala and Honduras, these issues are everywhere evident, with crime and poverty dominating much of the landscape and reaching extreme levels in cities such as San Pedro Sula. Even historically placid and politically stable Costa Rica has seen a rise in crime, transit migration, and climate-related challenges. Ties to the U.S. remain profound throughout the region, due to proximity, investments, remittances, cultural ties, and ongoing migration flows.

El Salvador is an interesting case. While President Nayib Bukele has fundamentally transformed the security situation and economic potential of his nation since his election in 2019, he has been criticized by the American left for his extreme methods in combatting gang violence and perceived anti-democratic drift. Nicaragua is also a special case, where former Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega began his fourth term as president in 2022, in which he and his wife Rosario Murillo have presided over a shutdown of the political opposition and increased emigration. Nicaragua is a persistent irritant to the U.S. in the region, a visible reminder of the Central American conflicts of the 1980's, and as an ally of Russia, Cuba, and Venezuela. Ortega found a path to stay in power for the long term and to enforce stability in his country, while facing condemnation by his neighbors and even squabbling with other leftist-led countries like Brazil.

Belize will remain a minor player, influenced by its former status as a British colony, issues with organized crime, and tourism, agriculture, and services-based economy. The Caribbean is hardly a monolith, with Cuba being the primary focus of American attention. Cuba's relations with Russia and China, influence in Venezuela, Nicaragua and throughout the hemisphere, and relative success for over six decades to parry American sanctions and preserve its

independence of action are the main preoccupations of the United States. There are long-standing and until now insuperable issues of governance and poverty in Haiti, and despite yet another UN intervention in 2024 and Haitian requests for reparations for historical banking predations by France and the U.S., there is no clear resolution in sight. Drug trafficking and related criminal activity, natural disasters, and limited economic development beyond tourism and agriculture in various other Caribbean states, are other challenges going forward. The Caribbean at large, however, is likely to remain a sea dominated by U.S. interests and those of former colonial powers.

Panama begins the geographic transition to South America. It has long been associated with the United States, which presided over its birth from Colombia and then cemented its economic ties with the Panama Canal, military investments and interventions, and the introduction of the dollar. Panama, despite its challenges related to banking scandals, money-laundering, and crime, should continue to occupy a position as a regional leader and will remain a key priority for the U.S. in limiting Chinese presence and telecommunications investment in the region. It has also become a key part of a treacherous migration route from South America to the U.S. through the Darien jungle.

Like Mexico and much of Central America, South America has seen the full impact of the "marea rosa" (pink tide/the turn to the left). This has many forms, that encompass a move toward economic and socially progressive movements, social-democratic and left-leaning parties, and neoliberalism. It has drawn other less neutral descriptors in certain cases such as populist, anti-American, and even authoritarian in the case of Venezuela.

The "marea rosa" has indeed, since the victory of AMLO in 2018, encompassed Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Honduras, Chile, Colombia, Brazil, Guatemala, and again Mexico in 2024. The wave has kept its strength and broad geographic appeal, while suffering some reverses such as the election in 2023 of Javier Milei in Argentina, and in Uruguay in 2020, where the election of President Luis Lacalle Pou ended 15 years of leftist rule. This, when looked at in the context of existing leftist governments in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Cuba, shows a significant trend that poses a distinct challenge to U.S. interests in the region.

In South America, the tide has been almost complete. Setting aside Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay and the small northern tier countries of Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana, it covers much of the continent. U.S. relations with South America are an interesting and diverse problem as well. While Venezuela is the most extreme case, the rise of leftist governments throughout the continent has reduced U.S. influence. Even nations like Colombia have at least temporarily dropped from the U.S. orbit. There, as suggested earlier, what was once an essential and powerful alliance during decades of cartel wars and insurgency has deteriorated to the point where President Gustavo Petro openly and aggressively criticizes the war on drugs and bemoans the losses of lives and treasure caused by his nation's cooperation with the U.S. at every opportunity. While his joint statements with AMLO suggest a unified front to this end, the real extent of that pairing is more difficult to define, and it does not yet seem to come close to a bilateral basis for regional leadership.

The frailty of Colombia's government in the face of persistent organized crime, drug trafficking, rural poverty challenges, the presence of fragmented armed groups including the ex-Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), could further complicate the

domestic stability situation. In such as case, the U.S. could again find itself in the driver's seat if a failed peace and reconciliation process leads to a renewed insurgent or regime change resulting in a shift to a more centrist or right-wing government.

Political developments in Colombia have been alarming to the U.S. given its decades-long investment there. Since the conception of Plan Colombia in 1999, the U.S. directed extensive military assistance, foreign aid, diplomatic attention, and presence on the ground to combat left-wing insurgencies and the Medellin and Cali cartels. After what had been a generation-long bilateral attempt to bring comprehensive peace and stability, in 2015 the U.S. replaced Plan Colombia with "Peace Colombia" and hopes for genuine national reconciliation after the 2016 Peace Agreement the FARC. Full realization of these hopes has been elusive, however, and violence by armed groups, internal displacement, lack of order in rural areas, emigration and renewed cocaine and marijuana production remain serious problems.

Colombia's neighbor, Venezuela, is a persistent thorn in the side of U.S. interests in the region. Its close relations with Cuba, Nicaragua, and even recent military contacts with Honduras, ensure that it will remain prominent in U.S. politico-military policy in the region. Involvement of American citizens in ill-conceived paramilitary activities intended to weaken or even bring down President Maduro leave little hope for improved relations. Maduro's re-election in 2024, itself viewed as fraudulent by many of its neighbors, further ensures continued animosity. The Russian Federation, for its part, will continue to court this failing state, which despite its economic and migration crises, is a resource-rich country that is ideally located as a potential base of naval and military operations in the Caribbean Sea.

The significant Cuban presence in Venezuelan government and security organs is yet another indicator of the importance of Maduro's regime as a foil to U.S. intentions and hopes for regional democracy, that far exceeds its size and increasingly dwindling population. Venezuela also continues to court conflict by claiming the western part of its neighbor Guyana, a small nation rich with petroleum reserves. It is one of the three northern tier countries that include Suriname, an ethnically diverse nation that is a member of the Organization of Islamic cooperation, and French Guiana, a sparsely populated remnant of empire of Devil's Island penal colony fame that persists as a testament to the colonial era.

Ecuador and Peru are also interesting cases. Ecuador, once a stable and comparatively peaceful nation, is now suffering from increasing levels of organized crime, internal armed conflict and political instability that are drawing comparisons to the worst periods of recent Colombian and Mexican history. The government of President Daniel Noboa, itself the result in October 2023 of impeachment proceedings against his predecessor, has sought military cooperation with the U.S. given the daunting challenges facing his government. The level of political chaos, however, has been further illustrated by the storming of the Mexican embassy in Quito by Ecuadorian law enforcement authorities in 2024.

Peru has been suffering from political upheaval and violence, especially since the impeachment and arrest of former President Pedro Castillo in December 2022. Corruption and political repression, however, have long been a part of Peruvian political culture. President Dina Boluarte has alliances with right-wing elements of Congress and the Peruvian military. With general elections not until 2026, her unpopular administration was tarnished from the start by the

December 2022 "Ayacucho massacre" in which troops opened fire on protestors. Her embrace of Sino-Peruvian economic relations, including a visit to China in July 2024, have contrasted with limited politico-economic engagement between the U.S. and Peru.

Both Ecuador and Peru, with their Pacific Ocean access, desirable tourist venues, and significant need for foreign and security investment, could easily develop as important players in a new economic order favoring China and Japan. Issues of poor governance and corruption might limit their potential for political leadership, but they both have major potential for becoming part of a less-U.S. centric political system led by others. Long-standing ties between Peru and Japan could certainly contribute to a more expansive view of global political engagement in that country.

In the southern cone, Chile has transformed in recent years from a bedrock of stability and calm to a far more economically challenged and politically restless society. U.S. involvement in the overthrow of Salvador Allende in 1973 and the rise of the brutal Pinochet dictatorship, may no longer be a critical factor in relations with the U.S., but Chile has shown itself to be quite receptive to other external sources of investment. Its coveted lithium reserves and other natural resources certainly give it some leverage in managing relationships with foreign partners.

The rise of Javier Milei has pushed the Argentine government back into the U.S. corner and away from what almost came to be membership in the BRICS at the behest of Brazil. This huge change to the right could last one electoral cycle or be more enduring, depending on how Argentina fares in yet another downturn in a history of economic boom-and-bust cycles. There are no indications of external crises, such as the war in the Falkland Islands/Malvinas of 1982, although in October 2024 Argentina again expressed its interest in taking control of the islands from Great Britain after the latter turned over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius in October 2024. With its oil reserves and role as an Antarctic gateway, Argentina could be a distant but ideally poised South Atlantic partner in any emerging world order.

Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay would remain as junior partners in any changes to the world order. The Bolivian left-wing government remains unstable and faces violent opposition, while Paraguay has a stable government on the right. Both, however, are landlocked and impoverished, and will have to act in the shadows of their larger neighbors. Uruguay, a quiet and peaceful nation with no clear ambitions for substantial demographic, political or economic growth, is, however, an often-influential player on social innovations despite its small size. Surrounded by the behemoths of Argentina and Brazil, it has navigated a path of constancy, although it too is experiencing some economic and organized crime challenges. U.S. political interests here are not extensive, with cold war great rivalries now less evident and only limited economic interaction.

Brazil, as the largest nation in Latin America, geographically dominates the entire continent. A combination of rich resources, Portuguese language and heritage, and incredible human and resource diversity have long ensured that it would be the South American nation of the "future." What this future will be, given its long history of political change, military governments, dueling right and left-wing constituencies and daunting regional poverty, crime, environmental challenges, and significant issues related to its indigenous population in Amazonia, remains unclear. The return of Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva to power, after the rule of the right-wing Jair Bolsonaro government

of 2019–22 and his clear alliance with U.S. President Donald Trump, has opened a wide range of possibilities.

The participation of Brazil in BRICS as a “plank owner” is increasingly affording more substantial opportunities for an increased Brazilian role in world politics, international banking and monetary system reform, and in conflict resolution as far away as Ukraine. Major courtesans, such as China in their joint peace initiative for Ukraine, will find gaining enhanced access to Brazil a compelling goal. This would include finding commonalities in political ideologies. Here, the U.S. may find that Brazil is large enough as an emerging power, that is it is increasingly free to act purely in its own self-interest and with the widest variety of global partners. In purchasing power parity terms, the BRICS will account for 37 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP) and almost half of the world’s population, with the inclusion of the new members. This would compare with 30 percent of the G7’s global GDP (Nyabiage, 2023).

The U.S. also exercise strong influence over regional issues through the Organization of American States (OAS), where its leading role enables it to dominate this forum on a wide range of cultural, economic, and political issues. Indeed, this organization was specifically created by the U.S. in 1948 to counter Soviet influence, although it has engaged in a wide variety of activities unrelated to that goal. It had 32 members in 2024.

2.3 Great power relations: China and Russian Federation

The order based on a system of post-war norms, influenced by Western power, has changed course. We are witnessing a decline of the European continent that reduces its ability to influence world events. However, the European Union, despite not being able to compete with the military might of the United States or China, remains a major international player with considerable soft power (Fitz-Gerald and Thompson, 2020).

China has become the leading advocate of a new world order based on “win-win” relations. But a “common destiny for humanity” within global capitalism obscures the fundamental reality of capitalist competition and exploitation (Harris, 2024). Due to the tendency of the Asian continent to propose itself as a promoter of a multipolar world, Stuenkel (2023) considers that there are three advantages that Latin America can take advantage of from Asia’s increased influence: its high economic compatibility; its geopolitical and diplomatic versatility that allows it to deliberately engage with China or the United States without the need to align with one of them; and a privileged place at the table of the global debate on climate change.

Relations of these two great power adversaries of the U.S. with Latin America has economic, politico-military, and ideological bases. China, as an export powerhouse, and with substantial investment capital to deploy, is certainly the dominant of the two players. Its footprint is continuously expanding throughout the continent. For now, this engagement is primarily in the politico-economic sphere, rather than as politico-military engagement designed to counter U.S. influence in the region. The U.S. regularly cites its alarm at the persistent trend of Chinese investment and expansion of commercial ties yet continues a policy approach toward Latin America that many political observers regard as one of benign neglect. In relation to China, South America has been the big winner, accounting for about

89%, on average for the period analyzed (Velosa and Pastrana Buelvas, 2023), of the Asian country’s imports from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The South American advantage, when it comes to the consolidation of markets for Chinese products, is reduced to about 58%, on average. However, the role played by Mexico in Chinese exports to the region should once again be highlighted, as this country accounts for about 29% of the regional market.

South America and Mexico have become the key markets for China in LAC, accounting for 87% of imports from the other side of the Pacific. In fact, China destined 54% of its exports to the region to just two states between 2019 and 2022: Mexico and Brazil. The case of the United States is different. South America accounts for only about 19% of U.S. imports from LAC. Mexico, on the other hand, represents, on average, 74%. This means that Central America and the Caribbean export, on average, only 7% of the total regional supply that reaches the U.S. In the case of U.S. exports, the situation is similar to the above, although not as concentrated. South America represents, on average, about 25% of the market for U.S. products exported to LAC, while Mexico is the main partner, consuming, on average, about 62% of them. Central America and the Caribbean receive about 13% (Velosa and Pastrana Buelvas, 2023).

China’s state-dominated form of capitalism, in which it can direct resources to strategic ends, provides some significant advantages. It can take a long-term view on investment returns, and link economic and political goals. This is a markedly different investment approach than that of U.S. companies, driven by short-term profit considerations and not necessarily acting in concert either with competitors or in advancing national political goals. Further, China has a consistent policy of not criticizing national governments for the quality of their democratic processes or on their record of accomplishment on cultural issues affecting their societies. One major exception of purely political intervention has been China’s mostly successful efforts to woo nations that diplomatically recognize Taiwan into their orbit.

Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and Venezuela have the highest levels of bilateral trade with China, but Chinese exports are pervasive throughout Latin America. Chinese markets, with a wide variety of inexpensive products from cell phones and consumer electronics to clothing are a major element of local commerce. Direct foreign investment by China is particularly strong in the extractive sector, but also in port, canal, and rail infrastructure, power generation, and manufacturing. This relationship is not exclusively one-way. Latin American exports to China are also significant, particularly from Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Argentina.

China is second only to the U.S. as a trading partner in the region. While Latin American countries such as Mexico express concern that the region not become another Africa in terms of the effects of Chinese investment that might lead to dependency, the imperatives for trade and investment on both sides of the Pacific Ocean remain strong. Latin America needs affordable imports of all kinds, and especially of modern Chinese technology that is cheaper than that produced in the West. China needs the raw materials that enable its exports, including oil, silver, copper, nickel, lithium, other minerals and rare earth elements, and agricultural products.

Most Latin American consumers have little interest in issues raised by the U.S. about alleged information security risks of using Chinese technology, and while they recognize that risks exist, often believe that their own governments and the U.S. government would be as or more likely to collect data on them than the Chinese. TikTok,

under fire by American authorities as a tool for propaganda and espionage, remains as wildly popular in Latin America as it is in the U.S. Huawei and ZTE products continue in widespread use, despite specific U.S. measures against these companies.

Indeed, Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Latin America has begun to shift from large infrastructure projects to investment in smaller high-tech enterprises engaged in areas such as AI, 5G, electric vehicles, and renewable energy. Overall FDI investment, however, has slowed, and is still well below that of the U.S. and Europe. The U.S. is still wary of Chinese investments in critical infrastructure, to include electricity transmission, data centres, and telecommunications, cloud computing, and internet connectivity.

China has limited military and intelligence goals in Latin America. In the case of Chinese signals intelligence facilities in Cuba, the purpose is quite clear and directed at the U.S. In other cases, this is more a subject of conjecture and possible dual use of commercial facilities. For example, the Chinese mega-port in Freeport, the Bahamas, and other investments in infrastructure, tourism, and agriculture in the Caribbean have drawn U.S. ire due to their proximity to U.S. naval facilities and even the mainland itself.

The U.S. has criticized Chinese investments in Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador as preying on weak democracies and not delivering value, while Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele characterized the Chinese as having “no-strings attached,” a clear swipe at U.S. influence in the region. The Chancay mega-port north of Lima, scheduled to open in late 2024 under the control of Chinese company COSCO, has also caused considerable angst among American policymakers both for its status as the first Chinese commercial shipping hub in South America and its perceived potential for future naval usage.

Chinese investment in Peru, actively promoted by President Boluarte in mid-2024 during her visit to Beijing, now also includes complete control of Lima’s electricity by China Southern Power Grid. Chinese investment in the Chilean lithium mining industry has also proven controversial both in Chile and abroad, as U.S. and western companies vie for access to this critical battery component, and as the Chilean government seeks to increase state control over this key resource. The issue is fraught with environmental implications as well. Further, as China has been Chile’s top trading partner since 2010, there is a significant politico-economic dimension as well.

In sum, Chinese investment in, and trade with, Latin America is a dynamic and evolving process that will have critical importance in shaping Latin America’s engagement with partners outside of the Western Hemisphere. Despite changes in Chinese policy due to cyclical economic factors and reduced emphasis on Belt and Road style projects, this trans-Pacific engagement is here to stay. How it is linked to geopolitical issues, such as the rise of BRICS and other global south initiatives, and even the reform of the United Nations, will play a key role in whether this can become the basis for policies that go beyond country-specific commercial projects to a broader regional policies and changes in international political alignments.

The role of the Russian Federation is a related, but more complex and even urgent matter given the war in Ukraine and the almost complete breakdown of relations between Washington and Moscow. The Russian Federation focuses its policy on Latin America most significantly, but not exclusively, on Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, and continues to have a large official presence in Mexico as a platform to target the United States. Russia employs diplomatic, press, and

social media efforts to counter U. S. influence, emphasize politico-military positions, and even promote its religious and family values in the Bolivarian nations and throughout the Americas. These efforts often find considerable traction as an alternative to the U.S. narrative, especially given the rise of the left in Latin American politics. Nonetheless, the Russian Federation cannot compete with centuries of U.S. presence in the region. American economic might and the importance of an increasing Latino population in the U.S. suggest that while the U.S. has lost a considerable amount of influence, it will remain the dominant superpower in the region.

The key role of Brazil in BRICS, the avowed neutrality of Mexico, and the “*mare rosa*” in Latin American politics have all provided fertile ground for the Russian Federation to advance its limited goals in the hemisphere. Its focus on Cuba has been inconsistent in recent decades based on budgetary challenges and competing political-military priorities. Engagement with Cuba is again, however, in the limelight for the Russian Federation as a response to the military role of the U.S. in Ukraine, which the Russian government regards as its “near abroad.” Cuba and Venezuela also provide convenient bases for Russian warship visits and other military activity far from home.

Nicaragua too provides the Russian Federation a counterweight to NATO expansion in Eastern Europe. In June 2022, the Ortega government announced that small contingents of Russian troops would deploy regularly to Nicaragua for training, law enforcement and emergency responses. A GLONASS navigational satellite ground station also operates in Nicaragua. While there are four such sites in Brazil, this one has drawn the concern of the U.S. for its potential use in intelligence collection.

Brazil’s participation with China and other nations in putting forth diplomatic proposals to end the war in Ukraine are also significant in that they pose a deliberate alternative to U.S. policy. The expanded role of Mexico in such dialogues, and its assertion that as a neutral it will retain good relations with Russia, is also increasingly impactful. Scepticism toward U.S. foreign policy has been directly addressed by AMLO, and indications are that President Sheinbaum will continue this tradition, emphasizing issues of sovereignty and neutrality. Sheinbaum almost immediately expressed her lack of interest in joining BRICS after assuming her mandate, indicating she understands the clear priority of relations with the U.S.

There are other elements of Russian policy in the region that have drawn the attention of the U.S., such as small investments in Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina, and activities of the Russian National Committee for the Promotion of Economic Trade with Countries of Latin America (NK SESLA) in Chile. In sum, however, Russian influence in the region at large is limited in both scope and politico-economic significance. It does not even approach the growing impact of China in the region and is only one of many larger challenges to U.S. dominance in Latin America rather than a major destabilizing factor. The impact of the Russian Federation on how Latin America adapts to the new global balance of power will, however, be more visible in United Nations reform and the expansion of both the membership and influence of BRICS.

2.4 Great power relations: European Union

The main obstacles that Latin America must overcome to play a more significant role is the need to generate greater regional

coordination, to get out of dependence on the West, which [Stuenkel \(2023\)](#) considers to be a “Western-centric” mentality among political and economic elites. The European Union considers LAC as natural partners, due to their historical and cultural ties, deep economic and social links and a common commitment to peace and multilateralism, shared values, and mutual interests. The priority is to strengthen the rules-based international system and intensify joint action to promote peace, security, democracy, the rule of law and human rights. They have a close relationship, although the region is not a priority for the EU. It is the third largest trading partner and the largest contributor to development cooperation in LAC. There is an Agenda for Relations between the European Union and LAC, aimed at strengthening and modernizing the bi-regional strategic partnership. The working method envisages summits with heads of state or government, links with the Caribbean, Central America, the Andean Community, Mercosur and direct agreements with states (27 of the 33 in total), in accordance with the EU’s external action provided for in the EU Treaty and the common commercial policy; development cooperation and humanitarian aid; international agreements, provided for in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU.

With the joint communication “A new agenda for relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean,” the [European Commission \(2023\)](#) set six priorities, including the creation of a renewed policy; the Global Gateway investment strategy to accelerate fair ecological and digital transitions and combat inequalities; and the construction of a dynamic interpersonal partnership, ratifying the importance of the functioning of the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly or EuroLat.

The relationship with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) bloc is developed through summits. CELAC was created in 2011, in Caracas, Venezuela as an alternative to this alliance. Its formation was an offspring of the 1986 Rio Group of 24 nations, on the initiative of President Lula in Brazil and President Calderon of Mexico, widely known for his determined war on drugs in direct cooperation with the United States. As of late 2024, it had 33 members. CELAC is technically the larger of the two because Cuba was suspended in 1962 from OAS until 2009. One of its summits was held in Cuba in 2014, a clear indication of the organization’s desire to be fully independent of U.S. influence. Both organizations have regional influence, but neither has had a dominant impact in forming coherent regional policies. Each, however, provides Latin America with useful precedents for how to organize on a regional basis. EuroLat hosts representatives of the Latin American Parliament, the Andean Parliament, the Central American Parliament, the Mercosur Parliament and those of Chile and Mexico. In this sense, parliamentary diplomacy is a key component of the bi-regional relationship.

There is also a sub-regional relationship with the Andean Community (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru); the Caribbean; Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama); Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) and then relations with individual States. Despite the developed formality in the relationship with LAC, the meeting with CELAC was suspended for 8 years, which indicates that the EU does not consider LAC a priority partner or a primary interlocutor, however, the EU is the leading investor in the LAC region. In the current collaboration strategy, green transition, digital transformation and human development are the central pillars of the new investment agenda between the EU and the region.

Interregional relations between the EU and LA have been concretized with the creation of a network of trade agreements with Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, the Caribbean, Central America and Mercosur. But the EU does not consider Latin America as a global player on a par with the others, leaving room for a rapid expansion of China in Latin America, to which Brussels has not paid due attention in recent years. This has led to the idea of confronting the growing struggle for influence in the Western Hemisphere gradually becoming a common thread that undermines the EU’s Latin American strategy, as [Kosevich \(2024\)](#) assumes.

Yet, The EU and LAC, which together represent one third of the membership of the United Nations (UN), play a significant role in respecting international law and share the goal of making the multilateral system more effective and representative. Together, having 60 countries, this represents more than 1.1 billion inhabitants; 28% of world GDP, bilateral trade of US\$ 400 billion per year; bi-regional investments in the order of \$934 billion per year. What a good business card.

2.5 Great power relations: global south

The delimitation of Latin America as a political-economic and geographic identity places it clearly within the Global South. This requires drawing a line of differentiation between the history of its relations with the U.S. and the region’s articulation with U.S.-led liberal internationalism. Although, following Hirst’s thesis, there is a tendency to perceive both processes as part of a single vertical linkage, they are distinct political developments ([Hirst et al., 2024](#)). The Global South is not the Third World of the Cold War, but an entity of great relevance in the current scenario. The dialogue between LA and the Global South is led by Brazil and includes Saudi Arabia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Turkey and other countries that influence, albeit in a dissociated manner, the global agenda, given their possession of critical resources, attributes of military power, financial means, technological and scientific capacity or sources of highly qualified human capital.

According to [Harris \(2024\)](#), as multipolarity grows, some see this as a new stage of non-alignment and we can say that the element that currently unites LA community are the threats, the inevitable challenges of global governance such as maintaining international peace and security, socioeconomic challenges, climate change, the water crisis, poverty, drug trafficking, migration, violence, micro-criminality, among others.

[Hirst et al. \(2024\)](#) conceives of the presence of Two different Norths and a diverse South. This is a “non-hegemonic order,” which has no start date because it emerges from a combination of processes of varying duration and effects, an order in which no single state or coalition of states and social forces would be able to establish hegemony or dominance with global reach. The order that is being formed will have two main fault lines: a gap between two opposing and different Norths (North 1 and North 2) and another gap between the two Norths and a Global South diverse in resources and power configurations, of which LA, with its own specificities, is a part ([Hirst et al., 2024](#)).

LA has enormous potential to play a leading role in the global order in coming years. Given its role as a significant component of the Global South, it can contribute directly to defining the role of the

United Nations, BRICS, and other global and regional fora on a range of topics such as the environment, security, health, and social and cultural identity. Its ability to serve as a binder between the two Norths can be a fundamental ingredient to reactivate multilateralism and its hopeful principles of cooperation.

3 Results: defining Latin American global interests

Here we will examine, as a result of the above analysis, how LA can play a role in international relations that both represents its interests and can define it as a meaningful and distinct participant in a dynamic and evolving world order. We are interested in how it can articulate and exercise a formal, legitimate, and efficient representation. We will seek to define potential leadership roles among its individual and collective members, while remaining aware of their limitations.

Before explaining Latin America's potential to play a more active role in world affairs, it seems pertinent to reflect briefly on economic perspectives and challenges, environmental challenges, political security and human rights.

3.1 Economic prospects and challenges

LAC represent the world's leading net exporter of food (14% of global food production and 45% of net international agri-food trade), while this is an impressive figure, it could produce eight times more food with appropriate reforms and investment, alleviating food insecurity.

Several relevant economic challenges appear in the Latin American context. These include higher post-pandemic levels of sovereign debt, poverty, lack of sufficient social security mechanisms and the need for reforms to strengthen supply-side mechanisms to balance import–export ratios. These must be addressed to define a clear path to successful globalization. LA must also pursue a strategy of diversification and resilience. Strengthening regional integration mechanisms in the Americas can improve economic cooperation and mitigate the risks of isolation in a divided world. Initiatives such as the Pacific Alliance and Mercosur are examples of efforts aimed at economic growth and integration started for trade reasons. The scope and institutional reach of these organizations must be developed further.

In an atmosphere of geopolitical and economic fragmentation, LA can take advantage of and benefit from nearshoring. Its countries are already strategically positioning themselves to attract nearshoring activities from North America. The region's advantages, such as lower labor and real estate costs, accessible natural resources, expanding highway, air, rail and maritime infrastructure, and favorable trade agreements all contribute to moving manufacturing and assembly processes closer to source markets. LA also stands to benefit from digital transformation, particularly in the financial and payments sector, and as fostered by public-private partnerships.

As part of its broader interaction with the global economy, the expanded presence of Latin American countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) will be crucial. Mello (2020) characterizes the OECD as an expanding organization led by the West, aimed at promoting a liberal economic agenda

through improved global governance mechanisms. While México, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica are current members, the probable inclusion of Argentina, Brazil and Peru, will afford LA an opportunity to generate an expanded space for expression of regional economic interests in a multilateral forum.

3.2 Environmental challenges

The transition from fossil fuels to renewable green energy has been taken seriously in the region, resulting in significantly increased use of hydroelectric, solar, wind and geothermal energy and biofuels. LA has a geographical and natural resource base that affords it diverse opportunities in renewable energy development. The region exports fuels, agricultural and mineral products that are crucial for the energy transition. Lithium resources in nations like Bolivia will provide the region with a key role future of the electric vehicle industry. In addition, the region has exciting potential for the production and export of green hydrogen (obtained by separating hydrogen from oxygen in water through a process of electrolysis powered by renewable energies such as wind, solar or hydroelectric), without producing emissions.

Latin American countries are increasingly adopting policies aimed at reducing the environmental impact of resource extraction and promoting sustainable development. The region is vital to the planet's ecological balance, with more than 50% of the planet's biodiversity. It is a renewable energy powerhouse (its generation mix has the highest share of renewables in the world: 61% in 2021). The LAC region is key to the clean energy transition. Thirty percent of the region's total energy supply comes from renewable sources, double the global average and, if properly harnessed, this figure could grow exponentially. The region is home to two-thirds of the world's lithium and 38% of its copper, both critical for producing clean energy and electric vehicles, including those manufactured by European car companies. A considerable opportunity in this framework is innovation in sustainable bioeconomy and *ecopreneurship* sector that brings together leaders from government, business, local entrepreneurs, and members of local communities.

With the rise of multipolarity and the reconfiguration of global power structures, LA could abandon the place of marginalization that has characterized its current role. Today's world needs the region's economic wealth (abundant natural resources, oil, minerals, raw materials for strategic productions, agricultural products), its positive demographic trend, its biodiversity (which could launch the region's leadership in environmental innovation) and a growing political and cultural relevance.

3.3 Political security and human rights

In LA it is necessary to point to a new social, economic and political paradigm that illuminates alternative paths for productive organization and consumption models that allow us to maintain a stable balance with the natural world in which we live (Ruesga Benito, 2023).

According to Acharya et al. (2021), the idea of a region not only as a place of action, but also as an identity, has developed in its struggle for independence. The contemporaneous formation of republics led

to shared efforts at the level of individual countries and at broader regional levels. But LA can manage strategic bi-regional partnerships. In the economic sphere, it is beginning to play a significant role in the scientific and technological fields.

In terms of security, drug cartels and criminal organizations undermine state authority and pose significant threats to a good government. Political stability has been affected by a wave of corruption turmoil and governance limits. Among the models that have stood out for their improvement process, it is worth highlighting the progress, however fragile, in the peace-building process in Colombia, or the transition to democratic governance in Chile. However, the region's institutional capacity and its role in international organizations still needs to be strengthened. For example, leftist governments in LA have historically pursued policies of regional integration, anti-imperialism, and detachment from the U.S., while right-wing governments have focused on economic liberalization.

Contrary to Fukuyama's (1992) predictions, we are witnessing the transition from a cold war to a hot peace, as mentioned by Parsons (1995), where soft power plays a fundamental role in the absence of leadership by States and International Organizations. This leads us to consider that in the new world order there is the empowerment of organized civil society, capable of measuring its forces with precise campaigns aimed at the protection of human rights, but also of rights whose violations are not directly attributable to States. Here, we consider promising examples of movements of cyber activism and calls for environmental protection, among others, which have a global impact (Cattafi, 2021). As a partner, LA needs political stability and good governance with a willingness to reduce corruption, strengthen institutions and civic participation and address social inequality. It is about implementing significant reforms of a structural nature, paradigm shifts, innovative policies, all with the goal of strengthening macroeconomic and social stability.

Although LA is performing below its potential, without a common voice it has attempted to strengthen its resilience. Latin American states have refreshed their international role in existing multilateral instruments such as the G20 and Brazil's leadership at COP30, Peru's role in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, Colombia's role in the COP on biodiversity, and the coordination of multilateral development banks by the Inter-American Development Bank.

Latin American participation in regional security organizations, such as the OAS and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), is crucial for addressing regional conflicts and promoting stability. But neither the OAS nor UNASUR are LA, even if they are composed of Latin American states. In this sense, the advance of autonomous regionalism led to the constitution of the CELAC in 2010, followed 2 years later by the consolidation of the Pacific Alliance with Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. These initiatives were joined by the actions of the ALBA-Mercosur axis countries and the BRICS agreements of 2014 to create elements of a new global architecture.

Advancement of both international and domestic law remain as considerable challenges. Both falter in cases such as south to north migration from the jungles of Panama to the suffering of migrants on the infamous "beast" train, where only minimum protocols are observed for the protection of human rights (Cattafi, 2021). In the new world order, we may just need to be more human, thinking that proclaiming the obligation to respect human rights should be unnecessary in a world of humans, but it is nonetheless a

fundamental operation because international agreements on human rights are precisely, as Turner (1993) reminds us, the institutional response to human frailty. Thinking of a perfect citizenship that goes beyond national ties (Cattafi, 2019) seems a matter of difficult implementation, but LA could play a role here by extending the implementation of the design of the European Union that began to be outlined with Mercosur.

This model of autonomous regionalism, which is unlikely to generate a regional union capable of interacting in a way that differs from the logic of individual state interests, contrasts with the open regionalism model of collaboration between micro-regional alliances. In this context what Gramsci (1996) saw as the formation of the *populus* embodied in a plebiscite is missing.

If the post-war period saw a renewed hegemony based on counter-hegemonic visions such as dependency, developmentalism, nationalism, race and *realpolitik* (Acharya et al., 2021), now, we are facing a new phase of the crisis of the world order, whose main feature is the direct political confrontation and large territories between central power blocs of the "global North" and emerging power blocs, deepening on the situation of relative multipolarity (Merino, 2016). In this new context, LA has a great opportunity to lead new alliances and fluid cooperation.

The alliances of interests that Harvey (2014) mentions, which he calls the representatives of the associations meet regularly to assess, plan, and carry out common tasks and to address common problems at different scales: bi-regional, continental, and global. In this sense, the construction of a genuine democracy will be arduous and prolonged, but the region maintains the ideal characteristics to be an influential partner in the new scenario. This begins with the need for LA to pursue a policy of non-alignment on issues that do not directly affect it, while vigorously advocating for global issues in which it can play a key role. A bit what, according to Heine (2024), India did in the Global South, to navigate the turbulent waters of a world order in transition.

According to Acharya's work, Latin American responses and reactions to alternative world orders in analytical and normative terms are framed by general attempts to theorize in and from the region about world order(s); by different Latin American approaches to understanding peace and security, through the promotion of the norms and institutions of international law; international political economy, (sub)development and globalization; and foreign policy formulations, through the autonomy approach, peripheral realism, regionalism, including the recent trend towards post-hegemonic regionalism and multilateralism (Acharya et al., 2021). While these variables must be considered in the analysis of Latin American reactions, it is also necessary to look inward and assign some space to the phenomenon of political polarization.

The same that McCoy (2024) considers as a systemic and multifaceted process that breaks cross-cutting ties and transforms the perception of politics into a zero-sum game. And when it becomes pernicious, political actors and partisans see opponents as an existential threat and the capacity of democratic institutions to process political conflict breaks down. In this sense, Latin American countries experience varying degrees of breakdowns where persistent and deeply entrenched social hierarchies oriented around class, race and place stand out.

Another additional challenge, generated by extreme versions of populism and authoritarianism feeds citizen disaffection and unease,

ideological polarization. [Moncagatta and Silva \(2024\)](#) reveal a substantial process of mass-level ideological restructuring, accompanied by a region-wide increase in ideological polarization in LA taking place during the second decade of the twenty-first century. They find that ideological polarization, albeit varying in intensity by country, is clearly present at a mass level in most countries in the region ([Moncagatta and Silva, 2024](#)). In addition, [Murillo \(2022\)](#) notes that polarization has been the historical norm in the region and that today, elites use polarizing strategies to attract electoral support rather than in respond to what is going on in the minds of voters.

Finally, ideological polarization refers to the increasing spatial distance between parties or citizens along a left–right continuum based on their ideological views or policy preferences ([Roberts, 2022](#)). Affective polarization refers to the adoption of positions by rival sociopolitical camps based on feelings or sentiments rather than ideological preferences ([Druckman and Levendusky, 2019](#)). In LA, polarization at the level of the masses (of citizens), remains present with even greater intensity than Elite-level polarization (of political leaders).

Political factors and ideology have tempered many of the potential economic benefits that LA could have achieved. The inability to implement good governance policies has generated more corruption that pollutes the political arena, coupled with unnecessary alienation of the middle classes ([Munck, 2020](#)).

We can perhaps explain this short circle between the exercise of power and the repercussions in society with the Foucauldian concept of “power-knowledge” which suggests that mechanisms of power bring together and produce different kinds of knowledge in ways that further reinforce exercises of power; this is about organization and discourse, where power-knowledge dominates ([Hacking et al., 1985](#)). In other words, regardless of ideology, and despite it, in LA knowledge/power continues to be exercised through surveillance and normalization.

3.4 Latin America’s potential to play a more active role in world affairs

The liberal international order is in the critical phase that Gramsci would call the interregnum, a historical stage in which the old dies and the new cannot be born. A crisis, which [Babic \(2020\)](#) considers multidimensional and cumulative, and which exerts its impact simultaneously and in a correlated manner, in politics and the global economy, at the state level and within society. [Heine \(2024\)](#) considers that a Second Cold War has begun, where LAC countries—but also, more broadly, across the Global South - are under pressure from the US and China. The resulting scenario is synthesized in the idea of interregnum: the dominant forces and coalitions are unable to sustain the established order (what is dying) and those that challenge them are not yet in a position, for lack of capacity or will, to establish an alternative order, which would be the new that cannot be born ([Hirst et al., 2024](#)).

Without having planned it, the region must take advantage of the fact that the European Union is once again looking towards LA. This comes after a pause during which the European Union devoted itself to projecting its interests on the African continent, but this did not bear the expected fruits. Its exaggerated investment in Africa did not have the expected response in terms of political recognition by African

countries. The non-explicit exchange failed, and the attempt at a new soft colonization of certain parts of Africa now leaves room for a deep concertation in international organizations, based on the interregional relationship between LA and the EU.

The search for greater autonomy in the international sphere, the diversification of ties with other actors, such as the China and the European Union, the deployment of new cooperation and regional integration initiatives, or the return of development policies in a scenario of environmental crisis and digital transformation are some of the elements through which the Latin American region is searching for answers. The region is a mosaic of countries and interests with internal historical, geographical, and ideological fractures that make it difficult to trace a common route. The countries called to exercise this type of leadership (Mexico and Brazil) do not coordinate common policies and have incompatible geopolitical strategies that do not converge. Latin America lacks hegemon, but generating the assumptions to overcome the obstacles, it can become an ally in the preservation of democratic institutions.

Currently, its States participate in dialogues of various kinds. For example, the Organization of American States, founded in 1948, has 35 members with the purpose of cooperating throughout the continent. The Central American Integration System, created in 1960, is composed of 8 members, and has an economic-political purpose. The Central American Common Market (CACM) of 1960, is composed of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Costa Rica. The Latin American Parliament (Parlatino) was founded in 1964 and has 23 members; it functions as a regional parliament for the promotion of integration. The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States was founded in 1967 for technical cooperation among seven members. The Andean Community, founded in 1969, has four members. CARICOM, founded in 1973, has 15 members seeking a common market. The LAC Economic System was founded in 1975 and has 28 members.

The Latin American Integration Association was founded in 1980 and has 13 members for economic cooperation. Since 1991, Mercosur foresees the constitution of a common market. It has 5 member states (Venezuela is suspended). The Association of Caribbean States was created in 1994 and has 18 members. The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) was founded in 2004 and serves as a venue for cooperation by 13 members with a certain ideological affinity. The Union of South American Nations (Unasur) was founded in 2008, with 7 members. The aforementioned CELAC has 33 members, and since 2010 has aimed at political dialogue. The Pacific Alliance was founded in 2011 and has 4 members.

Latin American economies are integrated into smaller sub-units due to the enormous differences that define them. Ideological influences play a palpable role in these regional organizations. This has resulted in limitations on their utility as true models of regional integration. Rather, they can devolve into mechanisms of “*regionalism à la carte*” when national interests take precedence over the interests of the region.

The Post-Western World experiencing the collapse of the existing world order and the emergence of a counter-order in difficulty for conflict resolutions like those that occurred in past transitions in 1812, 1919 and 1948, but this time without a full-scale war ([Zartman, 2024](#)). The state in 2024 of simultaneous large-scale war in Ukraine, complex and expanding conflicts in the Middle East, and tense confrontations in the East and South China Seas may, however, temper this assertion.

Borón (2014) said that in their phase of decomposition empires can become much more aggressive and bellicose. A question that is still present and in the face of which LA can generate the necessary dialogue to moderate bellicose situations.

In this context, LA can expand its global influence, but we must question whether it has adequate leadership in its own region to present a unified voice. Only once this key internal factor has been solved, can it become a significant actor in addressing global megatrends that represent challenges and opportunities. One factor is particularly promising. Despite its considerable domestic political and developmental challenges, we can affirm that in LA, inter-state armed conflicts are rarer than in other regions. It can speak on this topic with credibility and authority.

Among the advantages of this region, it is worth noting that in the economic, environmental, and demographic spheres it is emerging as an entity that can play a relevant role in the coming years. The younger population in LA compared to that of many mature economies of the world is another advantage for this region. Indeed, it already fuels a significant part of the labor market in the U.S. and provides a source of cultural vitality and demographic growth.

4 Discussion

Latin America's potential to increase its influence as an actor in the world order will be defined by strategic alliances, political stability, economic growth in public-private partnerships and commitment to the environment. Open dialogue with both the champions of the existing world order, the United States, and its allies, and with emerging power structures in the global south will be essential. Strengthening of mutually beneficial ties with major economies such as the U.S., China and the European Union will be critical. Participation in multilateral organizations will have to include an expansion of its voice in a United Nations that is facing essential reforms that expand more meaningful participation in the Security Council, can amplify the region's voice in global affairs and assert its interests in global governance structures.

In a new order, LA may play a positive role in world events introducing herself between the military power of U.S., the economic power of China, and the soft power of the European Union. The region has experienced varied economic growth rates. Brazil and Mexico show robust development trajectories (IMF, 2024) and are among the largest economies in the region, with diverse economic bases including agriculture, manufacturing, and services with promising long-term growth prospects across the region. Expressions of regional integration, such as those led by the Pacific Alliance and Mercosur, have the potential to increase Latin America's collective economic power. But it is an intraregional rationale that warrants deeper collaboration to strengthen the region's global economic influence and greater political stability to enhance Latin America's credibility and reliability as a global partner.

Yet, economic growth has also been disappointing in the region as a whole and has even been catastrophic in nations such as Argentina and Venezuela. Brazilian President Lula went as far as to claim that LA has been experiencing a second lost decade since 2014. He cited the region's average growth during this period as just 0.9%, half of what was recorded in the "lost" decade of the 1980s. Lula further argued that the combination of low growth levels and high degree of

inequality has negatively impacted the political landscape. In an even more pessimistic assessment Lula further argued that low levels of growth and high levels of inequality weaken the vocation for cooperation and understanding in LA (Lula da Silva, 2024).

This level of skepticism must be taken seriously, but it does not preclude an expanded role for LA in world affairs. Overall economic indicators may be weak, but this can and should be a driver for more focused global investments by Latin American corporations. Socio-economic issues such as inequality, migration, and crime suggest a clear need for greater investment in key sectors of the Latin American economy. Demand for Latin American raw materials and natural resources from the West can also be met with investment profiles that contribute to community development, environmental protection, and sustainable growth. Political corruption and poor governance within many Latin American nations will also take a toll on the region's political global impact but need not be decisive. The Global South in general and even the U.S. and Europe also face increasing political divisions, economic setbacks, anti-Democratic trends, censorship, and societal fragmentation. This, based on current realities, is clearly not an insurmountable barrier to the exercise of influence on the world stage.

The impetus for LA's expanded role in the world will rest in its ability to develop leaders and institutions that are willing to champion the strengths of the region. Far from current war zones and hardly at the epicenter of potential future flash points, LA can offer a model of inter-state stability. Even where issues like transnational organized crime and migration represent obstacles, and where democracy is not ubiquitous as a political model, the very lack of armed conflict between Latin American nations offers a kind of stability that other parts of the world would do well to analyze.

BRICS and the now almost inevitable reforms in the management of United Nations power structures such as the Security Council may well provide opportunities for LA to offer meaningful input to conflict resolution and peace initiatives. The region can also be a platform for non-superpower dominated investment models, socio-economic cooperation for human development, and even alternative cultural and linguistic models to flourish. The world simply needs the participation of new and less power-driven actors in a world dominated by U.S. political and economic hegemony, along with its European and other partners, as well as to the unsettling visions of opposition to this unipolar world posed by the Russian Federation, China, Iran, and other rising powers. Latin-America, African, and Asian nations need not be "non-aligned" to this end but must be willing to have their own voices that represent their own priorities.

Further reflection is needed in LA to strengthen a regionalism that seems as if it should come naturally but lacks solid foundations and leadership. In another sense, a stronger integration would allow all parties to be at the same table. Collaborating side by side without the need to align to a particular great power. Latin American nations could choose which issues to deal with on a sub-regional basis, in a hemispheric context, or at the level of international organizations. In doing so, it must avoid the trap of becoming a client state to any power acting out of hegemonic ambitions, addressing issues that the region itself defines as priorities in the interests of its own populations.

Yet, the definition of a leader, or group of leaders, to promote such an identity, and to achieve a significant regional influence on global affairs, remains elusive. We have discussed various nations that due to their politico-economic significance in the Americas, could exercise

such roles, including Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia. Indeed, these could collaborate more actively in international fora to provide a regional voice that could be identified as such in global economic, environmental, and conflict resolution initiatives. This voice may never be inclusive, and will hardly include nations such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua in formulating approaches to great power rivalries. Yet even the European Union has outliers with respect to relations with Russia, China, and Israel, that do not negate its impact on global economic and even political affairs. Unanimity of vision in LA is hardly achievable, yet it is also not necessary to increase her voice in areas that matter to the region.

LA already has a private sector with a cadre of strong national and multinational companies. This sector can play a key role in both conventional economic and broader cultural and social representation of the region abroad. Latin American companies have considerable opportunities to broaden their direct investment in the United States, Europe, Africa, and Asia. In that they do not operate from countries with significant political liabilities in these regions, as with the great powers, such companies have fewer barriers to entry. The grounds for objection, such as opposition to Chinese companies in the U.S., or French companies in Africa, are absent.

Here, the lack of politico-economic baggage and fear of state involvement in direct investment for potentially nefarious ends are a distinct advantage. Investments by a Mexican or Brazilian company in Asia or Africa do not engender the kinds of suspicions that might be found with the companies of former colonial powers. LA n companies must. However, move past simple import and export activity to more meaningful and influence-generating partnerships, equity investments, and even direct buyouts in the retail, manufacturing, and services sectors. There have been tentative steps by companies such as Mexico-based Bimbo and FEMSA in Europe and the United States, but much more can be done. Here, we emphasize foreign direct investment by LA n companies in other parts of the world rather than by other nations in LA.

Multipolarity, changing geopolitical needs, new global challenges, and the demand for a different typology of actors involved in decision making, generate a greater potential for LA to increase its influence in the evolving world order. The hitherto peripheral global role of LA may prove to be a strength given global south frustration with the behavior of its northern counterparts. LA bears little or no responsibility for ongoing global conflicts and has avoided direct military involvement in great power rivalries. Narratives in the global south toward the richer north of predatory capitalism, economic subjugation and the high political costs of foreign investment are absent.

The limited political and economic engagement to date of LA in world conflicts offers the region an opportunity to reassess its influence more prominently at the global level, as a player offering a fresh start and perspective. With more room for maneuver, however, there remain significant challenges for the sustainability of intra-regional peace, management of strategic resources, plurality of identities and the political vitality of its actors. Here the power and dynamism of traditional civic activism and social movements may

play a positive and unifying role in overcoming these challenges. By adopting a politically balanced approach that emphasizes genuine economic cooperation, respect for sovereignty and equality among nations, and an emphasis on its rich human and ecological diversity, Latin America can easily assume a more significant role in a world tired of conflict and great power rivalries.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

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Conflict of interest

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