



# **China seen favorably in Latin America**

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**By Joseph Boris in Washington (China Daily)**



Attendees leave the Chinese carmaker Great Wall Motors Ltd booth at the Sao Paulo Auto Show in Brazil. According to a new public-opinion survey in the region, China is regarded as favorable, if not necessarily influential, in Latin America and the Caribbean. Dado Galdieri / Bloomberg

Large majorities of people in countries across Latin America and the Caribbean believe China has at least "some influence" in their region and most see that influence as positive, according to a survey partly funded by the United States government. The views on China were culled from a broad assessment of public opinion, conducted in 2012, that involved 26 countries and over 41,000 individual interviews, researchers said in issuing their findings at a think-tank seminar in Washington on Thursday.

Only 20 percent of respondents, on average, in the multinational survey described China as the "most influential" country in the region. In response to a separate question, 23 percent said they expect China to have that status within 10 years. Of those who deemed China "most influential", more than two-thirds (68 percent) characterized that influence as either "positive" or "very positive", according to the findings from the Latin American Public Opinion Project, led by Vanderbilt University in Tennessee with funding from the US Agency for International Development, the government's main conduit for foreign assistance.

Among respondents in the 22 Latin American and Caribbean countries asked about China - including, but not limited to, those who ranked it first in regional influence - the nation was rated neutral to positive along a 1-to-5 scale. Asked about China's influence on their individual countries, an average of 63 percent responded "very positive" or "positive", 23 percent were neutral, 12.5 percent said "negative" or "very negative", and 1 percent said there was no Chinese influence where they live.

People in Jamaica had the highest positive ratings for China while those in Mexico had the lowest, but all were "trending toward the positive" in evaluating the nature of that influence, said Elizabeth Zechmeister, a political-science professor at Vanderbilt who co-runs the Latin American Public Opinion Project.

A strong correlation between countries where a majority identified China as "most influential" regionally or in relation to their own nation "suggests that where China is perceived to be more influential, it's also perceived to be more positive in terms of that influence, with the exception of Nicaragua", she said.

Zechmeister, who with her colleagues presented the survey data at Washington's Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, explained that respondents were given a list from which to choose their region's "most influential" outside power - China, Japan, India, the US, Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, Spain or "other".

Only 9.9 percent of respondents in Nicaragua - a survey low - ranked China as "most influential" in Latin America (their region), much lower than the nearly 40 percent of those in the Central American country's neighbor Costa Rica. In the category of "most influential" future regional power, Costa Ricans also led the way on China's behalf, while only 10.3 percent of respondents in Haiti agreed.

The Nicaragua paradox Zechmeister mentioned is that despite their evaluation, respondents in that country said, on average, that the nature of China's influence - however limited - is moderately positive.

China also was perceived as moving "closer" in relations with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean by a majority of those nations' citizens.

The presenters on Thursday cautioned that the survey results varied from country to country, due to respondents' education and income levels. They pointed out that some interviewees appeared better informed about relations between China and their own country or the region as a whole.

For instance, Zechmeister said, many of those interviewed in the six Central American countries confused the Chinese mainland with Taiwan - prompting survey interviewers to revise their questions to include this distinction.

"Even when we get it right, some people just may not have opinions about complex foreign-affairs questions," she said, adding that 20 percent of survey replies were of the "don't know" or "didn't respond" variety, four to five times the norm for the Vanderbilt project.

The 68.2 percent "positive" ranking for China among those who deemed it "most influential" regionally, trailed the assessment given to those who chose Brazil (71.4 percent) and Japan (70.2 percent).

In another comparison, the US was given a "most influential" ranking by 41 percent of respondents - double the figure for China. Through the next decade, 30 percent said they expect the US to be the region's dominant outside influence.

In characterizing the two economic powers' respective influence, however, China was more popular than the US, which scored 6 points lower, at 62.2 percent, in "positive" or "very positive" assessments.

Only 16 percent of those surveyed across Latin America and the Caribbean said they would choose China as the model for their own country's development. The US was the choice of 27.5 percent, followed by Japan (12.4 percent) and Brazil (7 percent). Respondents were given nine choices, including an "other" option, though citizens of Brazil, Venezuela and Mexico weren't offered their own country as a development-model option.

Survey results varied by country as to the degree of "trust" in China and the US. In this category, the Chinese received a high of 59 percent in Panama and a low of 17 percent in Suriname. The US was deemed trustworthy by 80 percent of respondents in Guyana but only 23 percent in Argentina.

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