

Values, culture and the economic integration of Latin America and North America: an empirical perspective on culturalist approaches*

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Introduction

Over the past two decades Latin American countries have changed considerably. Accompanying the economic liberalization of Latin American countries– “all but one of which have become members of the World Trade Organization” (Gaviria, 2001: 304-305) – has been their increasing reliance on international trade for economic growth as measured by the increasing proportion of gross domestic product accounted for by exports; this is the case for all countries in the hemisphere, including the United States and Canada. Hemispheric interdependence has been increasing as signaled by the growing importance of intraregional trade as a proportion of total trade. The democratization of Latin American countries has been important to the growth of intraregional trade as trade has expanded to encompass more and more services as well as industrial products:

Until the 1980's ... Latin America, seemed like a poor choice for a new friend. Military governments, yo-yo economic policies and performance, grinding poverty, and dubious human rights records were convincing reasons to not compete with the Americans for gringo status in Latin America. Canada changed ... as ... the rest of the region changed. The birth of democratic regimes and economic reform created the opportunity for viable partnerships where none existed before. (Dymond, 2001: 1).

Indeed, Canada, initially less than happy at seeing the Free Trade Agreement with the United States expanded to a North American Free Trade Agreement to include Mexico, now has its very own free trade agreement with Chile.

The future emergence of a free trade area encompassing most or the entire hemisphere is a project to which most South American and North American countries look forward. Both economic liberalization and democratization are central to this project and power relations and system position loom large for all countries. As Gaviria (2001: 311) puts it, “the creation of the FTAA is based on the existence of a community of democracies in the Americas and on a convergence of political, economic, and social values.” The FTAA, therefore, is as much about culture as it is about trade – strengthening democracy, reducing poverty and discrimination, and sustainable development are very much part of the negotiating package and overall objectives. Harrison (1997) contends that economic cooperation between countries depends directly on the degree of trust between them which, in turn, depends on their cultural similarity. His argument is that the United States and English-speaking Canada share an Anglo-protestant cultural heritage which explains the high degree of trust which exists between these two countries, on the one hand, and the low level of trust which he sees as existing between these two countries and the rest of the American continent, on the other. Harrison concludes that it was a mistake for the United States and Canada to allow Mexico into NAFTA, and, extending his argument, this implies that it would be a mistake to include other South American countries in free trade agreements with the United States and Canada as well.(1)

Culture and Economic Integration

In his very influential work, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel P. Huntington (1996: 131) argues that economic integration is facilitated by cultural similarity and that the “overall effectiveness of regional organizations varies inversely with the civilizational diversity of their membership.” The long term success of NAFTA, he argues (1996: 127), will depend on the extent to which Mexico is able to redefine itself:

In Latin America, economic associations – Mercosur, the Andean Pact, the tripartite Pact (Mexico, Columbia, Venezuela), the Central American Common Market – take on a new life, reaffirming the point demonstrated most graphically by the European Union that economic integration proceeds faster and further when it is based on cultural commonality. At the same time, the United States and Canada attempt to absorb Mexico into the North American Free Trade Area in a process whose long-term success depends largely on the ability of

Mexico to redefine itself culturally from Latin American to North American.

As a general rule, he argues, “single civilizational organizations do more things and are more successful than multicivilizational organizations”. Latin America is seen by Huntington (1996) as belonging to a different civilization; in his very recent work, Huntington (2004a, 2004b) portrays the profound cultural differences he perceives to exist between the U.S. and Latin America as a threat to American society and culture given current patterns of migration.

The substantive issues at stake in this kind of argument are considerable.

The effort of Inglehart and Carballo (1997) to respond, in empirical terms, to the question “Does Latin America Exist?” has been timely. They analyzed the 1990-1993 wave of the World Values Surveys to study the extent to which, in global perspective, a cluster of Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico) differ empirically from other clusters of countries on a number of cultural dimensions. It was found that, in comparative perspective, the respondents in the four Latin American countries showed similar values across a wide range of topics. But they did not focus on cross-national and intra-national differences within Latin America. The importance of doing so was demonstrated by Almond and Verba (1963) some four decades ago in their study of political culture. A problem they found was that in comparing countries (Mexico and Canada, for example) on a particular cultural dimension, intra-national cultural differences (that is, within Mexico and within Canada) can be larger than the differences between the two national groupings. In an area of research particularly vulnerable to simplification and reductionism, intra-national variations need to be more carefully examined. Also, Inglehart and Carballo (1997) point out that though a Latin American cultural cluster exists, the boundaries of this cluster could just as well be drawn so as to include Spain and Portugal; Inglehart and Baker (2000: 31-32) restate this observation with regard to Latin America in an analysis which included the 1995-1998 wave of the World Values Surveys; they also note that the cultural boundaries of Latin America could be extended into the cultural zone of the historically Catholic countries – this would include France and Italy, for example.(2) These difficulties in establishing empirically valid boundaries for the cultural zones (boundaries drawn with Huntington’s work in mind) in themselves seriously weaken those culturalist arguments which postulate a monolithic Latin American culture sufficiently distinct and sufficiently integrated as to constitute a

“civilization”. The existence of significant cross-national and intra-national variations within a cultural zone or area would weaken this argument further (cf. Armony and Lamy, 2000b). As Berger (2002: 15) puts it, “there are also sharp cultural conflicts within societies (... an internalized ‘clash of civilizations’).” Much of the extensive literature in the postmodernist tradition argues that cultural fragmentation within Western societies has been increasing enormously over the past several decades and as industrialization continues in Latin American countries, there may be changes in this direction there as well.

Norris and Inglehart (2003; cf. Inglehart and Norris, 2003)) in an analysis of the most recent waves (1995-2001) of the World Values Surveys, test Huntington’s thesis that the most important cultural division between the Western and Islamic world concerns differences over democratic values (they argue that, instead, the main differences are over gender equality and sexual liberation); they take him strongly to task over his portrayal of a single, monolithic Islamic culture. They point to the geographical, historical, and cultural diversity of Islamic societies and argue that Huntington overstates and over-simplifies major cross-national differences both within and across what he calls “civilizations”. The United States, for example, has a more traditional value system than other advanced industrial societies (Inglehart and Baker, 2000: 31).

So Inglehart and Carballo (1997) agree with Huntington (1996) to the extent that Latin America as a cultural area can be said to exist, but do Inglehart and his various collaborators also agree with Huntington as to the direction in which cultures are now moving? Not really. Religious legacies weigh heavily among the dimensions used by Huntington in identifying his nine contemporary civilizations. Though Inglehart and Norris (2003) do find that religious legacies shape contemporary values, Inglehart and Baker (2000: 30) observe that “economic development seems to move societies in a common direction, regardless of their cultural heritage.” Huntington (1996:76 & 96) sees modernization as producing cultural convergence only in its initial phases; this is followed by a phase of “de-Westernization and the resurgence of indigenous culture” which “in the secular Confucian culture takes the form of the affirmation of Asian values but in the rest of the world manifests itself in the affirmation of religious values.” Inglehart’s (1997) version of modernization theory posits a transition from traditional to secular-rational values with industrialization and a transition from survival to self-expression values with postindustrialism. Huntington (1996: 126) views the rupture of traditional bonds and social relations in societies undergoing modernization as resulting in widespread anomie and identity problems at the individual level to which secularism and moral

relativism are unable to provide solutions; therefore “people rally to those with similar ancestry, religion, language, values and institutions and distance themselves from those with different ones”.

The Globalization of Culture: Some Hemispheric Issues

It is not only economic development that might move societies in a common direction; globalization might also be having the same effect. It is not necessary to enter the debate as to whether globalization is analytically and empirically distinct from modernization as theorists such as Robertson (1992) might insist, or whether, as those such as Giddens (1991) would maintain, globalization is very much part of modernity and Western modernization at that. Whichever side of this theoretical issue one subscribes to, most would agree that globalization processes have accelerated in the past half century and that there has been an unprecedented compression of space and an accompanying increase in economic, political and social interdependence. Berger (2002: 9 & 2) speaks of “a cultural earthquake affecting virtually every part of the world”; he sees cultural globalization as “heavily American in origin and content” but also recognizes “subglobalizations” on a regional level which include the spread of Mexican and Venezuelan media throughout the region, including the Latin American population in the United States. The main attraction of global culture, according to Berger (2002: 9) is the promise of individuation it carries:

(A)ll sectors of the emerging global culture enhance the independence of the individual over against tradition and collectivity. Individuation must be seen as a social and psychological process, manifested empirically in the behaviour and consciousness of people regardless of the ideas they may hold about this.

Unlike Huntington (1996) who sees as inherent in the forces contributing to individuation, forces ultimately contributing to reaction in the form of the resurgence of indigenous culture, Berger (2002: 9) sees individuation as attractive to those who have experienced it and value it and who “aspire to an even greater realization of it.” Armony and Lamy (2000a: 250) argue that due to globalization “cultural barriers of all kinds are becoming more porous and national and ethnic identities are becoming less encompassing, a heightened individualism will dramatically alter the social fabric of Latin American countries.” Halman (1996: 212) rightly cautions that “individualism appears to be multifaceted and more than one-dimensional” and reflects cultural and socio-historical circumstances.

Freer trade, whether at the global or regional level, has in and of itself a cultural impact on societies. With regard to Chile, Talavera (2002: 262) points out that the globalization of consumption which has accompanied the opening of the economy has meant that:

In the popular world, people wear used clothing imported from the United States and Chinese or Korean parkas; they watch television on Japanese sets, go to shopping malls, and include Italian and Chinese food in their diets. Young people, especially, seem to be the same as those in any developed country, but they prefer Cuban or Latin music and Latin American soap operas. (3)

Armony and Lamy (2000a) argue that even in the context of a growing gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” in both North and Latin America, interdependence has increased across social class, ethnic and national boundaries and that cultural globalization will loosen ties to traditional cultures and groupings. Talavera (2002: 256) claims that, in Chile, due to television, “young people from different social strata speak a more similar language than their parents or grandparents did” and that “class differences that were much more noticeable and significant in people’s lives have now lessened.”

In Latin America generally, “recent changes in gender relations and women’s status have been remarkable”: women’s participation in the labour force has greatly increased, the gender gap in pay is not much different from that in more industrialized countries, women comprise half or more of the students at all levels of the educational system, and legal reforms to grant women formal equality have progressed notably (Htun, 2000: 192).

NAFTA seems to have resulted in some degree of cultural convergence between Mexico, the United States and Canada beyond that which can be attributed to global economic integration more generally:

With more than half a billion dollars of merchandise crossing the U.S.-Mexico border each day, and more than a billion crossing the U.S. - Canada border ...there is now a vast network of business relationships. Mexico has a growing and increasingly assertive environmental movement, which hardly existed earlier and probably would not exist at all if not for NAFTA. Universities throughout the three countries have inaugurated North American research and study centers. Civic organizations with cross-border connections, focusing

on women's and labor rights to the promotion of democracy have flourished. (Weintraub, 2000)

Based on an analysis of the 1981-1993 waves of the World Values Surveys, Nevitte (1995:200) found that in Mexico, the U.S., and Canada, "support for economic ties is related to support for doing away with borders"; he also argues that the main values in all three societies are becoming more similar and that this cannot be explained as simply an "Americanization" of Mexico and Canada.

As for the United States itself, Cooper (2002:15) exclaims that "(t)he Latinization of America is so profound that no one really notices it." She notes the dramatic rise in Hispanic immigration and that more than half of foreign-born U.S. residents are from Latin America (and the intermarriage rate with non-Hispanic Americans is quite high). Migration between countries in the rest of the hemisphere has also increased and has accelerated substantially over the past several decades: there has been substantial immigration to Argentina from neighbouring countries, from Columbia and the Caribbean to Venezuela, from Central America to Mexico, from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, and from Haiti to the Dominican Republic, for example. The multidimensional cultural impact of these increased migration levels in the hemisphere will take some time to determine. Migration in a hemisphere which is becoming increasingly interdependent and interconnected often results in the formation of transnational communities and participation in transnational activities, which as Portes (1999) notes, impacts on both the sending and host countries. Money sent back home by migrants is now a larger source of foreign exchange in some smaller countries than either exports or foreign investment. Migrants find it increasingly easy to maintain their family and social relationships in their country of origin through travel and telephone and internet links which have become less expensive and far more accessible over the past decade. This is not to argue that increasing global and hemispheric economic integration will result in permanent migration levels which will either remain at present levels or increase: Martin (2001: 45-46) states that "when viewed over a decade or two, the result of closer economic integration can be a migration hump, which can be relatively small and short because, when wage differences decrease to 4 or 5 to 1 and economic and wage growth seems assured in the emigration country, economically-motivated migration often drops dramatically."

North and South America have become increasingly interdependent and interconnected economically and socially, and this process has accelerated appreciably over the last decade in particular through growing

cultural globalization, global and regional economic integration, hemispheric migration patterns, and widening access to technologies facilitating transnational activities.(4) Cultural globalization in the hemisphere though asymmetric is not one-way and cannot easily be dismissed as merely a process of Americanization. In this context, Huntington's (1996) view of Latin America and North America as constituting different civilizations may not now make sense and Inglehart and Carballo's (1997) concept of "cultural zones", albeit with increasingly porous and ambiguous boundaries, might better reflect reality. We use the 1995-1997 wave of the World Values Surveys to explore this issue.

Methodology and results

The advantage of the World Values Surveys (WVS) for the purposes of this study is their broad scope of geographic coverage and their historical depth, even though there are other surveys of the same type (cf. Worcester et al, 2000); moreover, these surveys are very well documented (cf. Inglehart et al, 2000) and have been successfully used to address the kinds of issues we raise. The World Values Surveys were conducted in 1981-84, 1990-93, 1995-97, and 1999-2001. The 1991-2001 wave was available only to the participating researchers when we began our analysis – the 1995-97 wave was the latest available to us and is the one we use here. Eight Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela) are included in the 1995-97 wave, but we decided not to use the data for Columbia because of inconsistencies in the national data set that raised issues concerning data validity and reliability. This left seven Latin American countries included in our analysis as compared with the four included in Inglehart and Carballo (1997) who used the 1990-1993 wave of the surveys.

The basic strategy followed to study the extent to which Latin America constitutes a "civilization" as opposed to, say, a cultural area or cultural zone was to compare Latin American countries to each other, to the United States, and to a weighted composite of Latin America comprised of the seven countries. It would be difficult, it was reasoned, to argue that Latin America constitutes a distinct civilization if the comparisons with the U.S. did not show substantial differences in values, or if value patterns differed markedly from country to country, or if individual country value patterns differed markedly from those of the weighted composite of Latin America comprised of the seven countries. Though we do consider that intra-national variations are important and deserve to be examined, to do so would have needlessly increased the complexity of the study in terms of its

adequacy for testing the “civilization hypothesis” and would also have pushed up against the limitations of the data sets. In the low-income countries in the WVS, the urban and the more highly educated have been found to be oversampled; the urbanized and highly educated segments of low-income countries “tend to have orientations relatively similar to those found in ... industrial societies” (Inglehart, 2000: 8). This means that the WVS may tend to underestimate both cross-national differences and intra-national variations in Latin America.(7)

Regardless of original sample size (and these vary considerably), country sample sizes in the WVS are weighted to a standard size of 1500. The first step was to construct a weighted composite of Latin America comprised of the seven countries such that each of the countries would be given a weight in the Latin American composite proportional to its population. Table 1 presents the steps taken to create the composite sample of Latin American countries used here:

Table 1: Weighted composite sample of Latin America

Countries	Population (millions) (demographic weight)	Proportion of demographic weight	Sample size
Brazil	163	44.27%	1149
Argentina	36	9.78%	305
Mexico	100	27.16%	844
Chile	15	4.07%	127
Peru	27	7%	225
Venezuela	24	7%	202
Uruguay	3.2	0.87%	26
Total	368.2	100%	2 878

The second step was to construct validated scales from the series of questions on specific themes in the WVS questionnaire. Can the variables be added together so as to construct a single scale or does the scale have two or three different dimensions? We used the main 14 scales of the survey without making any hypotheses about which scale might be more or less important or central than the other. (5) The study of scale validity is a routine step when constructing scales. This step revealed a considerable degree of variation between Latin American countries. (Table 2)

Our third step was to perform a correlational analysis of the Cronbach alphas (Table 3).

In terms of the “civilization hypothesis”, if Latin America is a distinct civilization the results for the additive attitude scales should be more similar in each of the samples (including the composite sample of Latin America). This was not the case. The Cronbach alphas differ from one country to the other, which often indicated the presence of more than one factor in the scale. So the last step was to conduct factor analysis on each of the scales to verify the hypothesis of different factor structure as an explanation of the variation in the Cronbach alphas. We conducted separate factor analyses for each country and we compared them, using the local weights included in the database. These results are too cumbersome and numerous to be included in this short article. But they do not support the hypothesis that Latin America constitutes a distinct civilization in terms of the pattern of differences found in comparisons with the United States. Each of the scales had a specific configuration. Sometimes, the factors were the same for a group of countries but there was no single dominant pattern that emerged, which we expected would occur to the extent that Latin America constitutes a distinct civilization.

Conclusions

The idea that Latin America is a distinct civilization with cultural traits profoundly different from those in the United States is not supported by our analysis of the 1995-97 wave of the World Values Surveys. In their analysis of an earlier wave of the WVS, Inglehart and Carballo (1997) conceptualize Latin America as a cultural zone, rather than a distinct civilization à la Huntington (1996), based on the sharing of similar values across a wide range of topics; even then, there has been difficulty in this and in similar studies in drawing clear and well-defined cultural boundaries for this cultural zone, though Huntington’s schema was explicitly in mind.

Cultural boundaries in the Americas are becoming more porous and ambiguous due to the combined effects of cultural and economic globalization, growing regional economic interdependence and integration, and rising migration rates in a technological and socio-economic context which facilitates a widening participation in and spectrum of transnational interpersonal linkages and activities. Forced to choose, as the best approximation to reality, between Berger’s (2002) vision of “cultural earthquake” and Huntington’s (1996) imago of distinct civilizations with cultural resurgence waiting in the wings, “cultural earthquake” seems a safer bet.

TABLE 2 MEASURES OF SCALE VALIDITY (first part)

SCALES	Latin America *	Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Mexico
Value Ranking V4-V	0.47	0.3175	0.4267	0.3254	0.5163
Voluntary organizations V28-V36	0.73	0.5691	0.6729	0.8131	0.7808
Environment activism V38-V40	0.46	0.49	0.33	0.64	0.52
Environment V42-V46	0.56	0.52	0.51	0.47	0.50
Neighborhood V51-V60	0.70	0.76	0.56	0.79	0.83
Work Values V67-V71	0.64	0.52	0.45	0.59	0.31
Job values V75-V85	0.74	0.65	0.59	0.71	0.77
Women V98-V103	0.31	0.20	0.31	0.35	0.39
Changes in near future V111-V115	0.78	0.12	0.54	0,21	0.81
Political activism V119-V122	0.68	0.69	0.62	0.74	0.71
Confidence in institutions V135-V150	0.89	0.85	0.88	0.83	0.91
Democratic values V160-V164	0.52	0.21	0.48	0.30	0.46
Beliefs V183-V189	0.78	0.83	0.67	0.81	0.86
Tolerance for deviance V192-V202	0.73	0.78	0.67	0.77	0.81

*Weighted composite sample of Latin America

TABLE 2 MEASURES OF SCALE VALIDITY (last part)

SCALES	Peru	Uruguay	USA	Venezuela	Latin Countries **
Value Ranking V4-V	0.38	0.43	0.39	0.27	0.40
Voluntary organizations V28-V36	0.80	0.73	0.74	0.80	0.77
Environment activism V38-V40	0.41	0.71	0.25	0.62	0.56
Environment V42-V46	0.57	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.56
Neighborhood V51-V60	0.63	0.73	0.65	0.72	0.75
Work Values V67-V71	0.57	0.70	0.56	0.57	0.64
Job values V75-V85	0.45	0.81	0.72	0.90	0.78
Women V98-V103	0.42	0.32	0.25	0.40	0.33
Changes in near future V111-V115	0.81	0.81	0.18	0.17	0.78
Political activism V119-V122	0.67	0.80	0.76	0.71	0.71
Confidence in institutions V135-V150	0.85	0.89	0.85	0.89	0.88
Democratic values V160-V164	0.25	0.31	0.25	0.55	0.47
Beliefs V183-V189	0.70	0.86	0.86	0.69	0.81
Tolerance for deviance V192-V202	0.72	0.79	0.80	0.74	0.75

**Latin Countries (unweighted)

TABLE 3 CORRELATIONS OF THE CRONBACH ALPHAS

	Latin America*	Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Mexico	Peru	Uruguay	USA	Venezuela	Latin Countries **
Latin America*	1									
Argentina	0.84	1								
Brazil	0.98	0.83	1							
Chile	0.96	0.92	0.97	1						
Mexico	0.99	0.86	0.96	0.94	1					
Peru	0.96	0.78	0.99	0.95	0.92	1				
Uruguay	0.98	0.87	0.93	0.93	0.99	0.89	1			
USA	0.59	0.91	0.56	0.71	0.63	0.47	0.66	1		
Venezuela	0.96	0.88	0.99	0.99	0.94	0.98	0.92	0.63	1	
Latin Countries**	0.996	0.86	0.97	0.96	0.995	0.94	0.99	0.62	0.96	1

*Weighted composite sample of Latin America

**Latin Countries (unweighted)

Notes

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1. Harrison takes comfort in what he sees as a new intellectual current in Latin America as manifested in the work of Mendoza, Montaner, and Vargas Llosa (1996) who he sees as strongly implying “that the real causes of Latin America’s underdevelopment are in the minds of Latin Americans” (Harrison, 2000: 198). Certainly, a reading of Montana (2000) might make one confident in such conclusions.
2. See also Inglehart’s (2000: 87) discussion of “How real are the cultural zones?”
3. A far more pessimistic view of the effects of global economic integration on social equality in consumption patterns in Latin America, based on the example of Mexico City, is offered by Nicolas (1999).
4. Cameron and Stein (2000: S20) argue that these technologies “create a common cultural environment where everyone who is ‘connected’ has access to the same messages, the same icons, and the same calligraphy”. But these technologies are also widely used in ways which enhance and promote both individuation and diversity. Technology can, at once, be homogenizing and differentiating in its effects.
5. The only scale we eliminated concerns the way people see their children. There were too many discrepancies in the data with regard to this scale.
6. The results for Argentina were more similar to those for the United States than those of any other Latin American country other than Chile – but these results were not easy to interpret.
7. Worcester, Lagos, and Basanez (2000) provide a very useful exposition and discussion of the problems of data collection in low-income countries and the way in which these impact on the data sets.

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Abstract

With democratization and economic liberalization in Latin America, structural and a mixture of structural and institutional explanations for problems related to economic growth, global competitiveness, and distribution of wealth no longer appear as convincing as they did several decades ago. Attempts to deal with these issues in cultural terms have assumed increasing importance (Armony and Lamy, 2000b).

Culturalist approaches run the risk of exaggerating the degree of cultural homogeneity. Especially when culturalists are using the vocabulary of civilization differences as their model of cultural distinction. Differences between and within regions and countries in Latin America are often ignored to reinforce that hypothesis. This paper presents an analysis of the 1995-1997 World Values Surveys. These data were found to show more diversity than is usually acknowledged in culturalist approaches to Latin American issues – for example, some Latin American countries were found to be closer to the U.S. on certain value dimensions than to other Latin American countries. We discuss the implications of these findings.