

# Popular Support for Regional Economic Integration in Latin America

MITCHELL A. SELIGSON

*Abstract.* Regional economic integration schemes abound in Latin America, yet very little is known about the degree of popular support for such programmes. Now that democratic regimes rule in almost all of Latin America, public opinion can have an important impact on national policies. This paper examines the attitudes toward economic integration in 17 mainland Latin American countries with interview data from over 18,000 people. Bi-variate and multivariate analyses are conducted on the factors related to support for regional integration. Perceived benefits of integration and perceptions of personal and national economic situation prove to be important factors, as are higher levels of education, support for democracy and gender (males favour integration more than females). Two novel findings are that a positive opinion of the European Union along with satisfaction with the functioning of democracy are both linked to greater support for integration.

Although the world's most successful large-scale regional economic integration scheme has arisen in Europe, since the end of World War II Latin American nations have experimented with numerous integration programmes. Success in Latin America, however, has been far more limited, and once-promising schemes like the Central American Common Market fell into disarray as a result of international conflicts and domestic upheavals.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the recent rapid expansion of Mercosur, the trade group currently dominant in the 'Southern Cone' of South America, and the revitalisation of both the Andean Pact and the once moribund Central American Common Market has led some to suggest optimistically that Latin America might now be following on Europe's integrationist footsteps. Their hope is that many of the economic gains that have accrued to Europe as a result of economic integration could also be won by Latin America if it were to develop strong regional or sub-regional trading blocs.

What factors might promote (or hinder) support for integration among the governments of Latin America? For the first thirty years after World

Mitchell A. Seligson holds the Daniel H. Wallace Chair of Political Science at the University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>1</sup> For a review of the Central American case and recent efforts to reactivate the regional economic group see Victor Bulmer-Thomas (ed.), *Integración regional en Centroamérica* (San José, 1998).

War II, integrationist efforts in Latin America were promoted almost exclusively by small groups of technocrats and economic elites, who were largely able to operate without regard for potential public (especially labour) opposition since at that time most of Latin America was ruled by authoritarian regimes. By the late 1980s, however, Latin America had abandoned (at least for the moment) its authoritarian past. Today, with the exception of Cuba, all of Latin America is governed by elected regimes, even if the depth and stability of democracy in a number of countries remains an open question.

This paper examines popular support for and opposition to regional economic integration in Latin America. The probability that Latin American governments will move forward or turn their backs on the integrationist project depends today far more on public opinion than it did in the authoritarian past. In democracies, public opinion can count a great deal, and strong opposition to integration might well spell the end of the regionalist movement in Latin America. Labour unions, for example, can oppose integrationist measures, as many did in the United States when NAFTA was being debated. Popular opposition to NAFTA was one of the main arguments used by Congressional opponents to vote against the treaty, and nearly led to its defeat. Public opinion, once thought to be relevant in democracies only on matters of domestic politics, has now been shown by extensive academic research to have a large impact on key foreign policy issues.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, public opinion on foreign policy issues, once believed to be almost random in nature, has now been shown to be cohesively structured. Such structure has also been shown to exist in Latin America.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of European integration, an extensive body of research has been developed on the importance of public opinion for the furtherance of the programme.<sup>4</sup> It was once believed that mass attitudes were largely irrelevant to the complex technical issues of European integration, but the 1992 rejection by Danish voters of the Maastricht treaty showed that

<sup>2</sup> For a good literature review of the linkage between public opinion and public policy see Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, 'Studying Substantive Democracy', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol. 27, no. 1 (March 1994). For a study that shows the direct effect of US public opinion on foreign policy, see Bruce Russett, Thomas Hartley and Shoon Murray, 'The End of the Cold War, Attitude Change, and the Politics of Defense Spending', *PS: Politics & Society*, vol. 27, no. 1 (March 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Jon Hurwitz, Mark Peffley and Mitchell A. Seligson, 'Foreign Policy Belief Systems in Comparative Perspective: The United States and Costa Rica', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 3 (September 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Robert J. Shepherd, *Public Opinion and European Integration* (Westmead, 1975); Ronald Inglehart, 'Long Term Trends in Mass Support for European Unification', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 12, no. 2 (Summer, 1977), pp. 150-77; Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton, 1990).

without public support, progress on the integration process could be suspended or even reversed. According to an extensive study of public opinion data collected throughout the EU for over ten years, Richard Eichenberg and Russell J. Dalton have concluded, 'When seen in the context of the post-Maastricht debate in Europe, our results suggest that the link between domestic citizen consensus and the content of international agreements will become even closer.'<sup>5</sup>

While European opinions on the EU have been extensively studied, far less is known, however, about other regional integration schemes. With the exception of NAFTA, the role of public opinion in regional economic schemes in Latin America has been largely devoid of study. The only published research has covered individual countries or small groupings, such as integration in Central America.<sup>6</sup> Very recently, however, a new data source has been made available that allows us to take a careful look at the way that Latin Americans think about economic integration. The Latinbarometer, modelled after the Eurobarometer on which so much integration research has been based, covers all of the mainland countries from Mexico to the tip of South America, with the exception of Belize, Surinam and the Guyanas.<sup>7</sup> The 1996 Latinbarometer involved over 18,000 interviews in 17 countries. The countries covered and sample sizes are shown in Table 1. In most countries the samples hovered around 1,000 respondents, except in Venezuela where the number was 1,500 and in Bolivia and Paraguay where the samples were smaller.<sup>8</sup> These are each

<sup>5</sup> Richard Eichenberg and Russell J. Dalton, 'Europeans and the European Community: The Dynamics of Public Support for European Integration', *International Organization*, vol. 47 (Autumn 1993), p. 532.

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell A. Seligson and Ricardo Córdova, 'Integration and Disintegration in Central America: From 1950-1990', in Lawrence A. Herzog (ed.), *Changing Boundaries in the Americas: New Perspectives on the US-Mexican, Central American, and South American Borders* (San Diego, 1992), pp. 151-66; and Mitchell A. Seligson 'Actitudes de la Población Centroamericana Frente a la Integración Política y Económica.' *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1993), pp. 7-24. For a comparison of mass and elite attitudes see Mitchell A. Seligson and María Pía Scarfo, 'El público y los legisladores: apoyo para la integración regional centroamericana', in Victor Bulmer-Thomas, (ed.), *Centroamérica en reestructuración: Integración regional en Centroamérica* (San José, 1998), pp. 309-45.

<sup>7</sup> The data from the 1996 Latinbarometer were made available by the European Union, via the Centro de Investigación, Promoción y Cooperación Internacional of Spain and the United Nations Development Programme in Central America.

<sup>8</sup> In the published summary of the Central American cases a slight variation of two to three cases was found for Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama from the data set reported on here. The variation is a result of ambiguous coding of the country location for a total of eight interviews out of the more than 18,000 in the data base. See PNUD (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo), *Desarrollo Humano Sostenible, Informe Latinobarómetro: Consolidado de Centroamérica*, Proyecto CAM.96.001 (San José, Costa Rica, 1996). For a general discussion of some of the survey data for Central America see Proyecto Regional de Gobernabilidad para Centroamérica, *El desafío*

Table 1. *Sample distribution by country*

Country	Sample	Per cent
1 Argentina	1,199	6.4
2 Bolivia	772	4.1
3 Brazil	1,080	5.8
4 Colombia	1,200	6.4
5 Costa Rica	1,003	5.4
6 Chile	1,200	6.4
7 Ecuador	1,200	6.4
8 El Salvador	1,003	5.4
9 Guatemala	1,000	5.3
10 Honduras	1,000	5.3
11 Mexico	1,526	8.2
12 Nicaragua	1,033	5.5
13 Panama	1,005	5.4
14 Paraguay	598	3.2
15 Peru	1,200	6.4
16 Uruguay	1,200	6.4
17 Venezuela	1,500	8.0
Total	18,719	100.0

national probability samples. For the data set as a whole, 49 per cent of the respondents were male, and 51 per cent female.

In the analysis that follows, the data for the 17 countries have been weighted to reflect the differing population sizes of the countries from which the samples have been drawn, and then pooled so that an overall analysis of trends in Latin America can be examined.<sup>9</sup> Analyses of European data on integration have taken the same approach, pooling the data for all of the countries, or looking at the original members of European Community and then the expanded (current) membership of the EU. Since there is no Latin America-wide market in existence at the moment, another approach to this data set would be to compare regional groupings with Latin America (e.g., Andean Pact, Mercosur, the Central American Common Market, etc.), while an even more micro-approach would be to look at each of the 17 countries in isolation. That, however, is not the approach taken in this paper, which seeks to find overall trends for Latin America as a whole. In the future, researchers may wish to focus on differences among the trading pacts and/or differences among countries. It is important to note at the outset, however, that support for

---

*democrático: Reflexiones de las sociedades centroamericanas ante el resultado del Latinobarómetro 1996*, PNUD, San José, Costa Rica, 1997; and Marta Lagos, 'Latin America's Smiling Mask', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 8, no. 3 (July 1997), pp. 125-38.

<sup>9</sup> The population data are mid-1995 estimates from the World Bank, *World Development Report, 1989* (Washington, D.C., 1997), pp. 214-15.

integration in Latin America is *not* a function of the relative level of economic development of the countries involved. Inclusion of GDP data (as shown below), makes no difference in the overall patterns uncovered.

The present study follows the analytical tradition of the analysis of public opinion data on the EU, as developed by the ‘Beliefs in Government’ programme of the European Science Foundation. A 1995 Oxford University Press volume summarises what is known about public opinion for the European case.<sup>10</sup> The analysis in this paper begins with opinions and ‘non-opinions’, that is, the extent to which Latin Americans hold views on economic integration. It then goes on to examine support/opposition to integration, and the perception of benefits received to date of the various regional trading pacts. The data analysis then focuses on the factors that relate to higher or lower support for integration among Latin Americans, and concludes with a multi-variate analysis of those factors.

### *Opinions and Non-Opinions*

Before looking at the opinions about integration in Latin America, it is first necessary to separate out those who have an opinion on the subject from those who do not. If, for example, few Latin Americans had any opinion on the subject, it would misrepresent the overall picture to present the percentages from the small minority that did have an opinion. We can assess the absence of opinions on Latin American integration by utilizing one of the two key questions asked in the Latinbarometer survey. All respondents were asked: ‘In general, are you in favour or against economic integration of the countries of Latin America, even when this might imply some costs or sacrifices for [fill in country of survey]’. This item might seem skewed, since it emphasises the costs of integration without noting the benefits. Prior focus group research has shown, however, that unless the costs are mentioned, respondents are too quick to respond positively to questions on economic integration without thinking through all of the implications. This would be the equivalent of asking a respondent, ‘Would you like to earn more money?’ without noting that to do so would require additional hours of work per week. When the possible costs involved are noted, a more realistic estimate of support is obtained. The percentage of respondents in each country who did not have an opinion on this item are shown in Figure 1. For the sample as a whole, 17.7 per cent of the respondents did not have an opinion (pro or con) on Latin American economic integration. As the Figure shows,

<sup>10</sup> Oskar Niedermayer and Richard Sinnott (eds.), *Public Opinion and Internationalized Governance, Beliefs in Government*, Volume Two (Oxford, 1995).

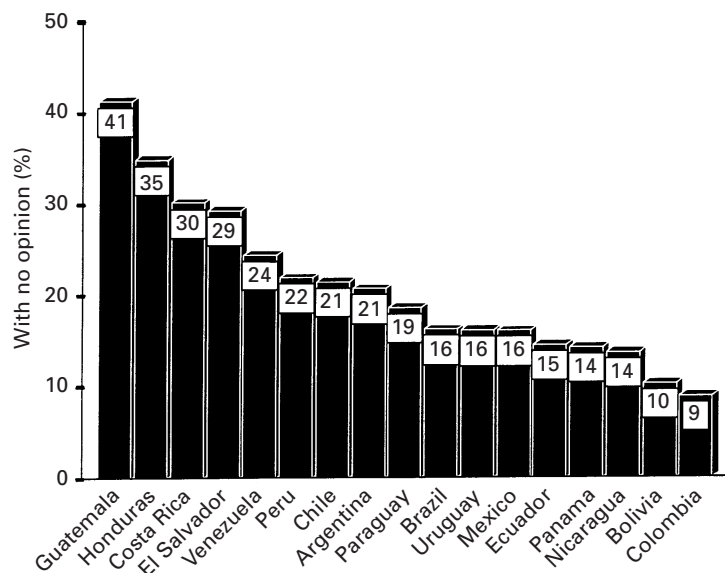


Fig. 1. Non-opinion on economic integration in Latin America.

Table 2. Predictors of non-opinion: logistic regression results

Variable	B	S.E.	d.f.	P	R
Attentiveness to political news	-0.4	0.005	1	< 0.001	-0.1
Years of education	-0.8	0.001	1	< 0.001	-0.1
Wealth	-0.01	0.001	1	< 0.001	-0.1
Sex <sup>a</sup>	0.47	0.008	1	< 0.001	0.1
Age <sup>b</sup>	0	0.001	1	< 0.01	0
Constant	0.96	0.019	1	< 0.001	

<sup>a</sup> Sex coded: 1 = male; 2 = female.

<sup>b</sup> Wealth measured by a 13-item index of ownership of various household appliances.

however, in Central America, with the exception of Panama and Nicaragua, non-opinion is as high as one-third to two-fifths of the samples.

How do those who hold opinions differ from those without opinions on the issue of regional integration in Latin America? Logistic regression analysis was utilised on the pooled survey comparing opinion holders to those with non-opinion. The results are shown in Table 2. As has frequently been found in European surveys on integration, the main determinants of non-opinion in Latin America are socio-economic and demographic factors. Specifically, those who expressed no opinion in favour or against Latin American economic integration were significantly more likely to be older, poorer, less well educated, less attentive to political news and female.

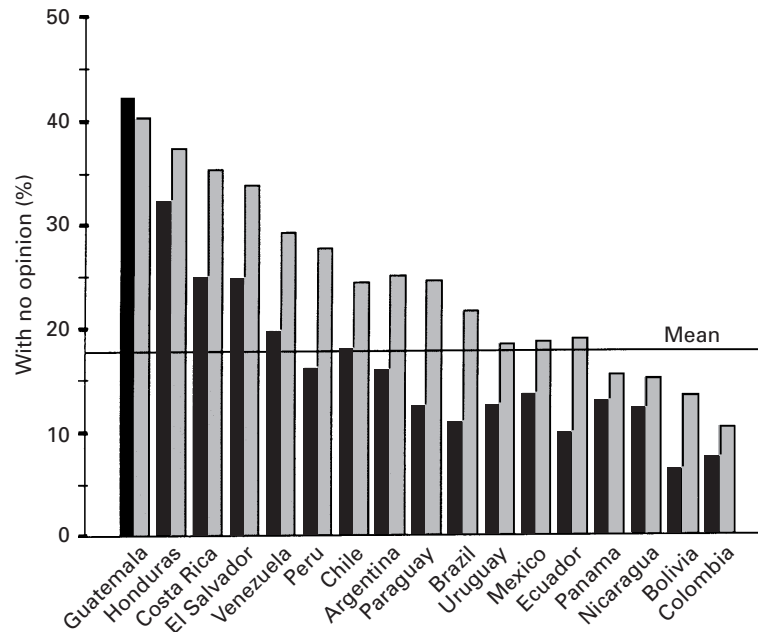


Fig. 2. Non-opinion on economic integration in Latin America: by Gender: ■, male; ▨, female.

There is some minor variation in the pattern of non-response by country. For example, in Figure 2 the responses have been broken down by gender. In every country except Guatemala, females are significantly less likely to hold an opinion than males on this subject. In Europe the gender gap exists as well, but it is far narrower, averaging less than 6 per cent.<sup>11</sup>

The other socio-economic and demographic variables shown in the regression analysis are significant predictors in each country, although the strength of association varies from country-to-country. For example, Figure 3 shows that in every country in the survey, those who had an opinion on economic integration had a higher average level of education (measured by years in school), than those who did not have an opinion.

The Latinbarometer utilised a second question to assess opinion on regional integration by asking, 'Taking everything into account, would you say that [*fill in country*] has benefited a lot, sufficiently, a little, not at all, by belonging to the [Andean Pact, Mercosur, etc.]'. The analysis of the responses to that item forms a component of the survey results reported

<sup>11</sup> Bernhard Wessels, 'Development of Support: Diffusion or Demographic Replacement?' in Oskar Niedermayer and Richard Sinnott (eds.), *Public Opinion and International Governance* (Oxford, 1995).

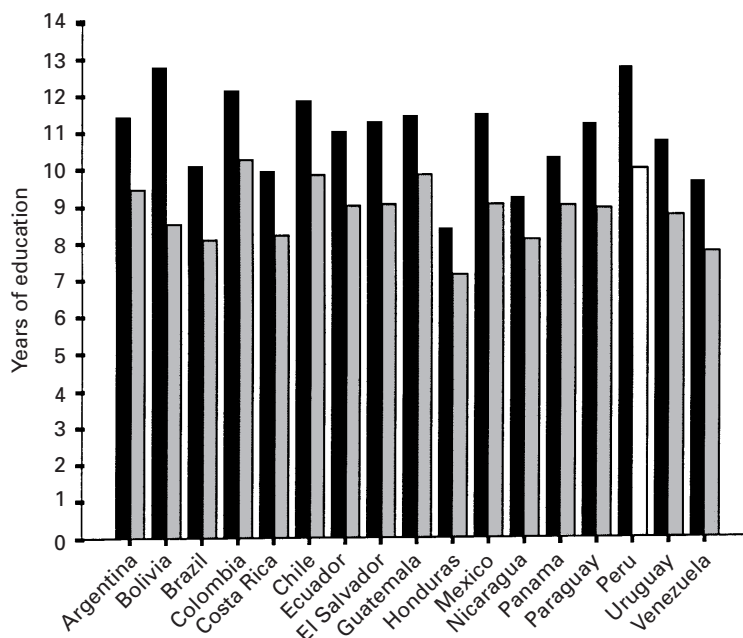


Fig. 3. Non-opinion on economic integration in Latin America: by education: ■, opinion; ▨, non-opinion.

below, but non-response patterns and correlates are similar for the support–oppose integration item analysed above, so they will not be repeated here.<sup>12</sup> Overall, then, the patterns of non-opinion on economic integration are similar throughout Latin America, and are a predictable function of socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

#### *Support for and benefits of regional integration in Latin America*

##### *Support for integration*

This paper has shown that on average, more than four-out-of-five Latin Americans have an opinion about the desirability of economic integration. For those who did have an opinion in the 1996 wave of surveys, how much support was there among Latin Americans for economic

<sup>12</sup> Actually, there is yet a third series measuring opinion–non-opinion in the Latinbarometer. This series, however, asks respondents about each specific regional trading bloc, namely, Mercosur, NAFTA and the Pacto Andino. Analysis of those questions shows, not surprisingly, that knowledge is far higher of the specific pact for the samples drawn from the countries which are members of that pact. Unfortunately, no question was asked on the Central American Common Market, thus excluding those six countries from the analysis. In order to avoid having to present results for each trading bloc and for each set of countries belong to that bloc, these variables are not analysed here.



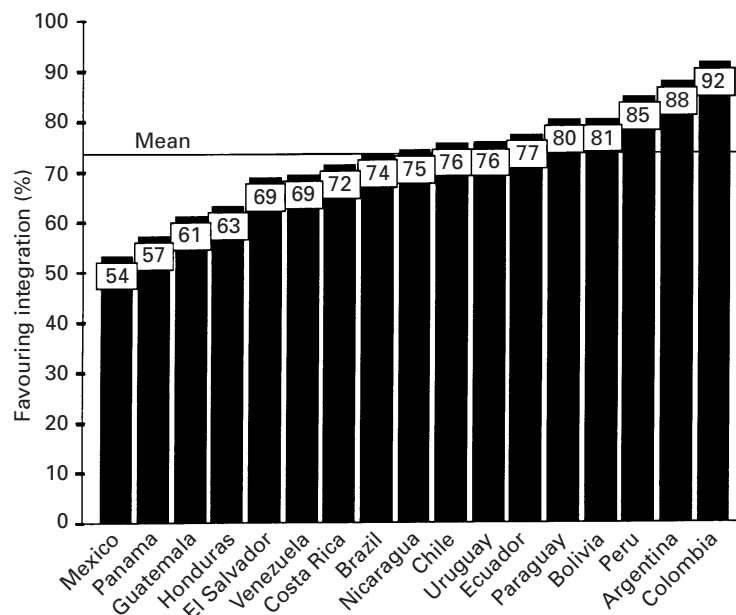


Fig. 4. Support for integration in Latin America (includes only those who hold an opinion).

integration? To answer this question, the ‘non-opinions’ are first excluded from the data base so that the focus from this point on is on those who hold an opinion. The answer to the question is given in Figure 4. In all but four countries, two-thirds of the sample express support, and in nine out of the 17 countries, three-quarters or more of those with an opinion are in favour of integration. The pattern that emerges shows that support is weakest in Mexico and Central America, and strongest in South America, especially in Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Argentina and Colombia.

Evidentially, there is a ‘north–south’ dimension in determining support for regional integration in Latin America. It may well be that Mexicans and Central Americans are more interested in integrating with North America than they are with South America. Unfortunately, the Latinbarometer questionnaire does not examine NAFTA versus Latin American integration programmes, so it is not possible to probe this finding further with the data set. It is suggestive, however, that even though Chile has been designated as the next country to enter NAFTA (pending, of course, approval by all current members, a step which is by no means assured at the time of writing), Chileans support economic integration with Latin America to a far greater extent than do Mexicans and many Central Americans.

Table 3. *Support–opposition to Latin American integration*

	Favour (%)	Oppose (%)	No opinion (%)	Total (%)
1 Argentina	69.6	9.7	20.7	100.0
2 Bolivia	72.3	17.5	10.2	100.0
3 Brazil	61.8	22.0	16.2	100.0
4 Colombia	83.4	7.7	8.9	100.0
5 Costa Rica	50.0	19.8	30.2	100.0
6 Chile	59.6	19.0	21.4	100.0
7 Ecuador	66.3	19.3	14.5	100.0
8 El Salvador	48.9	21.8	29.3	100.0
9 Guatemala	36.0	22.7	41.3	100.0
10 Honduras	41.2	23.9	34.9	100.0
11 Mexico	45.0	39.0	16.1	100.0
12 Nicaragua	64.4	22.0	13.6	100.0
13 Panama	49.3	36.5	14.2	100.0
14 Paraguay	65.6	15.9	18.6	100.0
15 Peru	66.3	11.8	21.9	100.0
16 Uruguay	63.7	20.3	16.1	100.0
17 Venezuela	52.5	23.1	24.4	100.0

The North–South split becomes even more evident when non-opinion is factored into the analysis. Table 3 shows that for every country, when non-opinion is included in the analysis, support for integration declines. In the northern zone of Latin America, only in Nicaragua and Costa Rica are there majorities in favour of integration when the full sample, including those with no-opinion, is analysed. Even in those countries, however, as noted above, those who favour integration outnumber those who oppose it, and for South America, majorities favour regional integration even when non-opinion is included.

Overall, then, policy makers in South America who wish to press for regional economic integration can be confident that in every country majorities of those holding an opinion would support it, and in most countries, only less than a fifth of the population opposes economic integration. Only in Mexico and Panama does more than one-third of the population oppose regional integration.

#### *Benefits of integration*

Support for economic integration is important, of course, but citizens want to see payoffs from policy. What is the perception in Latin America of the benefits of regional integration to date? To what extent do Latin Americans believe that their current regional trading schemes (Andean Pact, Mercosur, Central American Common Market, etc.), have been beneficial? Figure 5 presents a very different pattern from that obtained from the analysis of support/opposition to economic integration. With the exception of Colombians, who not only had the lowest level of non-

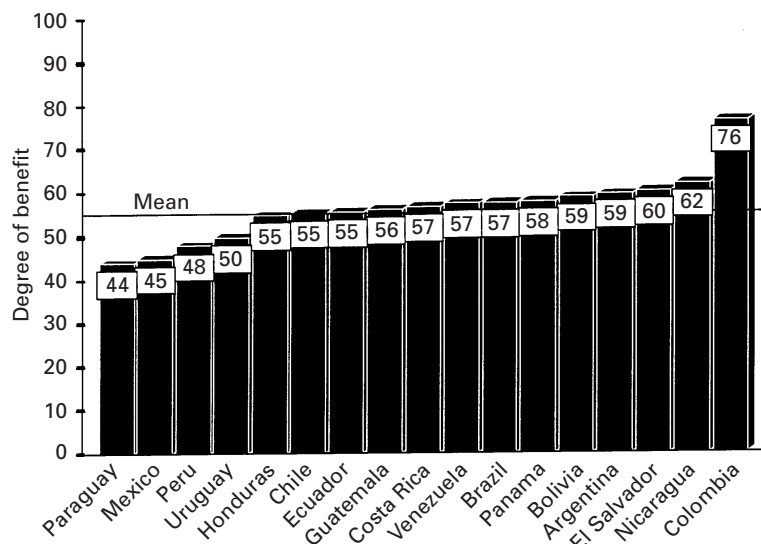


Fig. 5. Benefits from integration (among opinion holders). Scale: none = 0; a little = 33; sufficiently = 66; a lot = 100. Includes only those who hold an opinion.

opinion but also have the highest level of favourable opinion, the benefits of regional integration received to date are seen, on average, as being only modest. Most countries cluster very closely around the average for all countries (55.2 on the 100-point scale used to present this item), with only four countries (Paraguay, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay) falling slightly into the negative range. Moreover, although not shown in Figure 5, for the sample as a whole, non-opinion is larger, moving from about one-fifth of respondents on the question about support for integration to about one-quarter of respondents on the benefits question.

Combining the information gleaned from the survey items analysed thus far, two conclusions can be drawn. First, there is strong general support for Latin American regional integration. Secondly, the benefits of existing regional integration schemes are perceived as having been only modest in all countries, except in Colombia, where benefits are perceived as being greater. What explains variation in Latin America on support for economic integration? One might assume that it is largely a function of the degree of industrial development of each country, since most of the trade in Latin America generated by regional integration schemes has emerged in the industrial sector. In fact, when national-level economic development is examined as a predictor of support, no significant association emerges.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, there is no pattern linking exports (or

<sup>13</sup> Economic development was measured as the so-called 'real' GDP per capita for 1995 as calculated by the World Bank. Real GDP is based on purchasing power parity rather

exports per capita) and attitudes favourable toward regional economic integration. In order to explain variation in levels of support, we must look to individual-level factors, the analysis of which this paper now turns.

*Predictors of support for economic integration*

*'Pocketbook' issues*

Research has shown that the main determinants of support for European integration are 'pocketbook issues'.<sup>14</sup> The strongest attitudinal predictor of support for European integration is the extent to which respondents feel that the integration movement has paid off economically for their country.<sup>15</sup> In addition, those who feel that their national economy is doing well, and that they personally are doing well economically, are more supportive of integration. Even though the experience with economic integration in Latin America is more recent and more limited than in the European case, the individual-level patterns we find in this analysis mirror very closely those uncovered in Europe.

The impact of the belief that one's country has benefited from regional trading pacts on support for Latin American integration is shown in Figure 6. The relationship is obviously very strong, and holds equally well for men and women. Among Latin Americans who believe that the existing regional trade pacts have been of no benefit to their country, fewer than two-fifths support Latin American economic integration, whereas among those who believe that their country has benefited a great deal, over 80 per cent support integration. Female support for integration is virtually identical to that of the males in the sample, except at the very

---

than exchange rates. See World Bank, *World Development Report, 1997* (Washington, D.C., 1997).

<sup>14</sup> For an extensive analysis see Richard Eichenberg and Russell J. Dalton, 'Europeans and the European Community: The Dynamics of Public Support for European Integration.' Distinctions are made between so-called 'socio-tropic' issues and 'pocketbook' issues, the former being focused on the general state of the economy while the latter looking at personal economic issues. Analysis of the Latinbarometer data finds that both sets of economic issues have an impact on support for integration, with only relatively small differences between them. Researchers interested in this distinction could subdivide the items in the 'pocketbook' scale used here.

<sup>15</sup> See Charles Lyon, Jeffery J. Mondak and Anke Grosskopf, 'Economic Perceptions and Mass Support for European Integration: Exploring the Dimensions of Sociotropic Behavior', Paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meetings (Chicago, Illinois, April 1997).

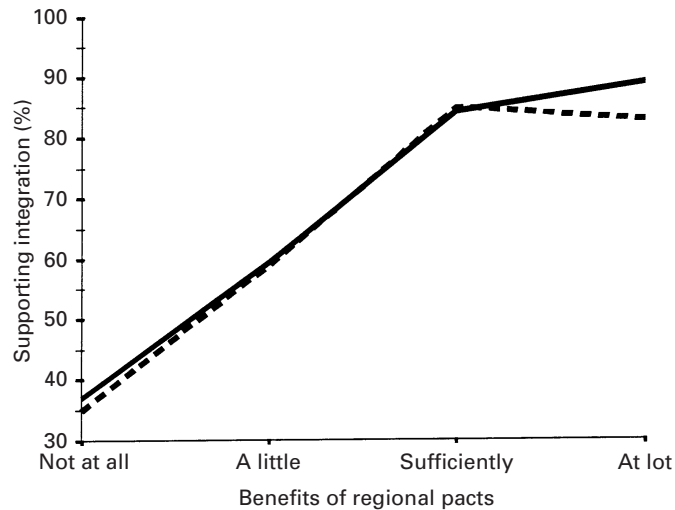


Fig. 6. Support for regional integration and perceived benefits of regional pacts.  
Gender: —, male; ---, female.

highest levels of the benefit variable, where support among females is slightly lower.

Not only do Latin Americans link their perception of the economic benefits of regional pacts to their support for regional integration, but they also link it to their perception of economic issues more broadly. The survey asked a series of questions regarding respondent perception of their national and their own personal economic situation. A direct, linear relationship is found for variables measuring perception of the future of the nation's economy as well as the respondent's own current and anticipated economic situation. The relationship between these variables, combined into an index, is shown in Figure 7.<sup>16</sup> Although the results show a clear and strong relationship between Latin Americans' perception of their nation's and their own economic situation and support for

<sup>16</sup> The index is comprised of four variables: (1) perception of the current economic situation of the country compared to a year previously; (2) perception of the economic situation one year in the future; (3) perception of respondent's family situation one year in the future and (4) degree of fear over personal unemployment in years to come. The overall index has an Alpha reliability of 0.6, and produces a single factor in a principal components analysis. The item least closely related to the other three is P14 (fear over personal unemployment). When this item is dropped, the Alpha rises to 0.65. In the survey, these items are labels P2, P3, P6 and P14. The responses for each item are recoded here on a 0–100 basis to give them an equivalent range, and the sum divided by 4. An analysis of the items comparing retrospective concerns (P2) versus prospective concerns (P3, P6 and P14) does not produce any substantive changes in the results.

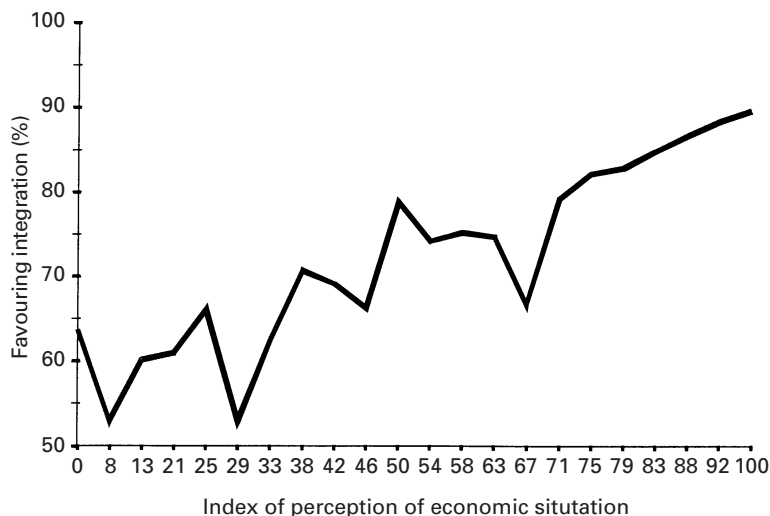


Fig. 7. Perception of the economy and support for integration.

integration, it is also clear from Figure 7 that even among those who are most pessimistic about their economy, about two-thirds still support integration. Nonetheless, these findings suggest quite clearly the identical pattern found in Europe, namely, that support for integration is highly contingent on pocketbook economic issues. In countries where the economy is headed in a downward direction one must anticipate declining support for integration. Of course, if the integration process itself produces strong rewards, and the economies grow, it is also possible to predict a reinforcement of support for integration.

#### *Socio-economic and demographic factors*

Immediate pocketbook issues clearly have their impact on support for integration, but underlying socio-economic and demographic factors also play a role. In Europe, those with higher education, professionals and males are all more supportive of integration than those with lower education, manual workers and females. Gender has already been noted as playing a role in non-opinion in the Latin American data, and in this section, this factor as well as socio-economic factors are analysed.<sup>17</sup>

In order to properly examine the role of gender on support for economic integration it is necessary to control for education, since the survey data show that males have significantly more education than

<sup>17</sup> An examination of age found no relationship in the data set. In the analysis of European data a number of studies have been conducted looking at age cohorts and their changing views over time, but since the Latinbarometer does not yet offer data sets over time, this analysis cannot be conducted here.

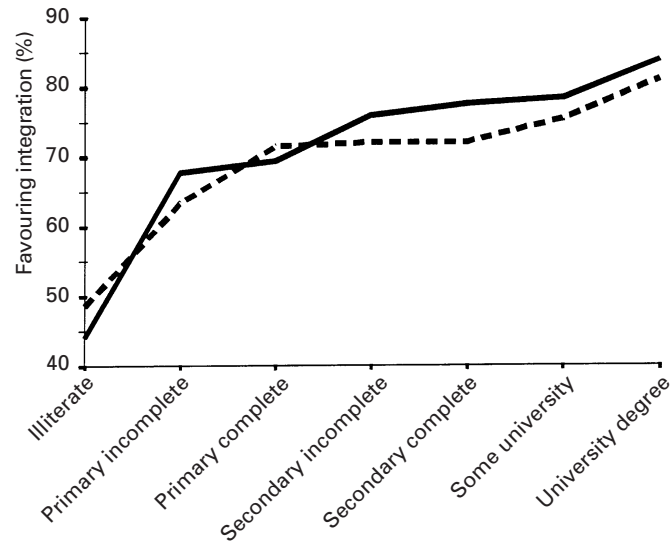


Fig. 8. Gender and support for integration: controlled by education. Gender: —, male; ---, female.

females, although the difference is not large in absolute terms. Figure 8 shows the relationship between gender and support for Latin American economic integration, controlled for education. Two findings are apparent from this analysis. First, education plays a strong role in predicting support for Latin American economic integration; among those who are illiterate, support hovers around 60 per cent, whereas about 80 per cent of those who have completed university degrees support integration. Secondly, the gender gap opens for those with secondary education and beyond, but for illiterates, females are slightly more supportive than males. Overall, however, the gender gap is not wide, with education clearly explaining far more of the difference in support than gender.

Research in Europe has often found that professionals are more supportive of integration than blue-collar workers. As a result, an examination by occupation is conducted on our Latin American data base. Figure 9 shows the results, which present no surprises. Once again we see that for all occupational categories, mean support for integration is positive. Yet, among those with the highest level professional occupations, support is nearly at the 90 per cent level, whereas it drops down to only two-thirds among farmers.

The final socio-economic variable linked to support for integration is wealth. As in many surveys, the Latinbarometer did not ask directly about income since many respondents refuse to answer this question or provide a deceptive answer. A better measure of the respondent's economic

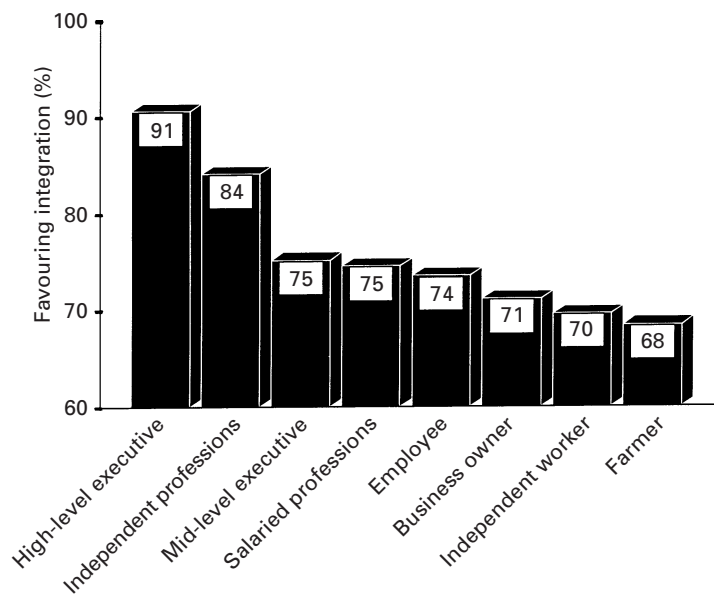


Fig. 9. Occupation and support for integration.

success is obtained by asking about the possession of capital goods, especially home appliances and cars. The Latinbarometer asked about 13 of these goods, and an index was created from them.<sup>18</sup> As expected, wealth was positively associated with support for integration, but the relationship was not strong ( $r = 0.11$ ; Sig.  $< 0.001$ ). Since wealth and education are so tightly linked, it turns out that the relationship between wealth and support for integration becomes spurious when controlled for education. The multivariate analysis presented at the conclusion of this paper excludes wealth because it becomes an insignificant predictor when education is entered into the equation.

#### *The 'role model' of the EU*

Relations between Latin America and Europe vary widely from country-to-country. Generally speaking, Southern Cone countries have paid closer attention to Europe than have the countries in Central America. In recent

<sup>18</sup> Although the capital goods measured in the survey vary widely in cost, from a microwave to an automobile, no attempt was made to weight these items in the scale. Rather, a summative scale was utilised, but since there was some missing data, mean scores of the individual respondent were assigned to each person who answered six or more of the 13 items. For those who had a larger proportion of missing data, the case was coded as missing. The goods were: colour TV, video player, video camera, refrigerator, computer, microwave oven, washing machine, telephone, automobile, second home/apartment, piped-in potable water, hot water, sewage system connected to home.



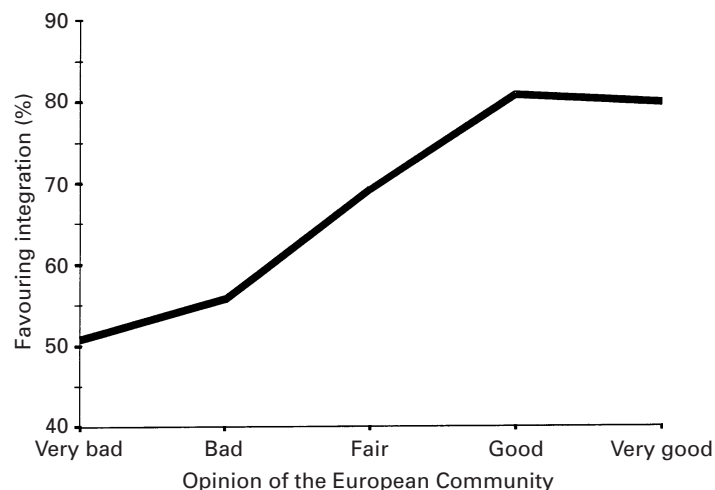


Fig. 10. Opinion of the European Community and support for integration in Latin America.

years, however, the EU has supported programmes (seminars, lectures, etc.) throughout Latin America to popularise their model of economic integration.<sup>19</sup> While it is not possible to show a direct linkage between those efforts and public opinion, the data do show a strong relationship between a favourable opinion of the EU and support for Latin American regional integration. Latin Americans also gave their opinion of the USA in the same question series, a country which came out significantly below the EU; 58 per cent of the respondents gave a positive opinion of the EU compared to 48 per cent for the USA. Figure 10 shows the relationship between opinion of the EU and support for Latin American economic integration. Among Latin Americans who have a very negative opinion of the EU, only one-third support economic integration in Latin America, whereas among those who have a favourable opinion, over 80 per cent support integration.

The close linkage between opinion of the EU and support for Latin American integration is not merely a generalised support for foreign countries. An analysis of opinions on the USA and support for integration does reveal a positive association, but one that is extremely weak and does not confirm to the linear pattern shown for the EU. Of course, there is always some risk involved in imitation. If the EU should falter as a trading unit, Latin Americans might understandably become more sceptical of the

<sup>19</sup> For a review of this literature see Simon Francoise and Susan Kaufman Purcell, 'The Impact of Regional Integration on European-Latin American Relations,' in Simon Francoise and Susan Kaufman Purcell (eds.), *Europe and Latin America in the World Economy* (Boulder, Colorado, 1995).

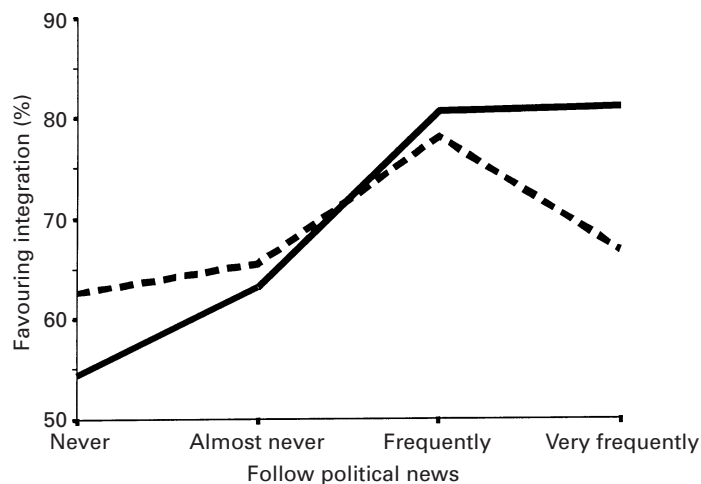


Fig. 11. Attention to political news and support for integration: by Gender: —, male; ---, female.

model, but the way things stand at the moment, the European model seems to be responsible for helping to inspire support for Latin American integration.

#### *Support for democracy*

As noted at the outset of this paper, Latin America is institutionally democratic at the moment, a significant shift from prior decades. It is also the case that Latin America is moving toward economic integration in firmer and deeper ways than in the past. Is there any association between the two? That is, can it be that support for democracy may translate into support for an economic model that involves regional integration? The survey data suggest an affirmative answer to this question.

The Latinbarometer contains an item that has frequently been used to measure support for democracy. It reads: ‘In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works [fill in country]? In Latin America’, there is a statistically significant ( $< 0.001$ ) relationship between satisfaction with democracy and support for economic integration. Support for integration increases from about two-thirds of the population among those with low satisfaction with democracy to nearly 80 per cent for those who are satisfied with it. Another item in the survey asks: ‘Would you be willing to defend democracy if it seemed to be threatened?’ Here again the relationship is statistically significant ( $< 0.001$ ), with three quarters of those willing to defend democracy supportive of integration compared to two-thirds of those among those unwilling to defend it.

*Political attentiveness*

The survey provides a number of questions to measure respondents' political attentiveness. Analysis of each of these reveals the same pattern: those who are more attentive to politics are more likely to be supporters of integration. For example, the survey asks about listening to political news on the TV and radio, and about reading political news in the newspaper. It also asks a more general question about the extent to which the respondent 'follows political news'. The pattern for each of these measures of political attentiveness is similar. In Figure 11 the results for the most general question, following political news, are displayed. The pattern for men is strong and linear, such that fewer than 55 per cent of those who never pay attention to political news support integration, compared to over 80 per cent who pay frequent attention. Among females, however, the pattern is far less marked, and even shows a decline in the group which is the most attentive.

*Overall model of support for economic integration*

Thus far the analysis has taken a bivariate approach so that the reader could easily visualize the relationships between each predictor and support for economic integration in Latin America. Since the predictors themselves are interrelated (e.g. education is positively associated with a number of the variables discussed above), it is important to examine the overall relationship using multivariate techniques. The results presented here incorporate each of the variables discussed in this paper, employing as the dependent variable support for integration in Latin America.<sup>20</sup> Table 4 contains the OLS regression results.

Each of the variables discussed in this paper (except wealth, as already noted) is a statistically significant predictor of support for integration in Latin America. A key predictor is perceived benefits of integration; the larger the perceived benefits, the greater the support. Also closely related is the positive association between Latin Americans' opinion of the European Union and support for integration. The two key socio-economic and demographic variables of education and gender are also significant, with the *t*-value of education higher than any of the remaining variables in the model. Gender, however, has a very low *t*-value when compared to education. Support for democracy (in the form of willingness

<sup>20</sup> The Latinbarometer contains a large number of variables, and those that seemed theoretically appropriate were examined for this linkages to support for integration. However, this paper reports on those that remained significant in a multivariate analysis. Index construction of some of the variables (for example grouping the large number of questions related to media attentiveness) produce slightly different results, but the substance remains the same.

Table 4. *OLS Regression: Predictors of Support for Latin American Integration*

	B	S.E	Beta	t	P
Constant	-20.44	0.69	—	-29.73	< 0.001
Benefits of economic integration	0.34	0.00	0.23	99.07	< 0.001
Opinion of European Union	10.30	0.11	0.21	92.94	< 0.001
Economic situation	0.17	0.00	0.10	42.89	< 0.001
Education	2.06	0.06	0.08	32.92	< 0.001
Willingness to defend democracy	5.88	0.23	0.06	25.24	< 0.001
Attentiveness to political news	2.69	0.12	0.05	22.43	< 0.001
Satisfaction with functioning of democracy	2.29	0.13	0.04	17.99	< 0.001
Business owner	-6.43	0.41	-0.04	-15.72	< 0.001
Student	-5.09	0.33	-0.04	-15.44	< 0.001
Salaried professional	-4.94	0.54	-0.02	-9.23	< 0.001
Unemployed	-4.94	0.54	-0.02	-8.66	< 0.001
Independent professional	4.53	0.65	0.02	6.93	< 0.001
Employee	-1.62	0.28	-0.01	-5.72	< 0.001
Gender	-0.97	-0.21	-0.01	-4.64	< 0.001

Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.19$ ,  $P < 0.001$ . Gender 1 = male; 2 = female.

to defend it and satisfaction with its functioning) also plays an independent role in predicting support for integration. Those who are more attentive to political news are more supportive as well. The occupation variable was divided into a series of dummy variables, so the effect of each of the major occupational groupings could be seen. Farmers, who were shown in Figure 9 to have the lowest support, were used as the base category, against which the others were compared. Unemployed and student status were also included as separate categories. As can be seen from the signs of the coefficients in Table 4, only the status of independent professional had a positive association with support for integration (the categories of high-level executives and mid-level executives, which also had positive links to support, were not significant once other variables were entered into the regression analysis). On the other hand, the status of business owner, student, salaried professional, the unemployed and employee, each had a negative impact on support. Overall, occupation played only a small role in determining support as shown by the  $t$ -values.

#### *Implications and conclusions*

In many ways this paper presents a picture of popular attitudes toward economic integration in Latin America that would cheer those who favour further integration. In all but four countries, two-thirds of those interviewed express support – and in nine out of the 17 countries, three-quarters or more of those with an opinion are in favour of – integration.

In every country, majorities of opinion holders support integration. Of course, these findings could be gleaned from looking merely at the percentages reported in the Latinbarometer results. But the payoff in this analysis has been the bi-variate and multivariate analysis.

Two economic variables have proven to be directly linked to support for Latin American integration: perceived benefits of regional trading blocks and perception of personal and national economic situation. This finding suggests that success breeds success, and the more that Latin America prospers from regional trade and the more that its economies flourish, the greater support there will be for economic integration.

Latin Americans also pay attention to Europe, and the integration process underway there. The higher the opinion of European integration, the greater the support for Latin American integration. This finding suggests that the efforts of the EU and its member nations to promote the integrationist ideals beyond their shores may be having a positive effect. Given that no reasonable person can expect completely smooth sailing for the European process in the years to come, it will be all the more important for the EU to continue to promote its model in Latin America so that public opinion can overcome the inevitable disappointments.

Women are less supportive of integration than men in a number of countries in Latin America. A large part of that difference, however, is a function of the lower level of education of females as compared to males. Once education is controlled for, the gender gap in opinion narrows considerably as the regression analysis shows. Perhaps more important from a policy perspective is that the highly educated and news-attentive are strong supporters of integration. Since the highly educated are usually the most politically active in any society, the ones who vote the most, who make the most demands on their elected officials, it is likely that popular support for integration will be especially effective in influencing policy. Furthermore, the opinions of the well-educated may have a restraining effect on populist regimes that, from time-to-time, have been elected in Latin America on the basis of nationalistic appeals. If such regimes seek to isolate their countries from regional economic integration, they may well meet with majoritarian popular opposition led by the strongest opposition from the most highly educated.

Finally, it is gratifying to see that democracy and support for integration are linked. The more satisfied Latin Americans are with democracy and the more willing they are to defend it, the greater their support for economic integration. If Latin America continues along its recent path of increasing democratisation these findings imply that it will likely see growing support for economic integration. One might even speculate that support for economic integration could eventually spill-

over into support for political integration, but such hopes have been raised before by early theorists of economic integration and have not been strongly supported.<sup>21</sup> Nationalism in Latin America has frequently been underestimated because of the relative infrequency of international wars in the region during the present century. Perhaps nationalism will fade along with the militarism and dictatorship of the past, but the present data set does not allow the exploration of that possibility. For the moment, supporters of integration in Latin America will have to content themselves with the optimistic picture presented here without leaping to the unjustified conclusion that we are soon to see the emergence of a 'United States of Latin America'.

<sup>21</sup> An early study that showed the sharp discontinuity of economic and political integration was Mitchell A. Seligson, 'Transactions and Community Formation: Fifteen Years of Growth and Stagnation in Central America', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 11 (March 1973), pp. 173–90.