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The Instruments of “Soft Power” of the USA, China and Russia in Latin America in the Context of Multipolar World Order Formation

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Abstract. The article examines the modern tools of the “soft power” policy of the USA, Russia and China in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), considering the economic, political, humanitarian, cultural, diplomatic, historical context of cooperation in the region. The relevance of the study is conditioned by the increasing popularity of the “soft power” ideas in the era of the world order transformation, a phenomenon that is required around the world, including in the LAC countries, where there is a strong competition for influence. The purpose of this work is to identify and analyze the contemporary effective “soft power” tools employed by key actors in Latin Caribbean America in the context of multipolarity. The main sources for analysis encompass modern monographs, scientific articles, materials from analytical centers, speeches delivered by officials. Methodologically, the work is based on comparative, statistical and synthetic analyses. It is revealed that with the activity and aggressiveness of the “soft power” of China, which forms the image of a reliable and gratuitous investor, the United States maintains high authority in the field of politics, economics and culture, albeit with methods of influence that are sometimes destructive. In 2025, Washington began actively using “hard power,” which has not yet made it easier to oust China and Russia from the region. As demonstrated by the statistical assessment of public opinion, there has been a decline in the reputation of the Russian Federation in South America since the start of the Special Military Operation. However, at the same time, Latin America is helping to restore Russia’s status as a world power. The Russian Federation is creating an image as a builder of a just, equality-based and value-based multipolar order. Not being associated with neo-colonialism, the country successfully operates with cultural, diplomatic and humanitarian “soft power” and it has potential in other areas. That is why the United States is trying to restrict the work of Russian media in LAC. Common promising and effective modern tools of “soft power” in Latin America in the era of multipolarization include economic tools, mass media, space diplomacy tools, high technologies, public and digital diplomacy.

Key words: public diplomacy, multipolar world, diplomacy, cultural cooperation, humanitarian instruments, neocolonialism, information technology

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Conflicts of interest. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Инструменты «мягкой силы» США, Китая и России в Латинской Америке в условиях формирования многополярного мира

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Аннотация. Проанализирован современный инструментарий политики «мягкой силы» США, России и Китая в Латинской Америке с учетом экономического, политического, гуманитарного, культурного, дипломатического и исторического контекста сотрудничества в регионе. Актуальность исследования обусловлена увеличивающейся в эпоху трансформации мирового порядка популярностью идей «мягкой силы», столь необходимой как во всем мире, так и в странах Латинской Америки и Карибского бассейна (ЛАКБ), за влияние в которых сегодня ведется конкурентная борьба. Цель — выявить и проанализировать современные эффективные инструменты «мягкой силы» важных акторов в ЛАКБ в контексте формирования многополярного мира. Основными источниками для анализа являются современные монографии, научные статьи, материалы аналитических центров, выступления официальных должностных лиц. Методологически работа базируется на сопоставительном и статистическом анализе и синтезе. Выявлено, что при активности и наступательности «мягкой силы» Китая, формирующей образ надежного и безвозмездного инвестора, в регионе сохраняется высокий авторитет США в области политики, экономики и культуры, пусть иногда с разрушительным характером методов воздействия. Так, в 2025 г. Вашингтон начал активно применять «жесткую силу», что пока не облегчает вытеснение Китая и России из региона. На основе статистической оценки общественного мнения констатируется падение репутации Российской Федерации на Южноамериканском континенте после начала специальной военной операции (СВО), однако вместе с тем Латинская Америка содействует восстановлению статуса России как мировой державы. РФ в свою очередь создает имидж строителя справедливого, основанного на равенстве и ценностях многополярного порядка. Не ассоциируясь с неокOLONIALИЗМом, страна успешно оперирует культурной, дипломатической и гуманитарной «мягкой силой» и имеет потенциал в других областях. Именно поэтому со стороны США осуществляются попытки ограничения работы российских СМИ в ЛАКБ. Общими перспективными и эффективными современными инструментами «мягкой силы» в Латинской Америке в эпоху многополярности являются экономические, СМИ, публичная и цифровая дипломатия, инструменты в области высоких технологий и космоса.

Ключевые слова: публичная дипломатия, многополярный мир, дипломатия, культурное сотрудничество, гуманитарные инструменты, неокOLONIALИЗМ, информационные технологии

Вклад авторов. Литягина Е. А.: концепция и дизайн исследования, сбор и обработка материалов, анализ полученных данных, написание текста. Климова К. М.: сбор и обработка материалов.

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Introduction

In the modern world, a multipolar model of international relations is gradually emerging, replacing the unipolar model. The new world order aims to establish a balance of power between the leading powers and newly emerging centers of power gaining weight in regions and subregions, and is also characterized by the emergence of new players and initiatives (Jeifets, 2020). Due to its strategic geopolitical position and colossal natural resource reserves, Latin America is one of the emerging centers of a multipolar world. In the 21st century, it is forced to balance between the declining influence of the United States and the rise of China in the global and regional political and economic arena, while existing integration blocs bring Latin America closer to extra-regional powers opposing global hegemony (Jeifets, 2021, p. 53; Lo Brutto & Crivelli Minutti, 2024). In the context of the crisis of globalization and the transformation of the world order, the role of “soft power” is rapidly increasing, demonstrating its promise and usefulness against the backdrop of the active development of information technology.

The present study is grounded in the theoretical and methodological principles of neoliberal institutionalism. The classic core term of American political liberalism, “soft power,” and its concept were formulated in the late 1970s by Harvard University professor J. Nye. According to his definition, “soft power” is the ability of one state to influence the behavior of another to achieve its own goals through persuasion, positive appeal, and the formation of an agenda that is accepted

and viewed as legitimate by other countries. However, A.V. Fenenko notes that the concept of “soft power” itself was described in the early 20th century by N. Angell and other experts.¹ The main components of “soft power” are state culture, political values, and foreign policy (Nye, 2011, p. 84).

The term “soft power” appeared in Russian practice in 2013. In essence, it is similar to the American term “public diplomacy.” The use of “soft power” across all areas of international relations reflects the interpretation of this term as a phenomenon arising in the process of political and sociocultural cooperation between countries (Filimonov, 2013, p. 3). Meanwhile, “soft” and “hard power” are not mutually exclusive: the Russian school often defines “soft power” as a set of non-military methods; accordingly, in this context, economic and political coercion fall under this definition (Lebedeva, 2017, p. 213).

The issues of using “soft power” of the United States, China and Russia in Latin America were addressed in the works of such authors as A.V. Budaev (2014; 2018), P.P. Yakovlev (2019; 2022), E.I. Safronova (2020), M.I. Garbart (2020), M. Santoro (2020), E.O. Ivanov (2022), V.L. Jeifets (2020; 2021), L. Xing (Xing, Vadell & Rubiolo, 2023), A. Morante (Morante & Wu, 2023), D.V. Polikanov² et al. However, among the body of work on this topic, studies on individual soft power instruments or actors predominate, while comparative overview studies providing a comprehensive picture of the overall balance of power in LAC are virtually absent.

¹ “We Need to Pay More Attention to Positive Projects Within Which We Can Work.” A Conversation with Alexey Fenenko // PICREADI: Creative Diplomacy. October 11, 2016. (In Russian). URL: <https://picreadianalitika.ru/fenenko-interview> (accessed: 09.01.2025).

² Polikanov D.V. The Role of Soft Power in International Relations: Modern Russian Experience and Prospects // Russian International Affairs Council. April 17, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/rol-myagkoy-sily-v-mezhdunarodnykh-otnosheniyakh-sovremennyy-rossiyskiy-opyt-i-perspektivy/> (accessed: 09.01.2025).

To address this gap, this study employs a synthesis to integrate various approaches and provide a holistic understanding of the overall situation in the region, as well as a comparative analysis of the soft power instruments employed by the United States, Russia, and China in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Based on the classification of soft power varieties proposed by G.G. Holyk (2011, p. 223) and E.V. Efanova (2018, p. 420), it seems appropriate to systematize the soft power instruments used in LAC, analyzing their effectiveness and providing specific examples from contemporary political practice.

Economic “Soft Power”

Despite J. Nye’s classification of economics as “hard power,” an attractive economic development model is actually a form of “soft power.” The manifestations of “soft power” are influenced by economic factors, depending on a country’s level of economic development and foreign economic policy. Furthermore, economically weak countries are rarely able to effectively demonstrate their attractiveness in other areas (Mironova, 2020). The main instruments of economic “soft power” include the promotion of a successful economic model, investment attractiveness, the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects abroad, development assistance programs, funding of international institutions, trade and providing economic assistance to countries in need.

Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the world’s most dynamic regions, with

numerous political, economic, and social processes are unfolding. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is a major investor in Latin America, providing loans, investments, and technology for the development of infrastructure, energy, telecommunications, and other industries (Pennaforte & Bones, 2020). In 2024, trade between China and LAC exceeded USD 500 billion.³

Beijing imports raw materials and agricultural products from Latin America, offering finished goods, weapons, and technology in exchange. Economic projects implemented with China’s participation contribute to the economic growth of Latin American countries and strengthen their dependence on the Chinese market (Xing, Vadell & Rubiolo, 2023, p. 16). In order to foster a close partnership with Latin American countries, in 2016 China adopted a strategy called the “Basic Document on Relations with Latin America and the Caribbean.” The “One Belt, One Road” project is highlighted by researchers as an important initiative and inspires confidence among the majority of the population in LAC countries (Garbart, 2020, p. 80).

China’s banking and investment strategies in Latin America have attracted the attention of experts and analysts: between 2005 and 2022, Latin America received USD 136 billion in foreign direct investment from China, mainly in markets such as Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela, and lending to LAC countries is carried out mainly through major Chinese banks such as the China Development Bank (CDB) and the Export-Import Bank of China.⁴ Since 1998, China has been a non-regional

³ Baptista E., Cash J., Lee L. China Offers Latin America and the Caribbean Billions in Bid to Rival US Influence // Reuters. May 13, 2025. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/china-latin-america-trade-exceeded-500-billion-2024-2025-05-13/> (accessed: 18.08.2025).

⁴ Mann R. A Comprehensive Breakdown of China’s Loans in Latin America // The Rio Times. August 14, 2023. URL: <https://www.riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/brazil/a-comprehensive-breakdown-of-chinas-loans-in-latin-america/> (accessed: 18.08.2025).

member of the Caribbean Development Bank,⁵ with equity and proportional voting rights, and in 2009 the country joined the Inter-American Development Bank.⁶ Working with individuals is also effective: Latin Americans already have yuan accounts, use them to pay for purchases on Chinese platforms, and use Chinese apps to order taxis and receive other services.

Beijing is making a serious bet on the Bolivian “corner” of the famous “lithium triangle” that includes Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile: China has signed an agreement with the Bolivian state-owned company *Yacimientos de Litio Bolivianos*.⁷ In this regard, China is following the example of Russia, whose Rosatom mining company, *Uranium One Group*, signed an agreement with Bolivia to build an industrial complex for the extraction and production of lithium carbonate.⁸

China is promoting the expansion of industrial production of chia seeds, with exports from Bolivia alone amounting to USD 22.4 million from January to October 2023.⁹ The Chancay megaport in Peru was built with the participation of China, which allows products to be delivered from Peru to China 23 days faster.¹⁰ China is also investing in Peruvian irrigation projects with the

prospect of expanding arable land.¹¹ To intensify cooperation, a mechanism for interaction with the largest forum, China — the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), is being used. A similar format exists between Russia and CELAC. All of the above measures enhance China’s attractiveness, shaping its image as a reliable, peaceful, and, most importantly, uncompensated partner.

China’s main competitor in the region, the United States, has created the image of a geographically close long-term partner, constantly investing in LAC countries and having concluded favorable free trade agreements with 11 countries, such as the US — Mexico — Canada Free Trade Agreement (T-MEC/USMCA).

The creation of a unique political and economic paradigm that could become an alternative to the American path could change the current state of US dominance in the LAC region. A prime example is Saudi Arabia’s *Aramco*, the world’s third-largest oil company by market capitalization, which financed the Chilean company *Esmax Distribution SpA*, though the latter was ultimately sold to the Saudis on the strong recommendation of *BofA*

⁵ CDB Signs MOU with Export-Import Bank of China // The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). July 13, 2017. URL: <https://www.caribank.org/newsroom/news-and-events/cdb-signs-mou-export-import-bank-china> (accessed: 12.02.2025).

⁶ IDB Approves \$153 Million in Loans To Set up IDB-China Eximbank Equity Investment Platform // The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). November 29, 2012. URL: <https://www.iadb.org/en/news/idb-approves-153-million-loans-set-idb-china-eximbank-equity-investment-platform> (accessed: 18.08.2025).

⁷ Bolivia Has Signed an Agreement with the Chinese Consortium CBC to Develop Lithium Deposits // Financial One. January 22, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://fomag.ru/news-streem/boliviya-podpisala-s-kitayskim-konsortsiomom-cbc-soglashenie-o-razrabotke-mestorozhdeniy-litiya-1/> (accessed: 10.07.2024).

⁸ Rosatom Signed an Agreement on Lithium Mining in Bolivia // Seldon.News. June 29, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://myseldon.com/ru/news/index/287262731> (accessed: 10.07.2024).

⁹ Bolivia Set to Export Chia to China // Fundación Andrés Bello. January 19, 2024. URL: <https://www.fundacionandresbello.org/en/news/bolivia-%F0%9F%87%A7%F0%9F%87%B4-news/bolivia-set-to-export-chia-to-china/> (accessed: 10.08.2025).

¹⁰ The Chancay Megaport, Built with Chinese Investment, Opened in Peru // TASS. November 15, 2024. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/22407027> (accessed: 03.07.2025).

¹¹ Aquino M. Peru to Spend \$24 Billion on Irrigation to Expand Farmlands // Reuters. March 24, 2025. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/peru-spend-24-billion-irrigation-expand-farmlands-2025-03-24/> (accessed: 12.05.2025).

Securities.¹² In general, analysts agree that the United States is trying to weaken China's influence in LAC both directly and indirectly (Yakovlev, 2019, p. 48).

In the context of an emerging multipolar world, foreign policy vectors are shifting. Despite the complicated situation due to anti-Russian sanctions, Russia is developing economic relations with Latin American countries, particularly in energy, trade, and investment, recognizing the region as an important area of foreign policy, with mutual trade turnover exceeding USD 20 billion in 2021 and continuing to grow, as it has been doing so until 2023.¹³ Economic “soft power” is coordinated, among other things, by the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, which is responsible for international cooperation between Russian Federation constituent entities and the development of integration mechanisms, such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) (especially in the humanitarian sphere), BRICS, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF), and the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) (Gonzalez & Bellott, 2022, p. 114). However, while total direct investment in the region grew, the United States held the leading position in 2024 (38%), China invested less (2%),¹⁴ and Russia does not appear in the rankings and is not noted as a leading investor, which in turn has a certain impact on the political and psychological perception of each country.

Humanitarian “Soft Power”

The importance of humanitarian cooperation, as well as the need for non-military methods of influence and conflict resolution, is rapidly increasing, especially in the current context of the international food, energy, and financial crises. A state's scientific, technological, and economic might rests on three pillars: science, education, and healthcare, enabling it to advance its interests on the global stage, as well as its soft power resources, applied for long-term goals (Lebedeva, 2017, p. 220).

The United States was the first to use the potential of scientific and technological power as a foreign policy tool by providing Latin American countries with humanitarian aid in the event of epidemics, natural disasters and other emergencies. This shaped the US's image as a reliable partner. In the field of education, numerous student exchange programs and grants are offered, thereby strengthening cultural ties and stimulating the region's educational development.

Education is also an important lever of China's “soft power,” fostering a positive image among Latin America's youth and intellectual elite. Confucius Institutes successfully popularize and promote the concept of a “Community of Shared Future for Humanity” and facilitate humanitarian exchanges between the parties, building the so-called “China — Latin America Community with a Shared Future.” The study of Chinese is promoted by 44 Confucius Institutes located

¹² Saudi Arabian Oil Company Completed the Acquisition of Esmax Distribución Limitada from Southern Cross Group // Marketscreener. February 29, 2024. URL: <https://www.marketscreener.com/quote/stock/ARAMCO-103505448/news/Saudi-Arabian-Oil-Company-completed-the-acquisition-of-Esmax-Distribuci-n-Limitada-from-Southern-Cr-46081641/> (accessed: 22.08.2025).

¹³ Nemtsev Yu. Russia and Latin America Have Significant Potential for Developing Economic Ties // International Affairs. August 27, 2025. (In Russian). URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/52702> (accessed: 11.10.2025).

¹⁴ Inversión extranjera directa en América Latina y el Caribe aumentó 7,1 % en 2024, totalizando 188.962 millones de dólares // CEPAL. 17 de julio de 2025. URL: <https://www.cepal.org/es/comunicados/inversion-extranjera-directa-america-latina-caribe-aumento-71-2024-totalizando-188962> (accessed: 22.08.2025).

in LAC countries,¹⁵ while a political elite familiar with Chinese values and culture is emerging in Latin American countries. In the high-tech sector, *Huawei* has become a key provider of information and communications technology (ICT) services and equipment in Latin America: in 2021, *Huawei*, *Hikvision*, and *ZTE* provided the Brazilian city of São Paulo with facial recognition surveillance equipment.¹⁶ Beijing is also expanding its space activities, such as through the China Joint Action Plan for CELAC (2022–2024), BRICS, cooperation with the Mexican Space Agency to expand the use of China's *BeiDou* satellite constellation in the region, and other funded satellite and radar projects in Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia.¹⁷

The Chairperson of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation, Valentina Matviyenko, emphasized that Russia aims to deepen humanitarian contacts in the fields of culture, science, and education¹⁸: as early as 2023, Russia increased the number of student places available to students from LAC.¹⁹ Russia is developing three key areas: space, medicine, and security. Significant achievements have also been made in joint efforts to protect human rights, minimize the

consequences of terrorist attacks, and uphold international humanitarian law.

The Russian Ministry of Education is promoting the Russian language and providing consultations on school education. Specifically, the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES) has launched regional training courses for firefighters in Cuba, including Russian language training. The MES's activities, such as delivering humanitarian aid to Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, operating an airmobile hospital in Chile and suppressing wildfires in Bolivia, as well as Russia's "vaccine diplomacy" have become an important manifestation of humanitarian "soft power," strengthening Moscow's reputation and demonstrating its willingness to assist. Cooperation on these issues has been successful with Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala (Ivanov, 2022). Moreover, the Russian-Nicaraguan joint venture for the production of Latin American biotechnological drugs, Mechnikov, has begun producing the Russian vaccine *CoviVac*,²⁰ and the company *Geropharm* has started manufacturing genetically engineered human insulin drugs in Venezuela.²¹

¹⁵ Rouvinski V. China's Soft Power in Latin America // *Diálogo Político*. February 19, 2024. URL: <https://dialogopolitico.org/special-edition-2024-keys-to-understanding-china/chinas-soft-power-in-latin-america/> (accessed: 11.12.2024).

¹⁶ Schwartz L. Grandes empresas "regalan" equipo de vigilancia para establecerse en América Latina // *Rest of World*. August 23, 2021. URL: <https://restofworld.org/2021/empresas-regalan-vigilancia-america-latina/> (accessed: 11.12.2024).

¹⁷ Evan Ellis R. China — Latin America Space Cooperation: An Overview // *The Diplomat*. February 16, 2024. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/china-latin-america-space-cooperation-an-overview/> (accessed: 22.07.2024).

¹⁸ V. Matviyenko: Russian Parliamentarians Advocate for Strengthening the Economic and Political Potential of the Global South // Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. October 3, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <http://www.council.gov.ru/events/news/148508/> (accessed: 10.07.2024).

¹⁹ Opening of the International Parliamentary Conference "Russia — Latin America" // President of Russia. September 29, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72401/videos> (accessed: 10.07.2024).

²⁰ Sidorova E. *CoviVac* Production Is to Launch in Nicaragua // *Pharmaceutical Bulletin*. October 26, 2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://pharmvestnik.ru/content/news/V-Nikaragua-planiruetsya-zapustit-proizvodstvo-KoviVaka.html> (accessed: 09.01.2025).

²¹ Russian Company *Geropharm* Will Begin Producing Insulin in Venezuela // *TASS*. March 30, 2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/11032393> (accessed: 09.01.2025).

In addition, Russia is enhancing its collaboration in the field of satellite navigation by deploying GLONASS stations in Brazil, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba.²² At the International Astronautical Congress (IAC–2023), *Roscosmos* invited the Brazilian space agency to participate in the work of the Russian orbital station.²³ Significantly, the first Brazilian cosmonaut launched into space on a Russian spacecraft as part of the cooperation agreement between Russia and Brazil (Baryshev, 2012, p. 105). Joint space exploration, knowledge sharing, and exporting Russian technologies enhance Russia's image and credibility in the LAC region.

However, in the space race for Brazil and other LAC countries, the United States and China are also competing. China is once again building its appeal through its willingness to invest heavily and strengthening its position on the continent through cooperation with CELAC, whose member countries have been invited to join the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) program.²⁴ China is thus seriously competing with the American lunar initiative, *Artemis Accords*.

Cultural “Soft Power”

Russian authors, following J. Nye and other foreign researchers, emphasize the importance and role of public and cultural diplomacy as a particularly important and powerful lever of “soft power.” This toolkit is shaped by cultural

influence, that is, the appeal of a country's lifestyle and values, the spread of the national language as a “carrier of the national cultural matrix” (Gorlova & Bychkova, 2015, p. 270), popular culture, the promotion of pop music, fashion, and cinema in other countries, the establishment of fast-food chains featuring national cuisine, victories in international sports tournaments, familiarity with literary and artistic works, and scientific and technological achievements.

Sport has long been a tool for achieving geopolitical goals and promoting economic systems and fundamental values. The results of sporting competitions in global tournaments become an important criterion for a country's international prestige, and sometimes methods far beyond sport are used. For example, football is the national sport and brand for almost all LAC countries. Therefore, to celebrate Argentina's victory in the 2024 Copa América, the Empire State Building in New York was illuminated in the colors of the Argentine flag,²⁵ endearing itself to the Argentine people and contributing to a positive image of the United States. Overall, American culture, including film, music, fashion, and pop culture, has a strong influence on Latin American countries. American films and television series are popular, and American music is often played on local radio stations.

In turn, to strengthen ties with LAC countries, Russia supports cultural exchanges, exhibitions, and festivals aimed at promoting Russian culture and language in Latin America. The Russian Ministry of Culture organizes special

²² Russia Submitted Materials to ICAO for the Use of GLONASS Satellite Navigation in Civil Aviation // GLONASS Bulletin. October 4, 2021. (In Russian). URL: <http://vestnik-ghonass.ru/news/tech/rossiya-predstavila-v-ikao-materialy-dlya-ispolzovaniya-sputnikovoy-navigatsii-ghonass-v-grazhdansko/> (accessed: 04.05.2025).

²³ Russia Offers Brazil Participation in the Creation of an Orbital Station // TV BRICS. October 4, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://tvbrics.com/news/rossiya-predlagaet-brazilii-uchastie-v-sozdanii-orbitalnoy-stantsii/> (accessed: 04.05.2025).

²⁴ China — CELAC Joint Action Plan for Cooperation in Key Areas (2022–2024) // Ministry of Foreign Affairs. People's Republic of China. December 7, 2021. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/jj/2020zt/kjgzbdffyq/202112/t20211207_10463459.html (accessed: 22.08.2025).

²⁵ Tower Lights Calendar, July 2024 // The Empire State Building. URL: <https://www.esbnyc.com/about/tower-lights/calendar/202407> (accessed: 12.02.2025).

events, including Russian film festivals, cultural days, theater and artist tours, and exhibitions. *Rosstrudnichestvo*, in turn, supports the functioning of Russian Houses.²⁶ In October 2025, a delegation from the Russian Public Chamber unveiled a joint mural in Santiago, where the Russian side is represented by an image of a bear, the Kremlin towers, and the domes of the Pokrovsky Cathedral. This mural evoked positive emotions and interest among local residents and has become a symbol of Russian-Chilean friendship. It will eventually serve as a reminder to Chileans of Russia and Moscow.²⁷

China also employs cultural diplomacy, supporting the exchange of cultural delegations, organizing festivals, exhibitions, and events to promote the Chinese language and traditions, actively involving Confucius Institutes. However, one of the most notable aspects of Chinese culture in LAC is its gastronomy: Sino-Latin American cuisine has a significant influence in the region, as has Hakku-Cantonese cuisine from China, which has been present in Cuba and Suriname for over 170 years. The large-scale historical migration of Chinese to Peru has given rise to the so-called *chifa* (In Spanish) — a fusion of Peruvian and Chinese cuisine, the popularity of which marks the reunification of two millennia-old cultures, the integration of Chinese immigrants, and the new identity of a multicultural society (Yuan, 2018). In addition, many Latin American artists have drawn inspiration from the aesthetics and philosophy of Chinese

calligraphy, and concepts such as yin-yang, Taoism, and Buddhism are a source of spiritual values and wisdom.

Diplomatic “Soft Power”

Diplomatic “soft power” refers to the activities of government officials aimed at achieving foreign policy goals through negotiations, agreements, and cooperation. Its tools include public diplomacy, information power and media, the influence of a strong and charismatic personality, effective negotiation, and the development and promotion of a unique development model that other countries will follow and sympathize with (Takazov & Zagoskina, 2022).

Recently, Russian diplomacy has achieved the desired results in strengthening Russian-Latin American relations based on the rule of international law, the pursuit of a multipolar world system, a balance of interests, and the strengthening of international security. One of the significant outcomes of the first international interparliamentary conference between Russia and Latin America, held in the fall of 2023, was the signing of a special agreement by State Duma Speaker V.V. Volodin and the President of the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) A.C. Acevedo on the State Duma’s accession to PARLACEN as a permanent observer.²⁸

The current expansion of dialogue between China and Latin America is carried out within the framework of Beijing’s open and stated foreign policy goals to “build a great country and

²⁶ The Development of Russian Houses Abroad Was Discussed in Moscow // Roscongress. February 17, 2025. (In Russian). URL: https://roscongress.org/news/v-moskve-obsudili-razvitie-russkih-domov-za-rubezhom/?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F (accessed: 18.06.2025).

²⁷ A Mural Dedicated to Russian-Chilean Friendship Opened in Santiago // Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation. October 9, 2025. (In Russian). URL: <http://www.oprf.ru/news/v-sant-yago-otkrylysa-mural-posvyashchenny-rossiyskoy-druzhbe> (accessed: 22.11.2025).

²⁸ Vyacheslav Volodin and Amado Serrud Acevedo Signed an Agreement on the State Duma’s Accession to PARLACEN as an Observer // State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. October 2, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <http://duma.gov.ru/news/57976/> (accessed: 10.07.2025).

promote national rejuvenation.”²⁹. China’s non-interference in domestic political processes has a positive impact on advancing Chinese interests. The same cannot be said of the Americans, who weakened their interest and political influence in the region at the beginning of the century and are now attempting to reclaim it and counter China’s influence. In LAC, the United States promotes guaranteed political freedoms, a stable political system and constitution, economic dynamism, and the “American Dream.” The Peace Corps and the United States Agency for International Development are used to implement these goals.

It should be noted that a key instrument of “soft power” is public diplomacy, a field in which the United States is the founder and undisputed leader. US public diplomacy targets the social elites of Latin America who shape public opinion and influence political development (Raymont, 2008). Key aspects of this activity include creating non-governmental organizations, interacting with a new generation of politicians, and supporting liberal political movements and independent media organizations (Tsvetkova et al., 2019). Innovative diplomatic tools include social media, microblogs, video hosting sites, and even individuals. An interesting example of US practice is the blogosphere, which, unlike the global experience, demonstrates real effectiveness and influences political processes in the region, for example, foreign policy blogs: *Americas Quarterly* (AQ),³⁰ *Washington Office on Latin America* (WOLA),³¹ regional blogs:

AULA Blog³² of the American University’s Center for Latin American and Latino Studies, *Latin American Perspectives* (LAP),³³ *Verso Books Blog*,³⁴ etc. Blogs themselves contribute to the creation and promotion of a politician’s image, rather than the other way around. They help convey ideas, persuade the masses, and achieve local or international success. However, these forces are disorganized and fragmented, and attempts to create coalitions in this area have so far been unsuccessful.

Russia’s experience is significant in terms of organizing youth forums and so-called Latin American model organizations, including, for example, the World Youth Festival and the CELAC Model, which was first held at Lomonosov Moscow State University. These events aim to foster friendship, understanding, and partnerships between young people in Russia and Latin America. Traditional media, encompassing magazines, newspapers, radio, television, and social media, function as public diplomacy tools, thereby serving as a powerful foreign policy tool. The news channel *Russia Today*, their project “¡Ahí les Va!,” and the *Sputnik* news agency successfully operate in LAC.

China, in turn, actively uses the internet, social platforms, and the media to disseminate its policies, ideology, and values among the region’s population. This allows China to effectively communicate with Latin American countries, cultivate a favorable image, and strengthen its influence. The platforms used on its isolated internet include *WeChat*, *QQ*, the news portal

²⁹ Full Text: China’s Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean // The State Council. The People’s Republic of China. December 10, 2025. URL: https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202512/10/content_WS693962c3c6d00ca5f9a08069.html (accessed:10.02.2026).

³⁰ *Americas Quarterly*. URL: <https://www.americasquarterly.org> (accessed: 12.12.2025).

³¹ *Washington Office on Latin America*. URL: <https://www.wola.org/> (accessed: 12.12.2025).

³² AULA Blog. URL: <https://aulablog.net/> (accessed: 12.12.2025).

³³ *Latin American Perspectives*. URL: <https://latinamericanperspectives.com/category/blog/> (accessed: 12.12.2025).

³⁴ *Verso Books Blog*. URL: <https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news> (accessed: 12.12.2025).

with its own satellite television channel *Ifeng.com*, *Sogou.com*, and *163.com*, the social platform *Douban.com*, and the microblog *Weibo*.

Essentially, it should be noted that digital diplomacy and big data diplomacy are relevant and innovative methods of modern “soft power”

(Tsvetkova & Sytnik, 2023). Since “soft power” aims to persuade and shape a positive perception of a country, it is advisable to analyze not only scientific knowledge, media materials, and propaganda, but also public opinion, based on *Latinobarometro* data (Table).

Public Opinion of the Population of LAC* Countries about the USA, China, and Russia before and after the Start of the Special Military Operation (SMO), % of Respondents

Answer Options	2020 (before the start of the SMO)	2023 (after starting the SMO)
Positive opinion of the USA	64.4	71.1
Negative opinion of the USA	25.2	22.3
Positive opinion about China	49.3	48.8
Negative opinion about China	35	40.3
Positive opinion about Russia	46.3	34.2
Negative opinion about Russia	31.9	53.1

Note. Data are summarized for the following countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Venezuela, Guatemala, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, El Salvador, Uruguay, and Ecuador.

Source: calculated by E.A. Lityagina based on data: Corporación Latinobarómetro. URL: <https://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp> (accessed: 13.11.2024).

A survey of LAC residents’ attitudes towards the United States, China, and Russia before and after the start of the SMO revealed that, while the United States saw a slight increase in positive public perceptions of LAC countries, China, despite a generally stable situation, experienced a slight decline in its standing. Russia, by contrast, significantly lost its credibility and appeal in the eyes of the Latin American population after the start of the SMO, which in turn impacts economic relations with LAC countries, despite the official positions of individual states. Thus, immediately after the conflict began, the leaders of Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay, Chile, Uruguay, and Ecuador issued condemnatory statements, while the leaders of Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia, Mexico, and Peru adopted a moderate

position, calling for a return to peaceful dialogue (Yakovlev, 2022, p. 236). According to data for 2023, the most positive attitudes towards Russia were observed in countries such as Peru, Guatemala, Ecuador and Bolivia.

Conclusion

As the study showed, regardless of classification, all methods of “soft power” are interconnected, interdependent, and one does not exclude the other: often, economic instruments become political, and humanitarian ones become economic.

The study suggests that China’ soft power, particularly successful in investment, finance, and education, is gradually attracting a growing

audience in Latin American countries, helping Beijing to expand its economic and political influence. Despite some experts believing that China is “buying” Latin America, China has long provided free loans, exerted no political pressure, and worked with all countries and governments—in other words, has adopted a soft approach. China is gaining favor among Latin American populations and is gradually displacing the United States as the primary partner.

Although China’s presence in the region is growing, Latin America remains financially dependent on the United States, which, in turn, vigorously utilizes almost all of the tools discussed and, as a pioneer in public diplomacy, maintains powerful political, economic, and cultural influence. With the advent of the second Trump administration in 2025, Washington began actively using hard power instruments, for example in Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia, Panama, Mexico, and Brazil, thereby charting a course towards coercive diplomacy and attempting to eliminate competitors who are becoming increasingly attractive as centers of a multipolar world.

Russia’s “soft power” has significant potential, which can be realized through a value system similar to that of the LAC countries, a commitment to strengthening the multilateral foundations of global politics, justice, and increased funding for public diplomacy. Trade, economic, and humanitarian cooperation, particularly in scientific and educational activities, pharmaceuticals, and space exploration, appear to be most promising option. However, continued development of an attractive political line is essential, as an alternative to the US. This is because Russia and China

are not perceived as colonial powers by Latin Americans. Currently, despite the continuation of the SMO, Russia continues to employ political, diplomatic, and humanitarian soft power, with culture and media remaining its most powerful instruments (which is why the US is attempting to restrict *RT* as an important source of information). Unlike China, which operates through bilateral agreements, Russia is leaning towards cooperation through integration associations, while Moscow and Beijing currently have virtually no overlapping interests in the region. The space race involves the United States, Russia, and China, with the latter attempting to take a leading position in the region through technological advances and investment.

Based on sociological data on the dynamics of Latin American perceptions of the United States, China, and Russia before and after the onset of the SMO, it can be concluded that geographic location, economic attractiveness, and control of local and global media sometimes influence public opinion more than other soft power instruments. This is exemplified by the stability of the United States’ position in Latin America and the decline of Russia’s position after the onset of the SMO, even despite the successful use of humanitarian, cultural, and political soft power instruments and efforts to convey historical truth. Despite a slight decline in Russia’s authority in South America after 2022, Latin America is contributing to the restoration of Russia’s status as a global power, which, in turn, is striving to demonstrate that, together with the BRICS countries, it is the main architect of a just multipolar order based on shared values and guidelines.

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