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**Disconnected Identities: (re)constructions of Brazilian National Identity in the Latin American context**

A Thesis in International Relations

by

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**Abstract:**

The position of Brazil in Latin America is constantly changing as different interpretations of Brazilian identity and self-image influence it. Article 4 of Brazil's constitution establishes integration with Latin American countries as a goal aimed at creating a community of nations. Despite the constitutional aspiration, data from the World Values Survey indicates that Brazilian respondents feel the least connected to a Latin American identity compared to other South American countries. This paper delves into the various stages of national identity formation in Brazil and how each of these stages relates to the broader Latin American community. In the context of identity construction, nationalism, and supranationalism, the author delves into how a range of competing interests forms Brazilian national identity and how each reconstruction frames Brazil differently as to how closely it belongs to Latin America. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the factors that shape how Brazil is perceived within the context of Latin America, ranging from complete disassociation to a self-proclaimed regional leader. As it concludes its analysis, the paper demonstrates how the constant reconstruction of the narratives of Brazilian National identity and its relation to Latin America contributed to an ultimate disconnect between the country and the surrounding region, thus hindering Brazil's integration into a broader Latin American identity.

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**Introduction**

The question "Are Brazilians Latin Americans?" can elicit many answers, the most intriguing being "It depends" as Brazil's place in Latin America constantly shifts. National identity and its relationship to supranationalism have been of interest to scholars for a long time (Collier 1983, Dorella 2010, Wodak and Boukala 2015). In Latin America, many nuances and historical intricacies have lent themselves to peculiar collective identity-building processes. The existence of a Latin American identity is undeniable (Gavião 2021), albeit with varying levels of strength and weakness felt by each society. Specifically in the South American Nations, early historical movements such as the Bolivarian Revolution and, in a way, colonization processes created a vision of a supranational "Latin America" to which one belongs through their national identity. The Brazilian constitution of 1988 clearly states that "The Federative Republic of Brazil will seek economic, political, social and cultural integration of the peoples in Latin America, aimed at the creation of a community of Latin American Nations."[1] However, the construction of Brazilian Nationalism follows a distinct trajectory that separates the country's identity from the larger continent. Different actors in Brazilian history constructed and reconstructed narratives of Brazilian National identity and its relation to Latin America, contributing to a disconnect between the country and the surrounding region and hindering Brazil's integration into a broader Latin American identity.

This paper begins by exploring why Brazil's relationship with Latin America warrants further study, highlighting evidence of its peculiarities. The second section explores theoretical

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[1] Translated by the Author. Original: "A República Federativa do Brasil buscará a integração econômica, política, social e cultural dos povos da América Latina, visando à formação de uma comunidade latino-americana de nações." Brazil constitution of 1988, Article 4, Paragraph 1.

frameworks of collective identity-building to ground the discussion of Brazilian national identity in the existing literature. Section three explores three moments in Latin American history: Iberian-Crown Colonies, Bolivarian Continentalism, and Creole nationalism. The fourth section explores Brazilian identity building and analyzes the construction of Brazilian Nationalism through history, focusing on the different narratives of Brazilian nationalism and exploring the motivations of its narrators. The final section of this paper delves into an analysis of data from the World Values Survey to explore the relationship between national and supranational identity at the population level; specifically, it examines the role of the education system in perpetuating nationalist narratives in Brazil. The conclusion summarizes the reconstructions of Brazilian national identity with varying degrees of Latin-Americanness, restating its consequences and proposing avenues for future research.

**"Not part of Latin America" - Some numbers**

A quick search for "Brazilian Exceptionalism" will bring many results, a majority of which are unrelated to the other. The idea that Brazil is exceptional–not in the sense that it is better but in the sense that it is different–permeates discussions regarding the history and politics of the country. Before exploring *why* Brazil's lack of belonging to a Latin American identity happens, it is essential to explore how this refusal is significant. Utilizing data from the World Values Survey, 7th Wave, it is possible to visualize that Brazil's population perceives a more prominent degree of separation from the idea of a continental identity than those in other countries of South America.

## How close do you feel to [Latin America]?
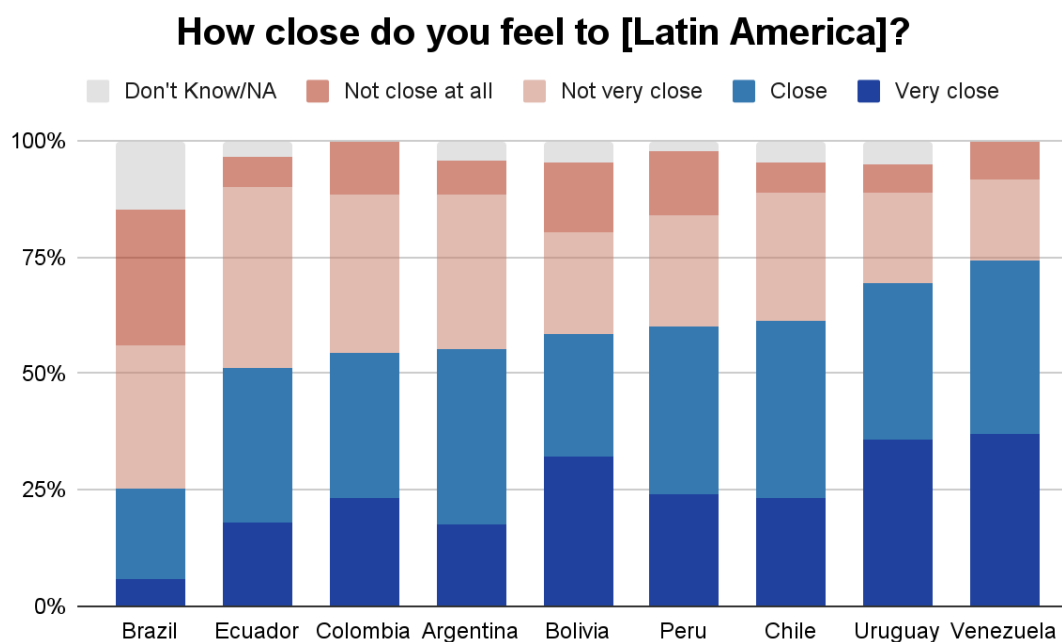


*Figure 1 Closeness to Latin America - Data source: World Values Survey 7th wave*

The translation of the question to which the chart above refers, as provided by the World Values Survey, is: "People have different views about themselves and how they relate to the world. Using this card, would you tell me how close you feel to…?: [Continent; e.g., Europe, Asia, etc.]". The question utilized "Latin America" as the continental name in all featured countries. The graph shows that Brazil's population feels significantly more distant from Latin America than other countries.

Nationalist scholars, including Anderson (1991), frequently agree that stronger 'small' identities are direct competitors of larger ones–reads, family above the city, which is above state, region, country, and, finally, continental or world. As this paper inserts itself into that conversation, it considers the following data.

## How close do you feel to [country]?
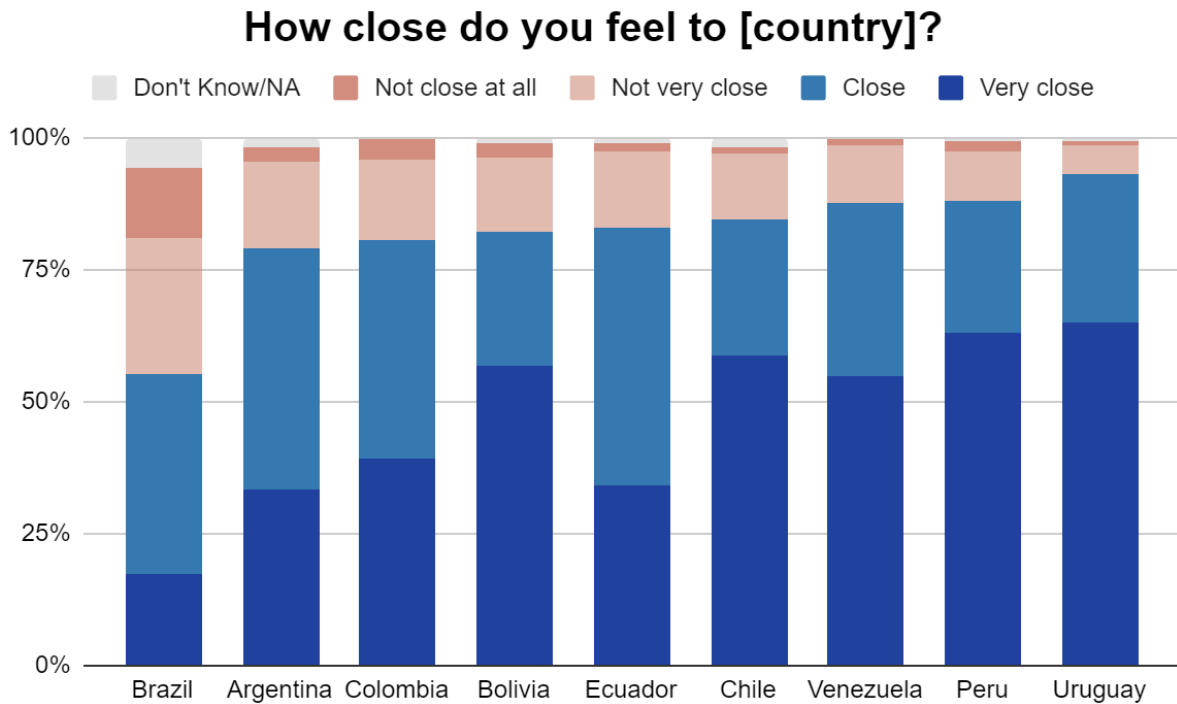
*Figure 2 Closeness to Country - Data source: World Values Survey 7th wave*

Here, it is evident that even when it comes to closeness to a national identity, Brazilian responses of "very close" or "close" continue to be significantly lower than in other neighboring nations. Another point of data that highlights a need to observe Brazil's population connection to Latin America is that more respondents feel "close" to "the World" than to "Latin America.

## Brazil - How close do you feel to...?
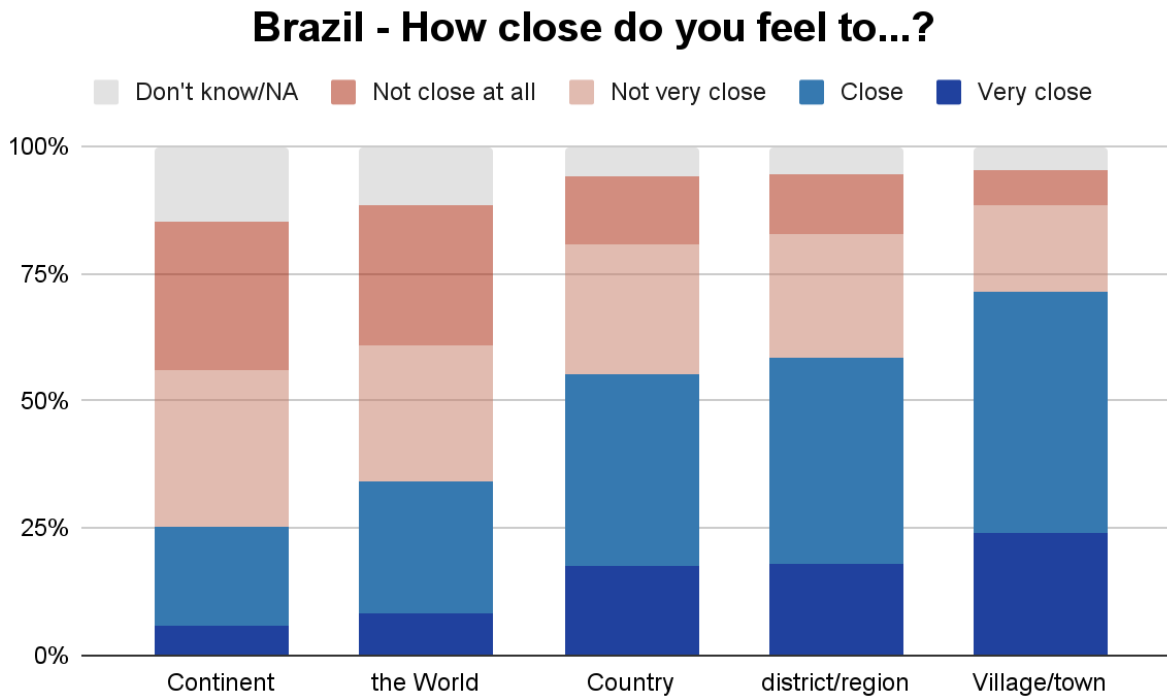


*Figure 3 Self-declared closeness to Continent, World, Country, Region, Town - Data source: Brazil World Values Survey 7th wave*

According to collective identity theories, smaller identities precede larger collectives (Anderson 1991). Therefore, more Brazilians should feel closer to Latin America than to "The World" at large. Since that is not the case, it begs the question of why Brazilian respondents perceive themselves so distant from a Latin American identity.

**What is Identity?**

Understanding how collective identities are formed is the essential first step to effectively investigating any concepts of national and supranational identities. While there are many different scholarly opinions from various fields of science, the definitions originated from the overlap of those with political sciences that are most relevant to the topic at hand. Regardless of

origin mechanisms, collective identities are rooted in perceptions of similarities and differences

(Delanty 2003; Wodak and Boukala 2015). Consequently, forming a common group identity is

heavily rooted in shared languages, history, and cultural practices (Delanty, 2003; Boukala,

2015). According to Salazar and Salazar (1998), three primary forms of national identity are

especially relevant to Latin American nationalisms–and supra-nationalisms:

> "Recapping, the three forms of identity found in the literature are related and must be considered as a trinity of valid perspectives: identity as objective [shared] characteristics of a group, identity as self-images or subjective stereotypes, and identity as the intersubjective identification with a social category; all valid and useful conceptions" (Salazar and Salazar, 1998, p. 79)[2]

"Self-stereotyping" is particularly applicable to the formation of Latin American identities. That

is when the perceptions and stereotypes attributed to a collective become internalized by the in-

group, becoming a core part of the constructed group identity (Salazar and Salazar, 1998). This

theoretical foundation makes it possible to understand why the ideas of Latin America, as they

have evolved and solidified, are directly related to the processes and connections that placed the

region in the international community. Multiple identities can co-exist in an individual's sense of

self (Pinteric, 2005). Frequently, scholars will place supranational and national Identities as

inversely proportional; that is, the stronger the identification with smaller communities, the

weaker a connection an individual will feel to a larger group (Delanty, 2003). Collective identity

literature agrees that a shared language is fundamental to forming a national identity (Pinteric

2003, Wodak and Boukala 2015). By extension, a shared language would facilitate the

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[2] Translated. Original: ""Recapitulando, las tres concepciones de la identidad nacional que encontramos en la literatura están relacionadas, y deben ser consideradas como «una trinidad de perspectivas validas: identidad como características objetivas de grupo, identidad como auto-imágenes o estereotipos subjetivos, y la identidad como la identificación intersubjetiva con una categoría social, son todas concepciones validas y útiles"

construction of a supranational identity. History and culture are essential to nation-building

(Delanty, 2003; Boukala, 2015); the Spanish linguistic commonality allows for the different

countries of Latin America to share the same significant literature, access the same news, and

connect as a larger community, all of which are fundamental to creating a collective identity

(Anderson 1991); notably, Brazil does not share in this commonality. Additionally, identities are

often, though not always, formed through a top-down process (Göncz, 2012; Pinteric, 2005),

meaning that based on the interests of political and intellectual elites, collective identities can be

manufactured and engineered; nations, as a form of collective identity, are a constructed concept

(Anderson, 1991).

*Where does nationalism come from?*

One of the most foundational works in nationalism theory is the book *Imagined

Communities* by Benedict Anderson, initially published in 1983. The initial claim is direct:

Nations are imagined, created concepts architected by key groups and dispersed through various

mechanisms (Anderson, 1991). According to Anderson, a community is a group of individuals in

a "horizontal comradeship" (1991, p.7), meaning a feeling of connection, common belonging to

a higher entity, or shared interests between people. A nation is a large community of individuals

who feel connected under this sense of nationalism. This community is imagined because many

of these individuals will never meet and likely have few interests in common aside from the fact

that they all belong to this same group: the nation (Anderson, 1991). The nation in itself is

imagined because it is not an awakened identity; it is instead a project, a design that is created

and invented (Gellner, as cited in Anderson, 1991, p.6).

As the arguments about who creates nations and their motivations require a more in-depth understanding, this paper takes a moment to dive into Anderson's argument. The concepts of nationalism developed in his book, and the discussions that originated from it are fundamental to the conclusions of this work. Before nations were able to be invented, a myriad of factors needed to align to allow the conceptualization of these imagined communities; Anderson lists three factors that had to die for the nation to be born:

> "The first of these was the idea that a particular script language offered privileged access to ontological truth[...]. Second was the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centers - monarchs who were persons apart from other human beings and who ruled by some form of cosmological (divine) dispensation [...].Third was a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and men essentially identical." (Anderson, 1991, p. 36)

In simpler words, Anderson argues that for the concept of a nation to be possible in people's minds, humanity needed to loosen from the idea that an extensive, divine-cosmological connection gave their lives meaning. The imagined ties that hold a nation together form only by severing these divine bonds. It is essential to specify that this argument does not mean religion is opposed to nationalism: while in Europe, the Reformation and the decline of the Catholic church were necessary to the creation of nations (Anderson, 1991), in Latin America, religion became an integral part of national identities–an idea that to be examined later in this paper.

Another particularly pertinent point Anderson (1991) made is the relationship between print–which in today's age takes the form of many media vehicles–and language. Fundamental to people's perception of belonging to a nation is their ability to place themselves in that community.  Imagining a community far beyond those one can see in their regular routines, as is a nation, requires tools such as a common language, and, above that, it demands technology that

allows people of that common language to share news and information (Anderson, 1991). At the beginning of collective identity building, one perceives the community as those with whom it interacts: neighbors, the local markets, and people with whom one communicates (Anderson, 1991). Of course, when writing *Imagined Communities*, the author speaks about the invention of print and how it innovated how individuals of the same now-community expanded their perception of the world. Contextualizing the argument for today's world, almost 30 years later, with communication technologies expanding, the community is no longer the people in a tiny bubble but also those about whom the newspaper is written, the ones on the radio, on the TV, and the influencer on social media.

Latin America had a peculiar experience with nationalism and the invention of its "imagined communities." Anderson dedicates an entire chapter to exploring the peculiarities of the creation of the imagined nation in the former colonies, with a mention of the exceptional case of Brazil. He argues that one of the main differences between the European processes of nationalism and those in Latin America is the latter's purposeful exclusion of the lower classes (Anderson, 1991). The Creole Elites of Latin America were the ones to start independence movements, pointedly lacking the populist characteristics of the European nationalist revolutions (Anderson, 1991). González (2016) points out that to accurately explore Latin American nationalisms, it is necessary to consider the context in which the discussions are inserted. At the onset of independence from the metropole, Latin American nationalism was more focused on *justifying* the separation from the metropole than *creating* a common national identity for the masses (González, 2016). Once independence became a goal of the Creole Elites, liberation processes included a deliberate suppression of the political incorporation of the lower classes

(Anderson 1991). Consequently, much of the structures of society were preserved from colonial times long after the colonial ties were severed (González 2016); after all, there was no effort to bring the masses up to speed on the new image of the nation. In an almost self-fulfilling prophecy, the disconnect between the conceptualized image of the nation and the actuality of society's way of life led the elites "to represent their own society as an alien object whose problems could only be interpreted and solved by a select minority. [...] The result was an exclusionary prejudice that confined the national imagination to the monopoly of the Europeanized elites" (González 2016).

**The Three Images of Latin American Nations**

Before analyzing the construction of Latin American Identity, it is essential to distinguish between the many terms used for different groups of the region. 'Latin America' is the most frequently used term, and it is from where the idea of a typical Latin identity is commonly derived. Nonetheless, as Gavião (2021) highlights, 'Latin America' refers to all American countries with a language originating in Latin; 'Ibero-America' or 'South America' are the geographically accurate terms for the twelve Southernmost countries in the continent; 'Hispano-America' incorporates the previous colonies of Spain. These distinctions are fundamental to the constructed narratives of these countries' political and cultural histories. All of the terms above are used throughout this paper. The term 'Latin America' often reflects the policies and conceptions of the time of its usage, and therefore, an understanding of the context and historical moment is required to understand which particular countries it encompasses. Although this paper focuses on the Brazilian experiences with the construction of Latin American identity,

consequently emphasizing the Southern Cone 'Latin America' is sometimes used interchangeably with South America to more accurately reflect the language used in the documents and discussions at hand. 'Hispano-America' is used to pointedly separate the Brazilian experiences from those of the larger 'Latin America' context, as these differences are crucial to understanding the present argument.

The history of Latin America, specifically of the South American nations in focus here, is long and nuanced; it is not the goal of this paper to detail the historical events related to nation-building in each of the territories in question. Nonetheless, three crucial images of Latin America have been constructed over the centuries; the processes through which each was recodified into the other are critical to understanding the current state of nationalism(s) in Latin America. The term *discovery* is controversial when describing the arrival of the Spanish and Portuguese metropoles in what is now Latin America, and there is much to discuss, critique, and deconstruct regarding how this part of history is retold. Nonetheless, it's important to note that Latin America first integrated the global discourse of space and belonging as the New World. At this moment and through the onset of colonization, the first collective history of the South American territories is construed: the Spanish–and Portuguese–colonies.

1. *Iberian-Crown Colonies*

The first collective grouping of the South American nations was labeling these territories as the New World Iberian–Spain and Portugal–colonies  (Rivarola Puntigliano 2009). It goes almost without saying that there were many other identities in the colonial territories, especially indigenous communities; however, the first continental-level collective identity in the territories

of what is now Latin/South America was that of a colonial holding of the Iberian Crowns (Rivarola Puntigliano 2009). The structure imposed by the colonial powers gave the Creole elites a strong sense of belonging to the Spanish empire, to the point where the first conflicts between the colonial elites and the Spanish crown did not claim independence; instead, it requested equal rights for the Creollos as members of the Spanish elite (Rivarola Puntigliano, 2009, p. 60-61). However, at this early stage, it is already possible to infer the disconnect between the broad continental identity, colonially imposed, and the collective identities of the population in the territory. The strong sense of belonging–or wish to belong to–which the Creole elites held towards the Spanish empire did not resonate among the masses and, in a way, exalting the monarchy represented a way to avoid awarding rights to the population at large (Rivarola Puntigliano, 2009). In the scenario of a continental, colonial Latin America, Anderson (1991) construes the arguments of Creole elites and, later, Creole nationalism. Despite the Creole elite's wishes to be an integral part of Spanish nobility, the structure of society in the colonies created a pointed detachment between those born in colonial Latin America and the Spaniard elites (Anderson 1991). According to Anderson (1991), the Spanish colonies in Latin America had a unique middle-ground elite, represented by the sons of Spaniards. These individuals received high prestige in their local communities but were disregarded by the broader Spanish system. Sitting in a weird limbo between prestige and disdain, the Creoles of Latin America start to coin for themselves a society where they hold power.

*2. Bolivar's continental nationalism*

A directly competing image of Latin America started to form with the onset of independence processes and the vision of Bolivarian nationalism. Simon Bolivar's visions for an independent Latin America–specifically, South America–are often seen as the paramount of Latin American unity. Nonetheless, it is essential to note that Bolivar, as the son of Spanish-born parents, was himself a Creole. Though Bolivar's background alone does not imply his full accordance with the ideals of the Creole elite, it helps shed light on the relationship between the Liberator's views and the processes of independence that generated the current nations of South America. In a way, Bolivar's views stem from the same roots as Creole nationalism; however, they stretched much further than most Creole thinkers would (Collier, 1983, p. 48). It is also fundamental to note Bolivar himself, as a member of the Creole elite, recognized the separation between ideas of independence, nationalism, or unity and the masses of those soon-to-be nations. In 1815, he wrote, "The opinion of America is still not settled; although all thinking people are for independence, the general mass still remains ignorant of its rights and interests" (Bolivar, cited in Collier, p. 39).

Bolivar's views were drastically separate from those of the other members of the Creole elite at the point of national unity versus the 'fissiparous' tendencies of the Ibero-South-American territories (Collier 1983). The Liberator was not blind to the localist tendencies of the new-forming nations; however, he still believed in and emphasized the importance of unity (Collier 1983). Historical evidence shows that Spaniards who embraced the revolution and wished to adopt the new American nations were welcomed as "brothers of the Patria" (Collier 1983), a unifying term emphasizing a common origin to all 'brothers.' Bolivar's analogies for Hispano-America were family-like, with the patria always taking a maternal role (Collier 1983).

Assessing Bolivar's writings, Collier (1983) makes an excellent and detailed analysis of the Libertador's views of nationalism and supranationalism. More pertinent to this paper's arguments is Collier's account of Bolivar's "Maximal Supranationalism." Recognizing the local nationalist tendencies of the South American territories, Bolivar sought the establishment of institutions that superseded the local governments. He idealized a "supranational framework as strong as possible; in his heart, he wanted something much more cohesive than a loose confederation" (Collier 1983).

Another noteworthy point is that Bolivar's consolidation efforts were primarily retained in the northern part of the South American continent. He was vehemently opposed to Pan-Americanism and integration with the United States or even Haiti–for which he expressed admiration and gratitude, respectively–but did not wish to incorporate into his envisioned federation (Collier 1983). Nonetheless, Bolivar's views of a united South America resonated throughout the Spanish empire, and he is the historical figure to whom Latin American independence movements are often attributed (Collier 1983). For reasons beyond ideologies, Bolivar's vision did not take hold as the political interests of different groups impeded this realization. As a brief example, while Bolivar himself recognized the importance of acquiring support from Great Britain for the security of his idealized nation (Collier 1983), it went against the British Empire's interests to have yet another nation follow the footsteps of the United States and become a large enough mass to defy it ((Rivarola Puntigliano, 2009). As Bolivar's *Grande Patria* failed to take hold, the smaller units that now form South America formed–but never fully shed the brotherhood *re*codified in Bolivar's ideologies.

*3. Creole Nationalism and Localized Power*

Creole nationalism developed as the Spaniard-descendent elites developed an identity separate from the Spanish empire. This process, however, was overshadowed as the Creoles, albeit developing their own identity, "did not let go of the fear of losing their privileges" (Rivarola Puntigliano, 2009, p. 63). At this point in time, as independence ideas spread through the region–primarily with Bolivar–the competing images of possible independence versus the loss of the privileges associated with being a governing elite start to clash. As noted by Anderson (1991), the Spanish-American empire was split from the beginning into different administrative regions, which allowed for the creation and development of societies with their independent hierarchies and administrations, solidifying local power in the hands of an elite that was culturally cut off from the more extensive Spanish empire. As the independence revolution went on, the Creole elites had to reconcile two competing feelings: one, the wish to retain the privileges associated with being at the top of the local hierarchy set by the Spanish empire (Rivarola Puntigliano 2009), and two, the resentment from a society–the Spanish Empire–that had long excluded and rejected them (Anderson 1991).

The success of Creole nationalism is tied to the failure of Bolivar's continentalist views. As the Great Powers of the time saw a threat in the possibility of a continental nation (Collier 1983) and began to align with local oligarchies (Rivarola Puntigliano 2009), the weakening of continentalism and strengthening of local elites happened simultaneously. On their end, the local oligarchs had little motivation to integrate the broad *Patria*. First, although the members of the Creole elite shared a common experience–that of being excluded from the metropole society– they did not get the opportunity to connect with their counterparts in other administrative regions

due to the treatment received from the Spanish Empire (Anderson 1991). Any American-born son of a Spaniard was, in the eyes of the social structure of the time, "irremediably a creole" (Anderson 1991); this strict labeling relays a separation between the Americans and Spanish elites. As explained in the first section of this paper, perceptions of similarity and differences are at the core of developing national identities (Delanty 2003, Boukala 2015); additionally, through processes of self-stereotyping (Salazar and Salazar, 1998), the division of the Creole likely permeated the ideas of the Latin American elites themselves. Paired with the rise of ideas of independence, the Creole Elites had the motive to separate from the Spanish empire. Still, Bolivar's vision of a gloriously large and unified South America directly contrasted with the interests of the Creole elite. By joining the *Grande Patria*, the Creoles would remain subjugated to the structure they had under the crown: to join the Bolivarian revolution and merge into a large Latin American nation would once more relay this elite to the place of secondary power; they would once again be regional leaders within a more significant State. However, smaller national units elevated those groups to the ruling elite of the new nation.

Factors such as language, shared history, and shared government are all present in all regions of the South American continent. Further, during the independence process and through the Bolivarian revolution, a sense of unity against a common enemy began to form–as "us" to oppose "them." All of these factors point toward the awakening of a unified nation, one Latin American country, united through its similarities. Despite the reasons mentioned above for the existence of one Latin American nationalism, the continent split into different states, and the vision of a united Bolivarian nation did not come to pass.

If Latin American identity exists undeniably, why did such an identity not result in a unified country? Which factors overpowered the Bolivarian nation-building, resulting in the 12 sovereign nations that exist today in Latin America? Again, referring to the idea that a nation is not awakened but instead created (Anderson, 1991), the processes that led to the construction of Latin American nationalism depended on the interests of the political elite of the time. Consequently, for the existence of one united Latin America, its politically powerful groups need to be interested in constructing a big nation. In Chapter 4 of *Imagined Communities* (1991), Benedict Anderson addresses the Latin American states as some of the first to develop nationalism. However, he highlights that the federalist tendencies present in North America did not apply in the southern continent. Anderson argues that one of the main reasons is that the colonies were divided into small administrative units from day one. The aforementioned Creole elite had its power legitimized locally. To this extent, even Bolivar recognized that despite the ideal of a unified Latin American nation, localized power had a firm footing: "As to the political boundaries of the new nation-states, Bolivar's ideas were logical and pragmatic; they were to be 'the limits of the former viceroyalties, captaincies-general, and presidencies' The practical application of this principle is later known as uti possidetis" (Collier, 1983, p. 47). Furthermore, according to Antonio Candido (1965 as cited in Dorella 2010, p.9), the Spaniards tend to exalt their language and identity, even within the European context, while Portugal, due to its size, tends to incorporate and learn other languages and cultures. As a result, the early Hispanic cultures hyper-valued their national productions and had a polite indifference towards the Brazilian productions (Dorella 2010). Suggesting that, as early as the onset of independence, Brazil's refusal to integrate with the region was met with indifferent agreement by the South

American nations, and the non-integration between Brazil and the Hispanic region was not one-sided.

**The invention of the Brazilian Nation**

In what relates to the creation of continental identity, Brazil's history is filled with so many exceptions that it must be regarded as a separate case from the remainder of Latin America entirely. Starting in colonial times, the two sides of the American colonies–Portuguese and Spanish colonies–internalized the identities and relationships of their metropolitan rulers: according to Carvalho (1998 as cited in Dorella 2010), the rivalry between the Iberian crowns bled into the colonies. In this sense, the two identities were bound to differentiate and separate, despite their commonalities, due to the ideological differences of the people in their societies. Until the end of the twentieth century, Brazil–its various governments–resisted integration with other Latin American countries. The present section of this paper analyses the different phases of building the Brazilian nation, its external and internal images, and, most importantly, the narratives of national identity and their narrators. If identity is constructed through identifying similarities and differences (Delanty, 2003; Boukala, 2015), constructing an in-group and an out-group is a natural consequence. Often, collective identities rely on an association of positive traits to the in-group "us" and negative characteristics to the out-group "them" (Tajfel, as cited in Alves Brasil and Cabecinhas 2014). Dorella (2010) points out that the similarities between Brazil and the region's Hispanic nations likely necessitated a stark, well-traced separation of the nations to build separate identities, leading to the extreme overemphasizing of the existing differences. In sum, to construct the Brazilian national identity as different from the remainder of the region,

it was first necessary to separate it from what it was not; that meant solidifying a clear separation

of Brazil from its neighboring countries, often achieved by portraying the Hispanic-Americas

negatively.

*Colonial and Imperial Brazil*

With the differences in independence processes and the "import" of the monarchy to the

newly established Brazilian Empire, the country began its national image to portray itself as a

more stable, 'civilized' counterpart to the violence-ridden Latin states (Tancredi 2016). At this

point, it was in the best interest of the Brazilian political elites–the monarchy and its nobilities–to

stress the separation between Brazil and the "barbaric" surrounding societies (Tancredi 2016). A

new empire, surrounded by republic and federalist ideals, necessitated cultural and political tools

to ground itself and prevent threatening ideas from rising (Dorella 2010). Therefore, those who

benefitted from the monarchical systems and structures corroborated the vision of Brazil as

separate from its–republican–South American neighbors. It would be unwise to ignore that at this

moment in time, the Latin American nations were also prone to rejecting Brazil's "membership"

to this "us" group (Tancredi 2016, p.14). The other countries in the Hispanic portion of the

continent, having just acquired independence from the Spanish monarchy, were not so eager to

accept the Brazilian political regime–a monarchy directly derived from the Portuguese line–or its

economic model (Tancredi 2016). As mentioned by Collier (1983), Bolivar was wary of

integrating the new monarchy into its ideals of liberation: "The empire of Brazil–as his

correspondence throughout 1824 and 1825 makes abundantly clear–was suspect on the grounds

of its possible association with the Holy Alliance" (Collier, 1983, p. 52).  As for the Brazilian

nation-builder elites, there was a clear preference for integration with North America and Europe, prioritizing these relations over those with its neighbors for a long time during Brazilian history (Dorella 2010). In 1958, Brazilian Writer Nelson Rodrigues coined the term "mongrel complex" to refer to the Brazilian people's lack of historical and culturally based self-esteem. The term, although it originated in a sports context, was soon adopted by political scientists and scholars and is now referent to the idea that Brazilians, especially members of the elite, look at European and North Americans as "better than," consequently denying and separating from the national and regional. As exposed above, such a perception is identifiable from the early days of Brazil's nation-building process.

This paper does not wish to commit the mistake of arguing that Brazilian national identity was constructed through a Westernized lens; instead, it argues that there was a deliberate choice by Brazilian institutions to build an image *for* Western perceptions, as its elites believed it more advantageous to appeal to European and North American–namely, the United States–alliances. Remarkably different from the former Spanish Colonial Structure, where the colonial elites were cut off from Spanish high society (Anderson, 1991), Brazilian Creole elites had access to Portuguese hierarchical systems, and many of the Brazilian elites studied in Portuguese universities. With the move of the Empire to Rio, the relationship between the Brazilian elites and the European metropole only got closer. When Brazil became independent, with support from Portugal, a state structure was already in place (Tancredi, 2016). It is possible to argue that Brazil imported its state structure from the metropole, which later led to a somewhat stable early monarchical regime. Consequently, to belong to the "in" group of European nations, the country had to promote a marked separation between its identity and the rest of the South American

former colonies, whose independence process left them in less-than-good light with the European powers. To achieve this goal, Brazil emphasized its differences from Latin America (Dorella 2010) and sought to approximate its internal and external identity to Europe, a move reflected in Brazilian diplomatic relations and goals (Santos, 2005).

Santos (2005) analyses the history of Brazil's international identity through its diplomatic efforts. Upon independence, especially during the initial years of the empire, the Brazilian Empire pointedly looked towards Europe. While the Spanish colonies underwent the Bolivarian Revolution and fought for their independence, followed by a period of high instability and political turmoil, Brazil became independent through an agreement with the Portuguese metropole–a purchase, really–and the state structure was already formed, with the son of the Portuguese king staying behind. Perhaps because of its independence process, which maintained dynastic imperial values as a form of legitimation, Brazil started its place in the international state community quite friendly with European states (Santos 2005). At this point in history, Imperial Brazil was relatively stable. It considered itself more 'civilized' than its neighbors, whom it classified as "barbaric, violent and extremely unstable" (Tancredi 2016, p. 14). It is crucial to note that part of Imperial Brazil's efforts to resemble and approximate itself to European Monarchies was rooted in racial prejudice. Although the Latin American countries have similar ethnic makeups (Tancredi, 2016, p. 14), there was an active effort by the Brazilian Empire's rulers to "whiten" its population in the 19th century through incentives for European Migrants (Alvez Brasil and Cabecinhas, 2014, p. 125). This difference was vital as it constructed Brazil's image at the expense of the remainder of the continent. By emphasizing the concept of "civilization," the empire portrayed itself as superior in the eyes of its target audience, Europe,

given that it was the only monarchic country in the region (Santos, 2005; Tancredi, 2016). It is

noteworthy that during the years of the Brazilian Empire, Simon Bolivar developed a purposeful

separation between Brazil and his idea of a *Grande Patria* in Latin America (Gavião 2018). In

the same way that the Brazilian monarchy highlighted its separation from the remainder of

Latin–especially South–America to approximate its ties with Europe, Simon Bolivar excluded

Brazil from his vision to secure the shared identity necessary to his unification project.

> "It is observed that in the Brazil-Hispano-America relationship, the affinity of
> sociopolitical values is extremely low, weakening the identity that Bolivar attempted to
> construct precisely by appealing to political symbols such as the Republican regime and
> the common enemy—Spain." (Gavião, 2018, p.98)[3]

Hence, it is possible to understand that there were two groups whose interests lent to a separate

identity between Latin (South) America and Brazil: both the Brazilian Monarchy and the

Bolivarian national project stood to gain from the mutual understanding that their histories and

resulting identities, despite similar, were separate.


*Brazil's First Republic*

At the end of the XIX century, a series of events culminated in establishing Brazil's *First

Republic,* also known as the Old Republic (Bessa Maia and Sombra Saraiva 2012). The Old

Republic was heavily oligarchic, an elite movement that seldom genuinely involved the

population. Nowadays, it is popularly referred to as the Coffee-and-Milk Republic, a name that

reflects the dominant oligarchies of the time. Republican Brazil's diplomatic efforts began to

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[3] Translated. Original: "Verifica-se que, na relação Brasil-América Hispânica, a afinidade de valores sociopolíticos é
extremamente baixa, enfraquecendo uma identidade que Bolívar tentava construir exatamente apelando para signos
políticos, como o regime republicano e o inimigo comum – Espanha" (Gavião, 2018, p. 98)"

include relations with the United States, as it adopted "Americanist" values and sought to establish the state as a leader in the southernmost regions (Santos, 2005). The Rio Branco Baron is a historical figure of utmost importance in understanding this process. Known as the father of Brazilian Diplomacy, he served during the early years of the Old Republic, and much of his visions continue to be adopted today. In the first 25 years of the Republic, Brazilian diplomacy operated under the assumption of two systems: an American system, where the United States took the lead, and a sub-system in South America, where Brazil, Argentina, and Chile took the reins (Santos 2005). It is possible to infer, then, that at this point, the ruling elites of Brazil started to insert the country in a Latin American context, albeit with no claims of identity belonging; it was an insertion purely based on geography. According to Santos (2005), the South American sub-system was nuanced, with the United States being perceived to influence matters concerning countries in the northern region.

Conversely, Brazil defined its own system, which included the Southern Cone (Santos 2005; Barnabé 2014). For the following decades, Brazilian external relations had explicit instructions to support American efforts, and its alliance with the American powerhouse was a way to attain international prestige (Santos, 2005)–noteworthy that the word chosen is not influence per se, nor recognition or power; the goal was to attain "prestige." The approximation towards Washington was also rooted in the interests of Brazilian oligarchies that ruled the Old Republic; alliances with the United States presented, for example, better coffee export deals (Barnabé 2014). As Brazilian diplomats gained more participation in international forums such as the League of Nations, they began to speak for Latin America (Santos, 2005) as a way to embed more power in their statements, making Brazil the self-appointed voice of Latin America.

Nonetheless, its regional counterparts did not agree that the interests of Brazil and the region aligned, as evidenced when Brazil was removed from the Latin America seat at the League of Nations in 1926 (Santos, 2005). The instrumental aspect assigned to Latin America, specifically South America, in Brazil's external relations permeates the country's international behavior today, as evidenced by the treatment given to MERCOSUR and other integration initiatives (Vigevani et al. 2008). Until its collapse in 1930, the Old Republic followed Rio Branco's vision and project for Brazil's external relations (Jaguaribe 2006).

Cultural shifts mark the 1920s and, amidst those, the rise of a nationalist doctrine rooted in the search for a reconstructed Brazilian national identity. In 1922, the *Semana de Arte Moderna* ("Week of Modern Art") exposition constituted an important milestone of nationalist thought: the artistic movement explicitly sought to rediscover Brazil, rethinking it in a way to "free it from the ties that bound it to Europe" (Ajzenberg 2012). Brazilian Modernism represents, therefore, more than an artistic movement. Many of the Week of Modern Art organizers in 1922 were also journalists and, commonly, intellectuals involved in politics (Tucci Carneiro 1990). The movement's birthplace was Sao Paulo; as the city grew powered by industrialization, a cluster of emerging middle-class thinkers, journalists, and artists collided. Therefore, despite being an art-focused movement, Brazilian Modernism reflects a new strand of thought that permeated Brazilian society in the decade following the end of the First World War (Ajzenberg 2012; Nascimento 2015; Tucci Carneiro 1990).

*The Vargas Era*

The Vargas era and the decade before it constitute an essential piece of the puzzle of Brazil's national identity. The nationalist ideal of Brazil began to be built–or better put, re-coded–about a decade before the rise of Vargas to power, as exemplified by the Brazilian Modernist artistic movement and its political roots. It is essential to understand that the 1930s political changes arose from a break in the Coffee-and-Milk Republic's two oligarchies' hold on power. Varga's government found its support base by integrating the working class into politics–a movement often named *laborism,* which laid the foundation for future Populist movements (Fortes 2007; Tucci Carneiro 1990). Like the rest of South America, Brazil saw the impacts of the 1929 Crisis (Fortes 2007; Tucci Carneiro 1990). Feelings of dissent continued to foster, and many Brazilian intellectuals–sons and daughters of the upper middle classes who pursued education abroad and traveled to Western countries–began to import different ideas of the time. A noteworthy movement born out of the import of these ideals is Integralism, led by Plinio Salgado. The integralist movement had its inspirations in Italian Fascism, and it took root within Brazil's Urban Middle and Upper classes (Tucci Carneiro 1990). Vargas came to power in 1930, effectively marking the end of the old republic. A bloodless military coup d'etat, the fruit of the 1930 Revolution, placed Getulio Vargas in the presidency (Dascal 2000). Four years later, he won the election of 1934, effectively becoming a democratically elected leader. Vargas represents, therefore, the official end of the Old Republic, removing the political power from the Sao Paulo oligarchies (Dascall 2000). Despite coming from a wealthy background, Vargas becomes known as "Father of the poor," a curious title for a man who never quite integrated with the masses (Dascal 2000). His laborist–not *populist*–rhetoric won him the title (Fortes 2007). The Vargas Era is marked by the president's affinity for the Axis' ideology and the move of Brazilian

politics towards authoritarianism (Fortes 2007; Tucci Carneiro 1990, Dascal 2000). The Integralists and other extreme-right movements–ideologically rooted in antisemitism and the scapegoating of ideologies such as communism and liberalism–ultimately prepared the terrain for Vargas' Authoritarian takeover in 1937 (Tucci Carneiro 1990); he would stay in power until 1946.

Concerning the topic of this paper, two important things happened during the period explained above that impacted the reconstruction of Brazilian national identity. First, it was a moment of cultural rewriting, where intellectuals–predominantly members of the Brazilian economic elite–searched for the "authentic" Brazilian national identity (Tucci Carneiro 1990, Fortes 2007, Gonçalves 2009). Of course, the search for a true national identity implies deciding what is *not* part of said national construction. Therefore, through artistic and literary movements, there was, for the first time, an exaltation of Brazil for its own merits as a nation, not for being a piece of the West in Latin America. At this point in Brazilian history, many nationalisms happened.

> "One cannot truly talk of nationalism as an autonomous ideology with its own essence or invariable class content; there were only nationalisms, in the plural, which could be liberal, fascist, or even communist, and so it was important always to ask: who's Nationalism?" (Ahmad, as cited in Gonçalves 2009, p. 4)[4].

The second significant shift is that Vargas' administration is the first to find its support by politically rallying the masses, specifically the working class (Tucci Carneiro 1990, Fortes 2007, Gonçalves 2009).

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[4] Translated. Original: "não se podia realmente falar em nacionalismo como uma ideologia autônoma com sua essência ou seu conteúdo de classe invariável; havia apenas nacionalismos, no plural, que podiam ser liberais, fascistas, ou mesmo comunistas, e tinha-se, portanto, que perguntar sempre: nacionalismo de quem?" (Ahmad, as cited in Gonçalves 2009, p. 4)

Despite his own personal affinities to the Axis states, Vargas was still bound by Brazil's economic dependency on the United States, which the Old Republic had started in the projects of Rio Branco (Jaguaribe 2006). Because of the newfound involvement of the working class in politics and the need to cater to this public, the internal discourse of Brazilian politics focuses on development. At this moment, the elites shift their discourse and find their legitimization in the– only sometimes true–claim that they speak for the masses (Velloso, cited in Gonçalves 2009). As evidenced by the Modernist movement, the artists and intellectuals of the time saw the existent Brazilian identity as a synonym for backwardness (Velloso, cited in Gonçalves 2009). Paired together, the shift in discourse and the need to cater to the working masses turn Brazilian national identity from a–desired but never quite achieved–a mirror of Europe and the United States into the "country of the future" (Tucci Carneiro 1990) which, for movements such as the Integralists, meant asserting Brazilian hegemony in Latin America (Gonçalves 2009). Gradually, Varga's administration shifted its external policy to deeper involvement in Latin American matters, albeit still maintaining an apparent inclination to align with the United States as its preferred partner (Jaguaribe 2006).

After the Second World War, Brazilian external relations started to seek approximation to the South American nations, and its focus shifted towards regionalism, though not by choice (Santos 2005). The Vargas administration saw Brazil's alignment with the Allies, specifically with the US, as a strategic move to secure economic and diplomatic deals with the United States–almost as a reward after the war (Oliveira 2016).In the wake of the American government's decision to shift its focus to Europe and reject economic proposals put forth by the Vargas administration, the Brazilian government was left feeling betrayed by its long-standing

ally, the United States (Santos, 2005). This turn of events compelled the Brazilian government to reassess its position and image on the international stage (Santos 2005). The implications of this shift in the geopolitical landscape cannot be overstated and warrant further academic investigation. The importance of Washington's perceived betrayal lies in the fact that Brasilia now sees Latin America as a like-minded group of individuals who share similar concerns. With its entry into the US-led community essentially denied, Brazil must reconsider its public image and rebuild an identity that will allow it to maintain its status and effectively negotiate its interests (Santos 2005).

At that moment, the *re*construction of Brazil's external national image places it as an admittedly third world country, part of South America, whose interests align with those of other Latin American nations–at least at face value (Santos 2005). In the brief years, Vargas stepped down from the presidency, from 1946 until his return in 1951, Dutra, the newly elected president, continued the same relationship that had started immediately in the post-war year. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, founded in 1948, exemplifies how the Brazilian government incorporates Brazil's place in Latin America into its national identity. Gavião (2018) explains that ECLAC served as a school of thought for Latin American social and economic problems, whose intellectuals conceptualized a renewed vision of "Latin America," to which Brazil belonged not only through geography but through its similar economic and developmental situation and goals (Gavião 2018). In 1951, shortly after Vargas' return to power through a democratic election, official documents of Brazil's Ministry of External Relations showed its at-the-time Chancellor speaking "in the name of Latin-American Countries" (RMRE, Cited in Santos 2005). At that moment it time, two contrasting perspectives were apparent: first,

the perceived association with Latin America, which is reflected in the language used to discuss development, and second, the persistent push, primarily from within, to maintain close ties with the United States and its sphere of influence. This is exemplified by instances such as the rejection of Peron's suggestions to revive the ABC Pact (Santos 2005). The symbolic placement of Brazil back in Latin America was not, yet again, with a sense of shared identity. It was the need for development aids and the goal of fomenting industrialization that placed Brazil's external politics in the limbo between the previously built image of a Western-like country and the need to own its Latin American identity (Santos 2005).

After the Vargas Era, Brazil's national identity remained relegated to its position in Latin America (Santos 2005) until the onset of the military dictatorship. These reconstructions of the initial image of Brazil, which had been painted by its former colonial elites, as close to European monarchical hierarchies (Santos 2005; Tancredi 2016), moving to a closeness with the United States in the age of the First Republic (Santos 2005), consistently positioning the Brazilian state as a representative of or beacon for development in Latin America (Santos 2005), showcase a common thread: even when inserting itself in Latin America, Brazil is portrayed as an exceptional case. There is a sub-imperialist tone to the relationship between the Brazilian state and the remainder of the region, which can still be seen today (Bugiato and Berringer 2012).

*South America: The New Identity*

A significant temporal jump must be taken here to analyze another critical stakeholder in the idea of Latin American identity, especially in Brazil's role in constructing this supranational identity. In the early 2000s, a new competitor to the Latin American identity arose: the concept of South America. Up until the First Reunion of South American Presidents, hosted in Brasilia,

Brazilian governments and intellectual elites conceptualized the surrounding region in two ways,

Pan-America and Latin America; South America as an identity concept rather than a purely

geographic unit comes into this space, adding yet another competing vision (Gavião 2018). The

creation of the South American identity as a concept was also unique in how it formed under

Brazilian leadership. Here, the government of Brazil is no longer integrating or refusing an

existing identity; instead, it proposes a new concept and makes active efforts to move it forward

(Gavião 2018). This new identity brought forth at the turn of the 21st century has merits. The

first factor unifying the Latin American countries under one similar identity is the racial

composition of their societies, specifically the process through which they were constructed

(Tancredi 2016). South American countries experienced the blurring of racial-divide lines at a

level seldom seen in nations outside of the region. The processes through which the South

American societies were formed are peculiar to the region, composed of an amalgamation of

many other societies and cultures. Similarities are also visible in the nation's economies. South

American nations developed similarly from a resource-exportation economy based on the

colonial pact (Tancredi, 2016). Due to their shared history of insertion into the international

system through a colonization process, the states began their development journeys after

independence in similar ways. When analyzing previous development plans and strategies

employed by States in South America, it is clear that the nations were on a similar trajectory.

Barom (2018) reiterates the controversy of the two movements happening in Brazil at the time,

as while central-left political ideals rise amongst the population, there is an economic need to

insert the country in the global market, competing with the ever-looming North American

influence. According to Bugiato and Berringer (2012), the economic elites in Brazil have made

significant investments in South America. As a result, they are also keen to promote trade and commerce agreements with the region. However, many of these businesses also require capital and support from developed nations (Bugiato and Berringer 2012). In this sense, the Brazilian elites are in a permanent limbo area between their perceived and idealized identity and the reality of their capital flow. Consequently, the South American claim provides a way out, promoting just enough regional integration to be financially fruitful without associating with the Latin American Identity that is historically rejected by the construction of Brazilian Nationalism. The creation of MERCOSUR and other initiatives such as UNASUR rose in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although the integration was approached primarily through economic lenses (Barom 2018, Tancredi 2016), the actors behind such projects were central-left governments, which were considerably more open to discussing similarities between Latin American nations (Gavião 2009). Given the similarities of the economic and political trajectories of the countries in mind, integration became a subject in the late 20th century. Since the founding of MERCOSUR in the 1990s, the organization has never promised full identity integration. Instead, its founding treaties emphasized free-trade areas and initiatives to boost the regions' role in international commerce (Vigevani et al. 2008).

The perspective of the Brazilian economic elites saw MERCOSUR primarily as a business investment, and the organization was not meant to unify the region (Vigevani et al. 2008). Rather, it was a tool to launch the country further into the global scene, using the market in the region to power up and compete in the global economy. Therefore, MERCOSUR does not clash with the economic elite's approach to integration, which often seeks approximation with Western economies. Instead, it provides a new market and an instrument to establish a more

appealing image to the global scene (Vigevani et al. 2008). Further, it is explicit that MERCOSUR was intended as a policy tool for intergovernmental negotiations (Malamud and Dri, 2013). As Barom (2018) points out, the regionalist tendencies of the modern world economy have granted Brazil the role of a regional leader, which benefits the nation immensely despite its less-than-full integration with its neighbors. As Onuki, Mouron, and Urdinez (2016) point out, Brazilian self-appointed leadership is frequently questioned by other nations, especially Argentina and Mexico. Hence, creating a truly supranational integration initiative is hindered by unclear and contested leadership.

The Union of South American Nations (Union de las Naciones Sul-Americanas; UNASUR) began with a different premise. In 1991, a meeting between education ministers of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay was held in Brasilia to establish an agreement on what is related to education standards in the nations (Barom 2018). Essentially nested under the Assuncao Treaty, the resulting agreement focused on bettering education as a path to improving the economy of the region; nonetheless, the meetings contained a social character, with parts of the resulting document referring to a higher sense of social consciousness and closing the cultural gaps between the nations through education (Barom 2018). It also drafted a long-term path to integration through education. The document, in its final version, states a mission to "create a common educational space [...] moving towards the creation of a regional citizenship and identity" (Assuncao Treaty, cited in Baron 2018). UNASUR's website highlights former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso as the initial promoter of the organization (Gavião 2009). However, the constitutive treaty of UNASUR was signed only in 2008 under President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva (Gavião 2009). For some time, it has been possible to see movement

towards prioritizing some regional integration, such as the sanctioning in 2005 of a law making the teaching of Spanish in Brazilian high schools mandatory. However, the law was overturned by a new education reform in 2017, which made teaching Spanish optional. In comparison, the English language continues to be an obligatory subject in Brazilian high schools since it was deemed fundamental to a complete education. The aforementioned determinations on the curriculum serve as a clear example of how the integration with the South American countries neighboring Brazil is seen as positive during left-leaning governments but quickly discarded during central-right administrations.

UNASUR is a regional organization consisting of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Negotiations started in 2000, with a treaty finally being signed in 2008. Throughout UNASUR's constituting document, the matter of identity is discussed at length. Barom (2018) expounds on the notion of a united South American identity, which manifests in two forms: firstly, as an inherent construct that is already present to varying degrees in all member nations, rooted in shared history and experiences; secondly, as a political aspiration of the Bloc, representing a future objective to be pursued and a nascent identity to be constructed. This is intriguing as these two conceptions of South American identity seem initially opposing but, in reality, move quite similarly to any constructed identity. It is well-discussed within nationalism theories that communities are often imagined–hence, Benedict Anderson's book title–and built based on the political elite's interests. UNASUR initiated a five-year educational plan, which contained 11 general objectives to be achieved through the collaboration of the member nations (Barom 2018). Failing to continue the previous documents' move towards integration from a united history perspective, the

Quinquennial Plan addresses integration through language teaching and facilitating the

movement of scholastic persons–albeit with little detail on how to achieve either (Barom 2018).

This document can be seen as a temporal mark for abandoning ideas of cultural integration and

the pull-back on the wishes for a robust and united identity. Throughout both of these

foundational documents, the writing uses language explicitly focused on constructing and

maintaining a transnational identity (Barom 2018). However, the use of such language for

furthering–or constructing–a united identity stops being so present in further documents, falling

into the background of the bloc's objectives.

While Brazilian central-left politicians, starting in the late 1980s and 1990s, as

aforementioned, recognized and pushed for a South American identity, the right-leaning side of

Brazilian politics is notorious for refusing this identity. The most recent instance of a far-right

government in Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro's administration, began to pull the country away from the

previously built continentalism as it asserted new stances on the economy, religion, and the

meaning of the Brazilian Nation. Analyzing the construction of Brazilian nationalism through the

lenses of the right also provides some insight into the geopolitics of Religion in the region and

the frequent use of Christianity as a way to legitimize claims. The Brazilian right, especially the

Bolsonaro government, is characterized by an intriguing claim in the contemporary political

scenario: anti-communism (Lacerda 2022). Bolsonaro's campaign is strikingly similar to the

language used during the years of Brazil's military dictatorship (Lacerda 2022).

Regarding Brazilian integration with South and Latin America, Bolsonaro's rhetoric

offers a path to analyze how the military leaders of the '60s-80s perceived the matter. During the

years of the Military dictatorship, Brazilian relations with the rest of Latin America deteriorated

significantly. The Brazilian military coup, supported by the United States (At the onset of the

Military Dictatorship with the administration of President Castello Branco, there was an effort to

realign Brazil's international image as closer to Western countries than to Latin America (Santos

2005). Though Brazil's place–meaning its geographical location–in Latin America was

recognized, the integration efforts were halted, albeit not reversed (Santos 2005). Military

leaders focused on the rhetoric of development, which required strategically recognizing Brazil's

place in Latin America (Santos 2005). However, the military regime promoted a level of rivalry

with the neighboring countries (Jaeger 2019). During this time, many of the mentions of

alignment with Latin America became a move toward the Global North and South dichotomy

and, at some points, an "obligation" Brazil carried as the self-appointed leader of the region

(Santos 2005). An extremely significant mark in the relationship between Brazil and Latin

America happens during the process of re-democratization, as the constitution of 1988 sets the

aspiration that Brazil shall seek integration with Latin America, aimed at creating a "community

of Latin American nations."[5] Gavião (2013) holds that the end of the military regime boosted the

population's wish to participate in political affairs, which included external policies. It is at this

moment of increased popular participation that there is once again a shift towards regional

integration.

     In contemporaneity, right-wing and right-leaning governments have continued to neglect

projects of regional integration, especially UNASUR. The organization has been in crisis since

2017 when the then-Secretary General Samper renounced his position to protest the

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[5] Translated by the author. Original "comunidade latino-americana de nações." Brazilian constitution (1988), Article 4, Paragraph 1.

impeachment of–left-wing–Brazilian President Rousseff (Jaeger 2019). Subsequent federal administrations in Brazil made no effort to restore the organ (Jaeger 2019), and Bolsonaro's administration officially signed Brazil's departure from UNASUR in 2019 (Verdélio 2019). When leaving UNASUR, Bolsonaro's government moved towards PROSUR (Verdélio 2019), a regional development *forum* with no collective identity-building aspect. Such a move is on par with the history of right-wing governments in Brazil, which see regional integration as a tool for enhancing global relevancy (Santos 2005).

*The Role of the Catholic Church in Nation-Building*

One of the most important pieces of Bolsonaro's campaign was his ties to religious organizations. Though it would be incorrect to claim that the conservative right's resistance to South and Latin American integration is due solely to religious interests, it would be naive to ignore its possibly significant influence. The Catholic church has an undeniable level of influence in Latin America (Puntigliano 2021), including in Brazil. However, Brazilian right-leaning political parties tend towards the Evangelical church, especially in Bolsonaro's wake. According to the Latino Barometer, the proportion of the population who identifies as Evangelical is steadily increasing, while the Catholic population is decreasing. In this way, I argue that in claiming a 'Christian' and implicitly evangelical component to Brazil's national identity, the far right contributes to the distancing from a Latin-American identity as it provides, albeit indirectly, a separation from the Catholic component of Latin American identity.
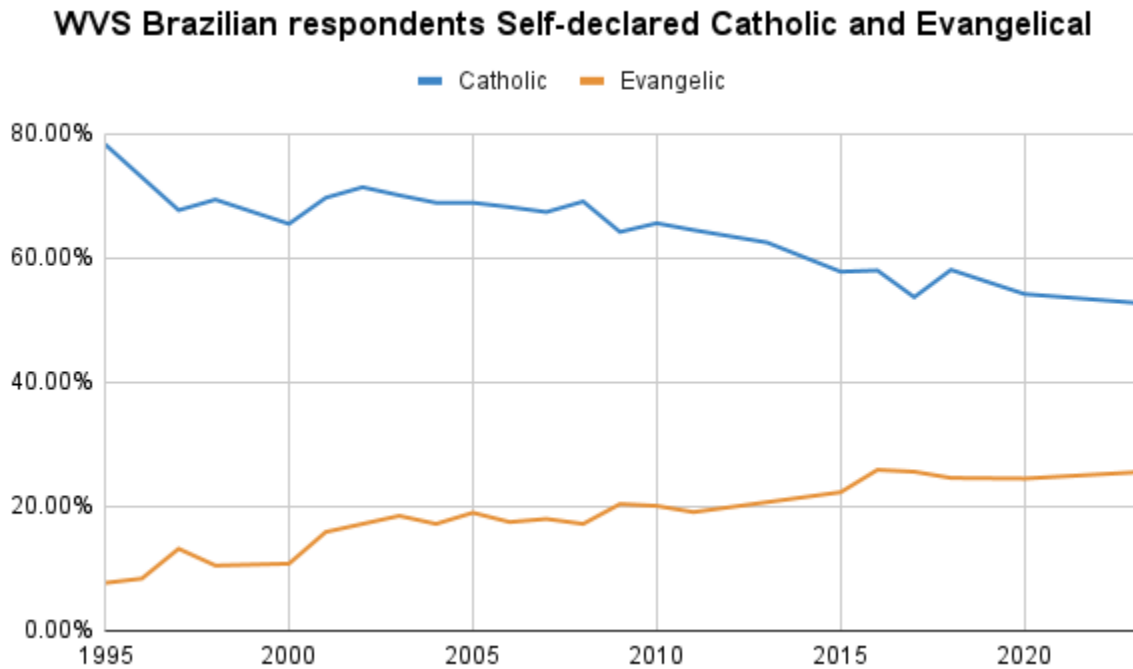
*Figure 4 Self-declared Catholic and Evangelical - Brazil WVS 7*

These two Christian denominations are similar; however, it is possible to argue that they are in direct competition. As previously explained, collective identity scholarship defends that religious similarities are a piece in favor of collective identity building (Anderson 1991). Therefore, it is essential to consider the geopolitical implications of the Catholic Church in Latin America. Since colonial times, Catholicism has been central in Latin American countries' history (Puntigliano 2019). Nonetheless, the degree to which "being catholic" is a root of Latin American identity is contested (Escobar 1991). Furthermore, it is possible to argue that the Brazilian Church has acted separately from its regional counterparts (Escobar 1991), as cohesive regional-unity-focused projects by the Catholic church did not consolidate until the late 19th and early 21st century (Puntigliano 2019). In analyzing the history of the Catholic Church's

geopolitical developments, Puntigliano (2019) concludes that, although the church as an organization has been a promoter of regional integration, the concepts and ideas linked to national identities in Latin America are not a product of the church. Additionally, Escobar's (1991) analysis of Catholic contributions to a Latin American identity highlights that the religious aspects of Latin American culture are not intrinsically linked to the institutional Church but rather to the religion itself. Thus, the catholic–and, more broadly, Christian–aspect of Latin American identity is beyond the scope of this paper's analysis.

**Current Data and relevant discussions**

In 2017, the *LatinoBarometer* survey asked, "With which country or bloc would you like [country] to strengthen commercial ties or external relations?" to which 42% of Brazilian respondents stated that they wished Brazil would strengthen ties with the United States, against 5.2% who would prefer integration with Latin American countries. The numbers speak to the Brazilian population's perception of how advantageous–or not–integration with the region can be. Nonetheless, LatinoBarometer surveys conducted in the years 2020 and 2023 found over 60% of respondents declared to be in favor of integration with the region. The data above supports the scholarly literature analysis above, showing that while the Brazilian population sees advantages in maintaining relationships with the Latin American countries, it does not prioritize the region. Consequently, integration plans are volatile as they are subject to the interests of the government in power, as there is little to no social pressure for further integration. In more direct terms, integration plans are quickly abandoned once a more politically marketable, short-term

opportunity presents itself, as there is no popular pressure to give regional integration any continuity.

Tancredi (2016) points out that there is a cultural separation between Brazil and the remainder of Latin America. The gap is starkly visible as the Brazilian population does not import or consume media, music, cinema, and other arts from the region; society is flooded with North American and European media. In schools, Brazilian students learn about the rest of the continent from a looking-down lens, imposing a supposed Brazilian superiority over the continent (Tancredi 2016). The history of Latin America is seldom taught in-depth, and significant historical figures such as Simon Bolivar are barely more than a passing mention in classes. According to Tancredi (2016), this gap and disconnection between the Brazilian population and the culture of the rest of the continent hinders integration efforts. A survey conducted in 2018 concluded that when asked to recall important events in Latin America, Brazilian respondents are far more likely to list events centered around their own nation than their counterparts in Chile and Mexico (Alves-Brasil and Cabecinha 2018). For example, when asked to list "an important event in Latin America," Brazilian respondents frequently cited the Paraguay War; in contrast, both Mexican and Chilean respondents listed the Cuban Revolution (Alves-Brazil and Cabecinhas 2018).

An analysis of the way in which the Paraguay War is taught in Brazilian schools sheds light on such results. According to Salles (2017), Brazilian school materials in the history of the Paraguayan War until the 1970s largely portrayed a superiority of Brazil, to whom the conflict was inevitable due to its role as a big beacon-of-civilization nation. More recent books, though critical of the near-imperialist behaviors of Imperial Brazil, move away from the patriotic view

to a curious one: Brazil is now portrayed as a "puppet of Great Britain" (Salles, 2017), securing the European country's interests. Both these ways of teaching the Paraguay War showcase how the Brazilian basic education cycle teaches a calculated image of the relationship between Brazil and the neighboring region as two types of "exceptional." The early and mid-20th century narrative paints Brazil as exceptional through the lens of a "more civilized" nation that is related to Latin America only so much as it is its duty to lead the region towards Western development standards. The second lens, though more critical of the previous sub-imperialist tone, still paints Brazil as an exception to the region and the conduit of European wishes. Therefore, the Paraguay War is an exemplification of how Brazil's education system portrays Latin America: while inserting the country in the context of Latin American history and approximating Brazil to its region, the curriculum still perpetrates the view of a separated powerhouse nation that is, yes, inserted in the region's history however does not share it in the same way. It is logical to assume that the more any one person buys into the constructed national identity framing Brazil as exceptional, the less likely one is to feel a closeness to Latin America. However, WVS data shows that the educational system in Brazil *reduces* national pride; simultaneously, higher educational attainment increases the likelihood of an individual feeling close to Latin America. Those with Masters and Doctoral levels were excluded from this analysis to avoid extreme skew, as the sample contained only ten respondents (out of 1,487) in those categories.

## "How proud do you feel to be [Brazilian]?" per Educational Level
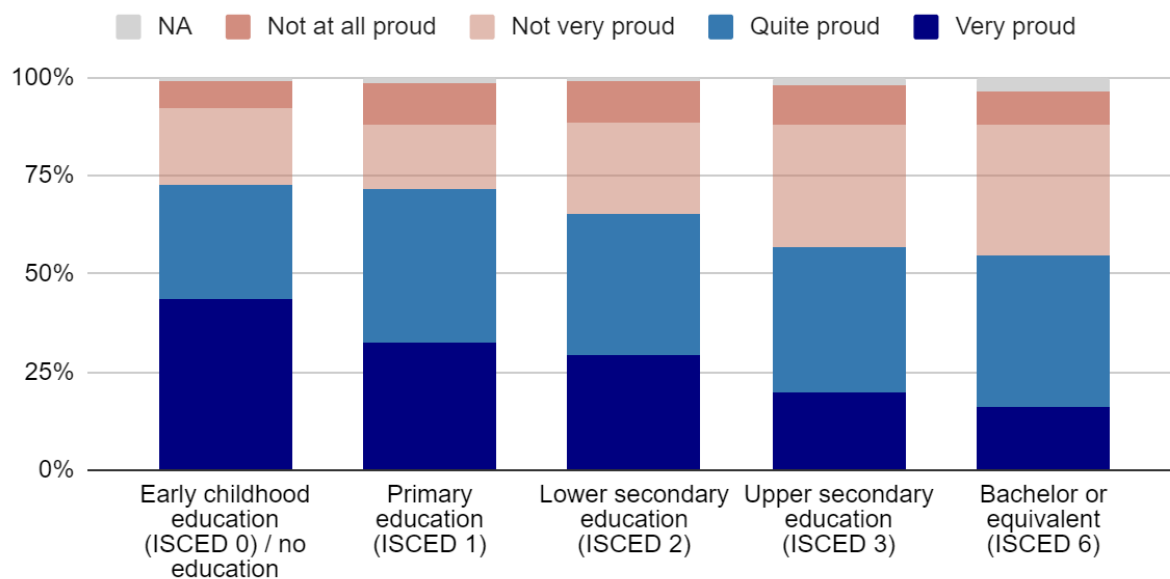


"How proud do you feel to be [Brazilian]?" per Educational Level

*Figure 5 Brazilian National Pride per ISCED educational level - Data source: World Values Survey 7th wave*

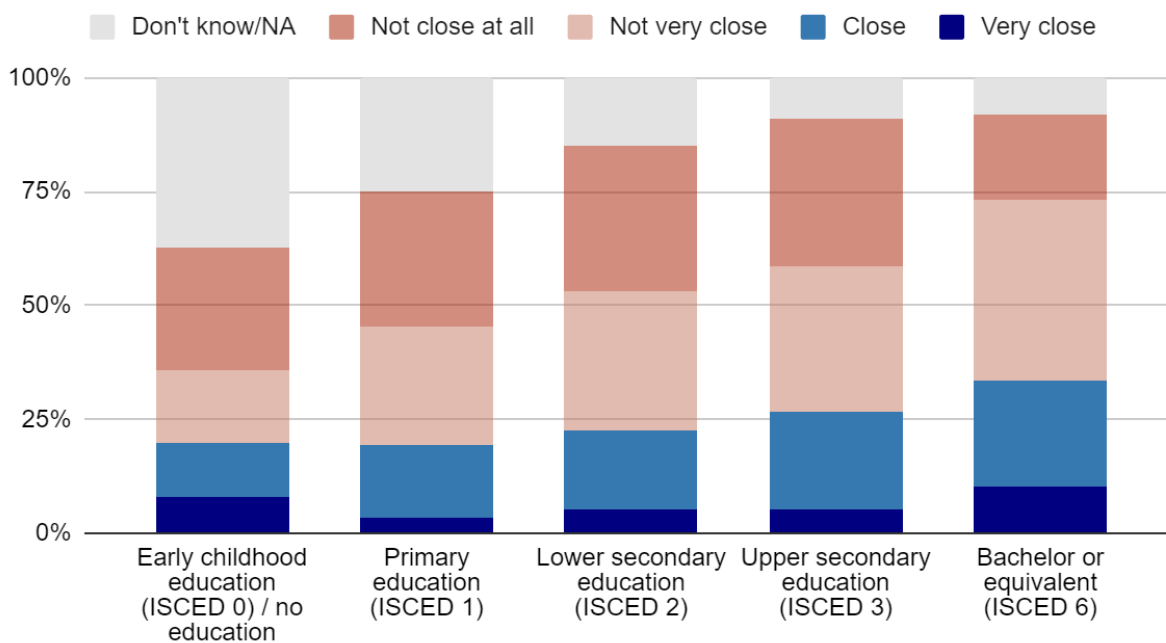## "How close do you feel to [Latin America]" per Educational Level



*Figure 6 Brazilian "Closeness" to Latin America x Education - Data source: World Values Survey 7th wave*

These numbers are initially contradictory to the existing literature and the theory developed throughout this paper, thus warranting deeper analysis. It is necessary to understand that recent changes in the Brazilian educational system have emphasized developing students' critical thinking and deconstruction of ready-made narratives (Salles 2017). A higher level of education implies a better understanding of national history, policies, and place in the world, which can increase the closeness one feels to a continent while simultaneously decreasing the level of blind nationalism present. The addition of "blind" as an adjective to nationalism is, here, far from hyperbolic; Carvalho (1998) concluded that Brazilian national pride is, more often than not, rooted in the natural resources and beauty of the nation and seldom in political, economic or otherwise critical factors. The term "Edenic Nationalism" has since been used to describe the

sense of national pride stemming from the natural characteristics of the country, over which its population has little to no protagonism. As Carvalho (1998) points out, education increases critical thinking skills, making it more conducive for a person to question the roots of national pride and, as his study concluded, also more accessible to question the roots of 'national shame.' The determination that education in Brazil increases criticism of nationalist rhetoric is fundamental to the conclusions of this paper: in deconstructing national narratives, the education system, perhaps as a collateral consequence, opens a space for understanding the place of Brazil in Latin America and the world. Therefore, in the Brazilian context, "closeness" to Latin America can imply an understanding of Brazil's place in the world and in the region without signifying a sense of belonging to a regional identity. For Brazilian students to develop a sense of Latin American identity, there would need to be a deliberate educational plan to correct the decades for which exceptionalism was taught. Recalling the way in which the Paraguayan War was taught, it is important to highlight that books with the exceptional leader narrative continued to be produced until the late 1970s (Salles 2017). Changing constructed narratives takes time, and it is likely that many exceptionalism biases continue to be perpetuated, as there has not been a consistent educational plan for identity building–with the exception of the aforementioned UNASUR quinquennial educational plan, which was non-specific and ultimately abandoned. Applying this line of thought to other significant historical events in Latin America, it is possible to understand why the university students in the study conducted by Alves-Brail and Cabecinhas (2017) listed primarily events and personalities where Brazil was centered as the *Most Important events in Latin America*. At this point, it is crucial to emphasize that National and Supranational identities can exist in different spheres (Pinteric, 2015). Brazilian students are able to understand

the country's place in South–and Latin–America, which increases closeness to the region but does not signify integration into a regional identity. Lastly, it is essential to emphasize that 46.9% of the Brazilian population did not complete the basic education cycle–meaning they did not graduate high school (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, IBGE). Therefore, the effects of the education system in approximating the Brazilian population to the larger region are not felt by nearly half the population. Furthermore, 34% of the population did not achieve lower secondary education. At that point, it is possible to infer nationalistic teachings are still centered around edenic reasons (Carvalho 1998), and regional history has not been properly taught. As Tancredi (2016) highlights, the Brazilian population is unaware of its regional history. Since ignorance often leads to discrimination, there is an urgent need to include Latin American history in Brazilian school curriculums and diffuse the importance of integration strategies amongst the population.

**Conclusions**

The complexity of Brazilian national identity is constantly evolving. This study delves into pivotal historical historical moments when Brazilian nationalisms were reconstructed and redefined. By examining relevant theories, historical events, and data, it is evident that numerous factors and competing interests played a crucial role in shaping what we now recognize as Brazilian national identity. The question, "Are Brazilians Latin Americans?" still elicits an "it depends" response, but with an added caveat - it depends on who is responding. Throughout history, Brazilian national identity has been shaped and reshaped, with a shifting focus on either highlighting the differences between Brazil and Hispano-America or emphasizing their similarities. When similarities were emphasized, economic and development status were the

main focus. However, UNASUR, the one project with an identity-building tone, was abandoned when a right-leaning administration came to power. One notable trend is that politicians who prioritize popular support, workers' rights, and left-leaning policies tend to seek more integration with Latin America based on similar identities. This can be seen in the original signing of the UNASUR treaty and Brazil's return to the organization, both of which occurred under Lula's leadership. In recent years, right-wing governments in Brazil have been observed to adopt an economic development-centric approach, which is characterized by a distinct emphasis on mirroring Western economies. This approach is often framed in such a way that South and Latin America are viewed as tools for further development, thus contrasting sharply with the "grow together" approach that is typically associated with left-leaning governments. The consequences of the inconsistent project of national identity building are numerous; the most relevant to the topic at hand is that Brazilian respondents feel a significant distance from any large regional identity.

Despite differing opinions on the identity or economic nature of the country's approach to integration, the narrative of exceptionalism remains a significant factor in shaping Brazilian national identity and distancing it from its regional counterparts. Without a meaningful transformation in Brazil's approach to sharing and identifying with its neighbors, the supranational identity or organizations may not come to fruition. However, for such a transformation to occur, the Brazilian government must have an advantageous incentive for regional integration and the subsequent construction of a shared identity. Currently, it remains unclear if there are political or economic reasons for Brazil to pursue this route.

The perceived distance of Brazilian national consciousness from the rest of Latin America presents a challenge when it comes to understanding Brazil's global position, cultural integration, and regional similarities. The 7th wave of the World Values survey revealed a significant lack of respondents who felt close to Latin America, Brazil, and the world (as shown in Figure 03). To better understand this phenomenon, future research should examine how the constant reconstruction of national identity may be promoting distance from that identity itself. Additionally, there is a lack of literature on how the general population feels about national and supranational identity. Given the growing importance of collective identities, it is crucial for future academic research to survey Latin Americans' sense of belonging to national and regional identities.

**Appendix A: Map of Latin America**



*Figure 7 Map of Latin America - Source: Library of Congress [Washington, D.C. : Central Intelligence Agency, 2006]*

**Appendix B: Map of Latin America - Spanish and Portuguese Territories, 1780**



*Figure 8 Map of Latin America, Portuguese and Spanish Viceroyalties, 1780 - Source: Britannica*

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