

DISCUSSION PAPER 24-004

# **A Public Perceptions Survey of China in Venezuela**

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UNITED STATES  
INSTITUTE OF PEACE  
Making Peace Possible

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Discussion Paper No. 24-004



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## SUMMARY

This discussion paper presents and analyzes original data gathered in June 2023 on Venezuelan perceptions of China and the United States. The results show that China's standing in Venezuela has declined in absolute terms and relative to the United States, which is commensurate with trends elsewhere in Latin America. Furthermore, it suggests the orientation of Venezuela's foreign policy—including forging close ties to China and alienating the United States—is inconsistent with Venezuelan public preferences. Venezuelans, however, are not fully satisfied with the policy approach of either China or the United States toward Venezuela. The discussion paper concludes with policy options for US officials and policymakers.

# INTRODUCTION

China has focused on Venezuela more than any other country in Latin America. Politically and financially, Venezuela has enjoyed large amounts of Chinese support. By one measure, China has loaned Venezuela more money than it has to any other country in Latin America.<sup>1</sup> China also recently upgraded its relationship status with Venezuela as an “all weather strategic partnership,” China’s highest designation of partnership for foreign countries.<sup>2</sup> But what do Venezuelans think of China after all these overtures?

The conventional wisdom suggests that China is a popular a friend to Venezuela and a foe to the United States. At the government level, Hugo Chavez visited China six times from 1999 to 2013, more than any other Latin American leader during this period. Nicolás Maduro has followed in these footsteps, leaning on China politically and financially since coming to power in 2013. Similarly, Juan Guaidó, the leader of Venezuela’s interim government from 2019 to 2022, sought multiple meetings with Chinese officials and publicly reiterated the importance of a relationship with China for Venezuela’s future.<sup>3</sup>

But elite-level engagements can only tell so much of the Venezuelan perspective on China. For all the exchanges and agreements, there are also reports of projects having gone wrong and disaffected Venezuelans.<sup>4</sup> Understanding the views of the Venezuelan people would offer a vital, additional perspective on the state of the China-Venezuela relationship, yet there is little reliable data or analysis on how Venezuelans perceive China.

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<sup>1</sup> Diana Roy, “China’s Growing Influence in Latin America,” Council on Foreign Relations, June 15, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-influence-latin-america-argentina-brazil-venezuela-security-energy-bri>.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The People’s Republic of China, “Xi Jinping Sends Congratulatory Message to Nicolás Maduro Moros on His Reelection as Venezuelan President,” July 30, 2024, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202408/t20240801\\_11464750.html](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202408/t20240801_11464750.html).

<sup>3</sup> Stuart Lau, “Self-Declared Leader of Venezuela Juan Guaido Extends Olive Branch to China, Wants ‘Productive and Mutually Beneficial Relationship,’” *South China Morning Post*, April 2, 2019, [www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2184773/exclusive-self-declared-leader-venezuela-juan-guaido-extends](http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2184773/exclusive-self-declared-leader-venezuela-juan-guaido-extends).

<sup>4</sup> Julett Pineda Sleinan, “Venezuela se colma de deudas y violaciones laborales ‘made in China,’” Fundación Andrés Bello—Centro de Investigación Chino Latinoamericano, January 18, 2021, <https://fundacionandresbello.org/reportajes/venezuela-se-colma-de-deudas-y-violaciones-laborales-made-in-china/>.

Additionally, Venezuela has experienced a humanitarian crisis for several years, and the fallout from its political instability has been of key concern to countries in the region, including the United States. The failure of Venezuela's state functions has exacerbated criminal activities, and the resultant waves of migration have stressed the social services of neighboring countries. In this context, its relationship with China has often been pointed to as a key factor in its future trajectory.<sup>5</sup>

To better understand this relationship, the China and Latin America programs at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) commissioned a public perceptions survey in Venezuela in 2023. Before this poll, the most recent survey conducted in Venezuela on public perceptions of China versus the United States was conducted in 2016 by Vanderbilt University's Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP).

USIP's 2023 poll sought to build on the LAPOP studies to provide an updated dataset that could be compared with LAPOP's historical data on Venezuela and its contemporary data on other Latin American countries. We added questions that would provide insights on how opinions of China are shaped based on domestic voting preferences in Venezuela—that is, whether respondents were pro-Maduro or in opposition to his government. The survey was administered face-to-face across 2,000 Venezuelan adults on June 11–23, 2023. The survey sample reflects the demographic, political, and regional composition of the Venezuelan population by incorporating responses among income levels, genders, geographic regions, and political affiliations.

We have found that the elite-level *bonhomie* has not trickled down. China's popularity with Venezuelans is now waning. Furthermore, like many issues in Venezuelan politics, we have found that perceptions of China have become decidedly partisan. This discussion paper analyzes the survey results, compares them with data from polls in other Latin American countries, and places the findings in the context of China's broader relations with Venezuela. We conclude with policy options for US officials and policymakers.

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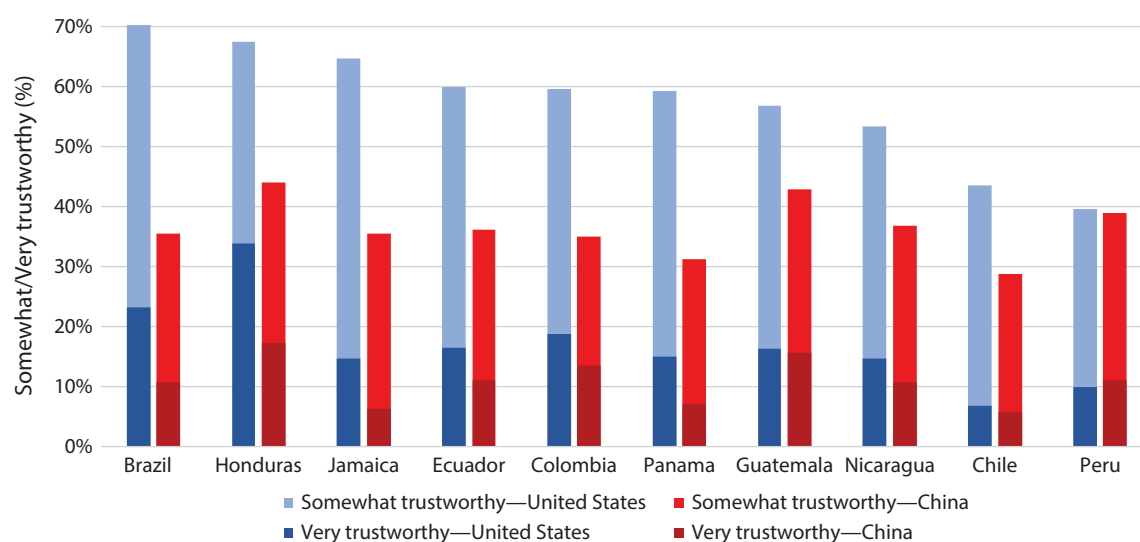
<sup>5</sup> Carlos Eduardo Pina, "China Will Determine the Future of Venezuela," Al Jazeera, July 14, 2019, [www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/7/14/china-will-determine-the-future-of-venezuela](http://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/7/14/china-will-determine-the-future-of-venezuela).

# 1. SURVEY FINDINGS

A key finding is that public perceptions of the United States in Latin America and the Caribbean are vastly more positive than views of China, and the gap in most countries in the region is widening. Surveys conducted over the past decade show that as China's presence in the Americas has increased, its image has deteriorated. Investments in infrastructure, diplomatic outreach, propaganda outlets, and cultural centers have not worked to boost attitudes toward the country. On the contrary, in the case of China, familiarity seems to breed contempt. This is also the key finding from surveys conducted over the past decade by the Pew Research Center and LAPOP, which queried respondents about their attitudes toward China and the United States.

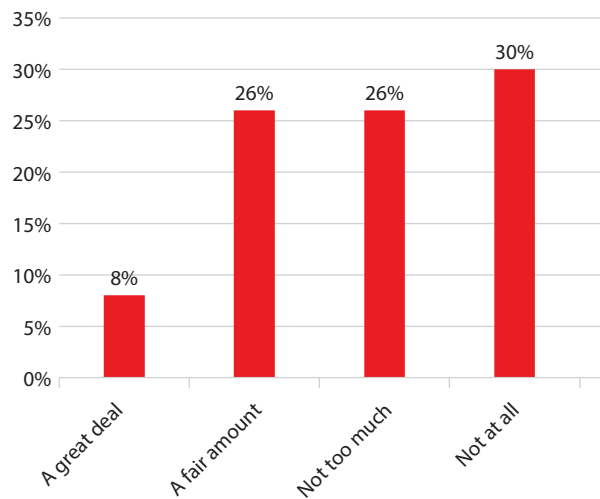
As figure 1 illustrates, in each of the nine countries surveyed by LAPOP in 2021, the share of people who consider the United States to be very or somewhat trustworthy is higher than the percentages who consider China trustworthy. In most cases, the difference is dramatic. In Panama, for example, a country with close ties to the United States but which established diplomatic relations with China in 2017, six in 10 view the United States as trustworthy, including 15 percent who say the country is very trustworthy. In contrast, only about one-third think China is trustworthy, with only 7 percent saying it is very trustworthy.

**Figure 1.** Trustworthiness of US and Chinese Governments



Source: LAPOP (2021).

**Figure 2.** Does China Contribute to Peace and Stability Around the World?



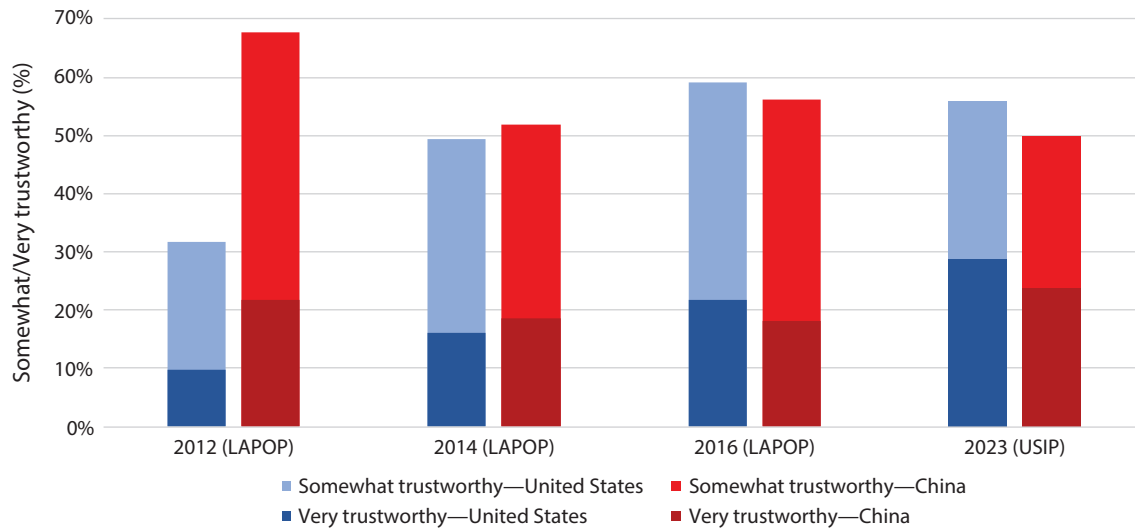
Source: Pew Research, Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey.

Similarly, in Colombia, another country with a close relationship to the United States, six in 10 believe the United States is trustworthy, with two in five describing it as very trustworthy. Only 35 percent see China as somewhat trustworthy and 13 percent as very trustworthy. The results in Jamaica are striking as well. About two-thirds surveyed think the United States is trustworthy, nearly double the share who say the same about China.

What is most notable are the results in countries not known to be bastions of pro-American sentiment or governance. In Brazil, for example, twice as many people consider the United States to be trustworthy than believe China to be so. Pew’s survey data also showed that an overwhelming majority of Brazilians do not see China contributing to international peace and stability (figure 2). In Nicaragua, where a dictatorial anti-American regime rules, a majority still considers the United States as trustworthy, while less than four in 10 say the same about China.

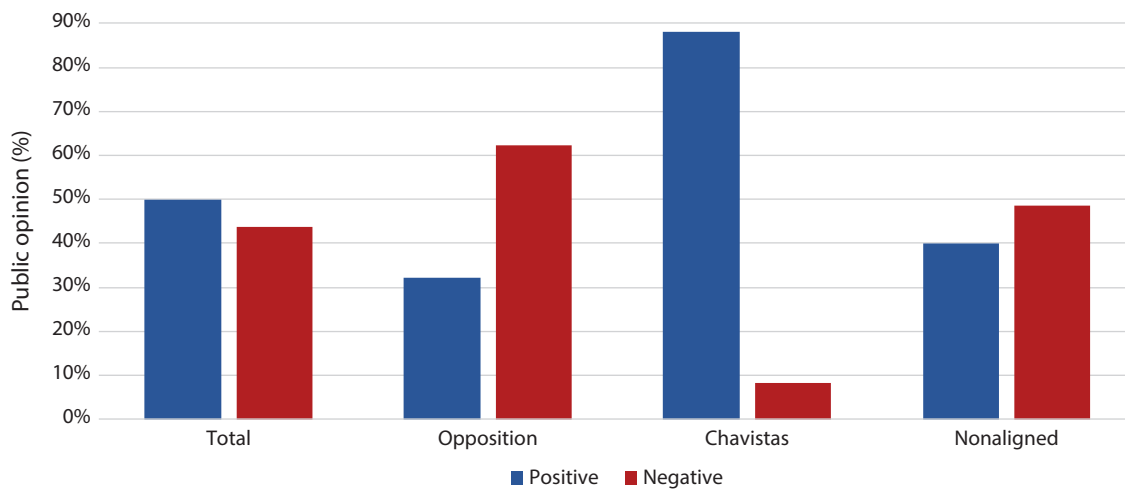
Venezuela is somewhat of an outlier. The most recent LAPOP data from 2016 showed that Venezuelans view the United States as 60 percent “somewhat trustworthy” and “very trustworthy” and China as 56 percent in the same categories. USIP’s 2023 poll shows similar results. As figure 3 shows, a majority (56 percent) have positive views of the United States (we asked about favorability rather than trustworthiness), while attitudes toward China are more divided (50 percent positive to 44 percent negative).

**Figure 3.** Trustworthiness of the US and Chinese Governments: Venezuela (2012–2023)



Source: LAPOP (2021) and USIP (2023).

**Figure 4.** Do You Have a Positive or Negative View of China?

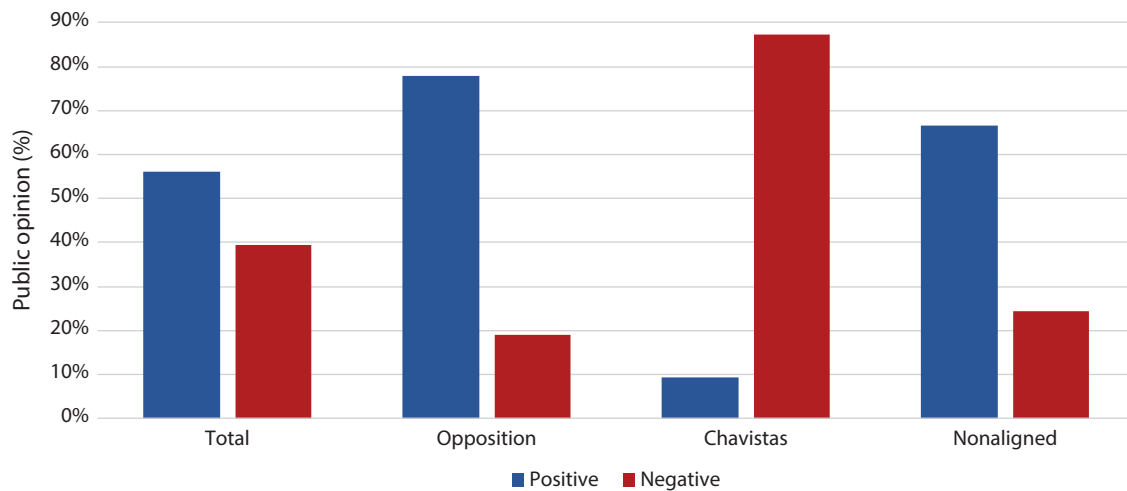


Source: USIP (June 2023).

Venezuela’s polarization is reflected in the findings. While nine in 10 government supporters have a positive view of China, supporters of the opposition view China negatively by a two-to-one margin (figure 4). The findings are nearly reversed when it comes to the United States (figure 5): eight in 10 opposition supporters hold a positive view, while nearly nine in 10 have a negative opinion. In both the case of China and the United States, the attitudes of political independents align more closely to those of the opposition.

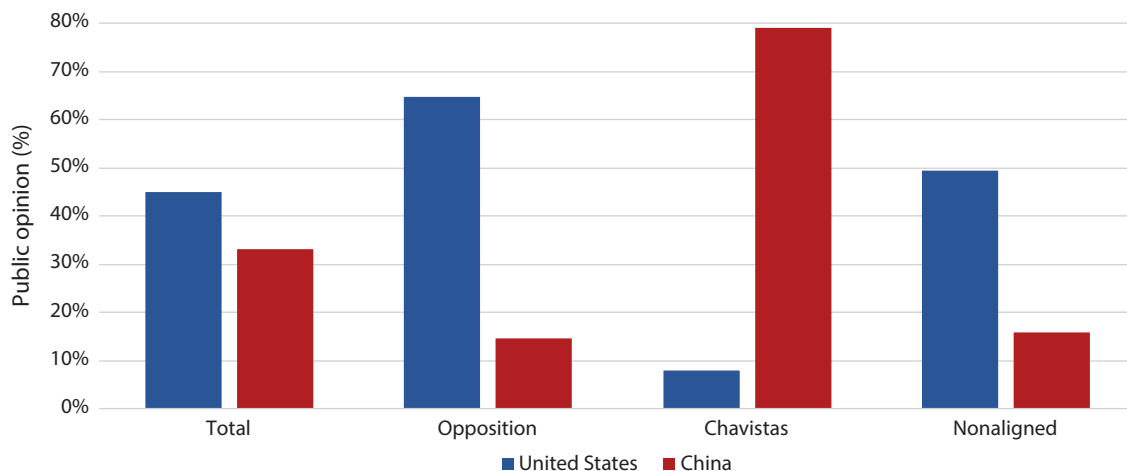


**Figure 5.** Do You Have a Positive or Negative View of the United States?



Source: USIP (June 2023).

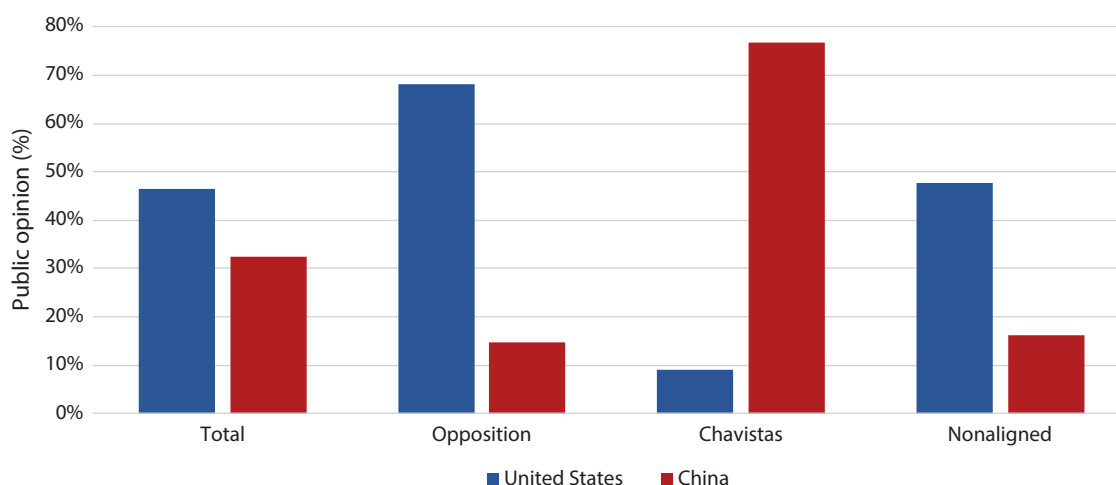
**Figure 6.** Between the United States and China, with which Country Should Venezuela Have Closer Political Ties?



Source: USIP (June 2023).

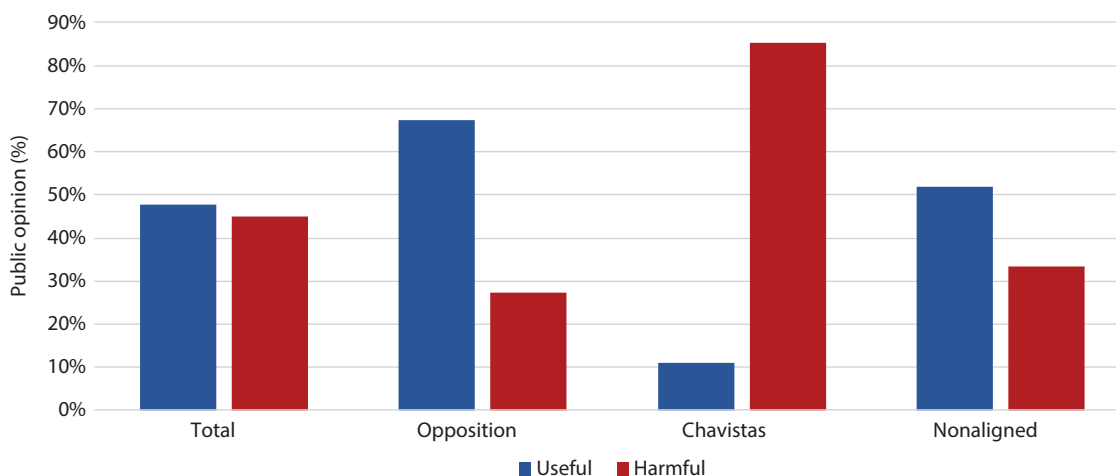
The orientation of Venezuela’s foreign policy, including forging close ties to China and alienating the United States, is inconsistent with what the Venezuelan public would prefer. By a 45–33 percent plurality, Venezuelans believe Venezuela should have a closer political relationship with the United States than China (figure 6). By a comparable margin, the public prefers the country have closer economic ties to the United States than China (figure 7). Again, the political divide is sharp, with Chavistas favoring China and opposition supporters and independents preferring the United States.

**Figure 7.** Between the United States and China, with which Country Should Venezuela Have Closer Economic Ties?



Source: USIP (June 2023).

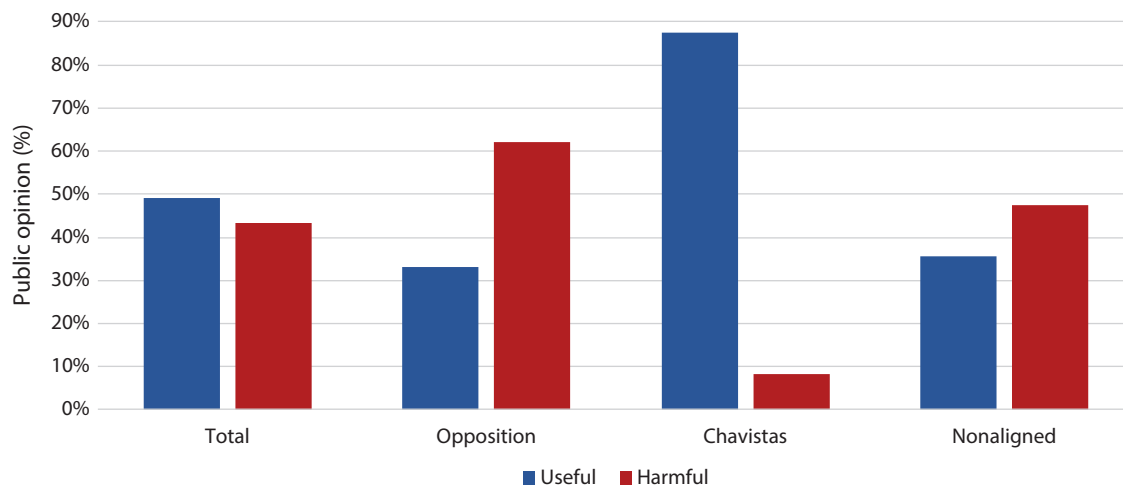
**Figure 8.** Are Current US Government Policies toward Venezuela More Useful or Harmful in Solving Venezuelan Political Differences?



Source: USIP (June 2023).

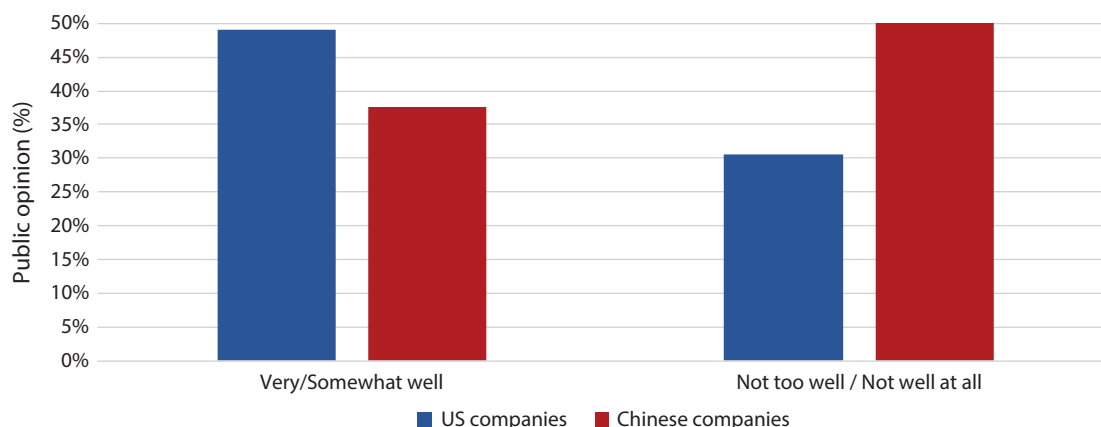
Venezuelans, however, are not fully satisfied with the policy approach of either China or the United States toward Venezuela. As figures 8 and 9 illustrate, opinions about the two countries' policies toward Venezuela are nearly evenly divided. Given the slightly higher favorable attitude toward the United States, these results are somewhat surprising. They are likely explained by what other public opinion surveys have shown: most Venezuelans, including opponents of the regime, oppose the economic sanctions imposed by the United States, while a small share would like a more hard-line approach than the Biden administration has employed.

**Figure 9.** Are Current Chinese Government Policies toward Venezuela More Useful or Harmful in Solving Venezuelan Political Differences?



Source: USIP (June 2023).

**Figure 10.** How Well do US and Chinese Companies Treat Venezuelan Workers?

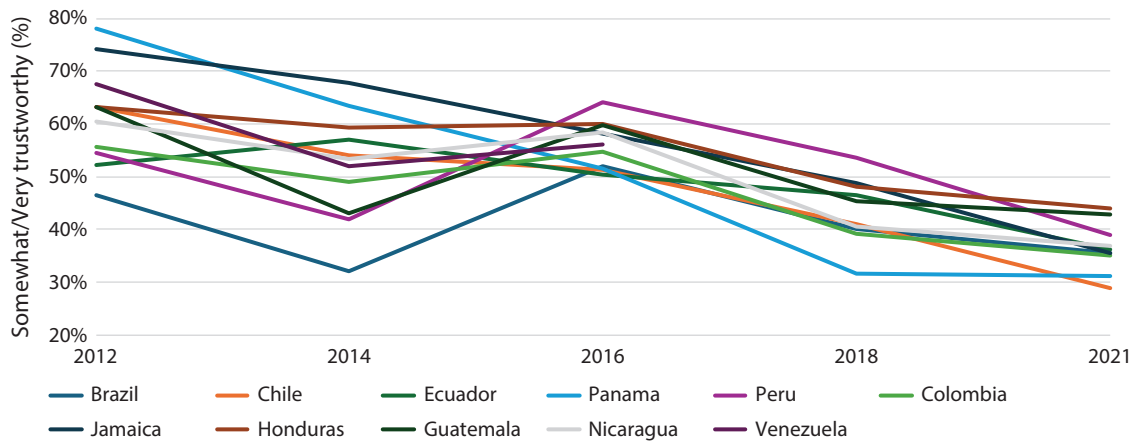


Source: USIP (June 2023).

If political conditions were to improve in Venezuela to the point that the United State would lift sanctions and enable US companies to invest in the country, Venezuelans would be enthusiastic. By a 49 to 31 percent plurality, they believe that US companies treat Venezuelan workers very or somewhat well (figure 10). In contrast, by a 50 to 37 percent plurality, Venezuelans believe Chinese companies treat workers not too well or not well at all.

Not only does China's image lag behind that of the United States in Venezuela, but Beijing is losing ground across the Americas, according to these surveys. Figure 11 shows the image of China over time in each country in the LAPOP research. In nearly every case, there is a downward trajectory.

**Figure 11.** Trustworthiness of the Chinese Government



Source: LAPOP (2021).

## 2. MAKING SENSE OF CHINA'S SHORTFALLS IN VENEZUELA

The partisan prism through which China and the United States are viewed in Venezuela reflects the starkly distinct worldviews of the government and opposition, the former embracing a socialist model and anti-Americanism of US adversaries, the latter identifying with a more Western version of democracy and free markets. But Venezuela today may not be so divided politically. Edmundo Gonzalez, the unity opposition candidate, has been shown to have defeated President Maduro by more than a two-to-one margin in the presidential election on July 28 based on the official tally sheets acquired by the opposition.<sup>6</sup> In the unlikely event that regional diplomatic efforts succeed in having the regime release the official tally sheets,<sup>7</sup> and Gonzalez is allowed to take office in January 2025, then US support for the country's economic reconstruction and political backing for national reconciliation will be broadly welcomed. A segment of the Chavista base will always resent the United States, but US policy, including under the first Trump administration, has been

<sup>6</sup> "Resultados: Nacional," Resultados con VZLA, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://resultadosconvzla.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> Lisandra Paraguassu, Leonardo Fernandez, and Deisy Buitrago, "Brazil, Mexico and Colombia Call for Venezuela to Release Full Vote Tallies," Reuters, August 2, 2024, [www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazilian-flag-raised-argentine-embassy-caracas-2024-08-01/](https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazilian-flag-raised-argentine-embassy-caracas-2024-08-01/).

supportive of a role for the ruling United Venezuelan Socialist Party, or PSUV, in a democratic Venezuela. China would not be as nearly well-positioned.

More broadly, the survey results above are surprising because there are strong reasons we might expect Venezuelans to look to Chinese engagements with greater fondness. First, the Venezuelan government has censored so many news outlets that Chinese media have a relatively unparalleled opportunity to advance their own narratives. Between 2003 and 2022, for example, at least 285 radio stations and 53 newspapers were shut down in Venezuela.<sup>8</sup> Censorship has become a major issue in the Venezuelan media landscape as journalists are harassed, arrested, or killed. In 2016, Venezuela's state-owned news channel, Telesur, even launched coproductions with China's CGTN.<sup>9</sup> Much of this programming is focused on Chinese culture, but this itself can be used as a means of presenting China and its political objectives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, in a positive light.<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, on the economic front, China has been Venezuela's most important partner in recent years. China provided significant lending until 2016, focused on Venezuela's oil, health, education, and technology sectors. More broadly, China's purchases of Venezuelan oil have offered an important lifeline to Venezuela, as it has mismanaged its economy amid US sanctions, a humanitarian crisis, and fluctuating oil prices.

Lastly, China has continued to extend scholarships and short-term training courses to Venezuelan university students, civil servants, and military personnel. These scholarships and training courses fly Venezuelan nationals to China and are designed to build strong relationships between counterparts in various sectors and government branches. The scholarships and training courses form an integral component of Chinese diplomacy and their efforts to increase soft power internationally.

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<sup>8</sup> Espacio Público, "Situación general del derecho a la libertad de expresión en Venezuela enero – diciembre 2022," January 27, 2023, <https://espaciopublico.org/situacion-general-del-derecho-a-la-libertad-de-expresion-en-venezuela-enero-diciembre-2022-informe-preliminar/>; and Espacio Público, "Sin periódicos: menos noticias en Venezuela," May 2, 2019, <https://espaciopublico.org/sin-periodicos-menos-noticias-en-venezuela/>.

<sup>9</sup> Pablo Sebastian Morales, "Counter-Hegemonic Collaborations or Alliances of the Underdogs? The Case of TeleSUR with Al-Mayadeen, RT and CGTN," *Global Media and Communication* 18, no. 3 (December 1, 2022): 365–82.

<sup>10</sup> Morales, "Counter-Hegemonic Collaborations."

China's popularity in Venezuela is declining, as it is in other Latin American countries. A significant factor is likely that China's outreach programs are mostly benefiting and engaging with people associated with Maduro's government. For instance, for short-term training programs, Chinese embassies will typically reach out to government ministry leadership and ask them to select who from within their departments will go on the expenses-paid trips to China.<sup>11</sup>

More tellingly, a 2022 review by Changzhou University of the Confucius Institute in Caracas found that it was struggling to advance a positive image of China across a broad swath of the Venezuelan population.<sup>12</sup> Among its successes, the author of the report celebrates that the institute had been invited by the Venezuelan government to teach civil servants, employees at the state oil company, and staff at the high court of justice. However, in the review's conclusion, the author suggests that partisan affiliations in Venezuela may simultaneously be an obstacle to broader reach. In particular, she points to the Confucius Institute's location in the Bolivarian University of Venezuela, noting that this new university was established by Hugo Chavez and that the institute received significant support from the Venezuelan government to operate there. She concludes that "this kind of 'care' [by the Venezuelan authorities] also indirectly creates some limitations. For example, other universities with a longer history and excellent teaching quality are unable to cooperate with the Confucius Institute due to political reasons, which indirectly distances Venezuelan university students from Chinese language and culture."<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, while such arrangements create obstacles for Chinese actors to communicate beyond pro-Maduro audiences, the independent media that remains in Venezuela often paints a negative picture of Chinese engagements to its opposition readership. The media outlet Armando.Info, for

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<sup>11</sup> Henry Tugendhat and Dawit Alemu, "Chinese Agricultural Training Courses for African Officials: Between Power and Partnerships," *World Development* 81 (2016): 71–81.

<sup>12</sup> Confucius Institutes are sponsored by learning institutions based in China; Changzhou University is responsible for the Confucius Institute in Caracas. See Guo Yina [郭漪娜], "Development Characteristics, Challenges, and Solutions for Venezuela's Confucius Institute [委内瑞拉孔子学院的发展特点、困难和对策]," *Data [数据]*, no. 12 (2022): 103–05.

<sup>13</sup> Guo, "Development Characteristics," 105. Author's translation of "但这样的'照顾'也间接造成了一些限制, 例如, 其他历史悠久、教学质量出色的大学由于政治原因无法与孔子学院合作, 间接上疏远了委内瑞拉广大大学生与汉语、中国文化的距离。"

example, has produced several articles of investigative journalism that criticize Chinese actors for their corrupt practices in collaboration with Venezuelan government officials, involving overpriced sales of weapons, unfinished infrastructure projects, and other projects that seem designed for kick-backs to Venezuelan officials.<sup>14</sup>

But just as significant for China's falling popularity in Venezuela is the change in attitude among China's own business community and policymakers. On the surface, there is still praise for Maduro in the Chinese-language media, and of course, in China's Spanish- and English-language statements on the relationship. A case in point is Maduro's visit to Beijing in September 2023. Chinese media highlighted the history of their relations, Maduro's gratitude to China, and the news that the two countries raised their bilateral relationship from a "comprehensive strategic partnership" to an "all weather strategic partnership."<sup>15</sup> China had previously reserved this partnership status for Belarus, Ethiopia, and Pakistan, the implication being Venezuela is China's strongest bilateral partner in Latin America.<sup>16</sup>

Behind closed doors, however, Maduro was also likely to have discussed the thorny issue of Venezuela's massive outstanding debt to China, which has totaled approximately \$60 billion since China's state banks began lending to Venezuela in 2007. Venezuela is now paying off this debt, but the total is twice as much as the second-largest borrower in Latin America. The debt is also an unflattering symbol of China's failure to gain traction in the country despite massive financial commitments.

Since China stopped lending to Venezuela in 2016, it has become more common to find Chinese businesses and analysts who have grown weary and cynical of dealing with Venezuela. In 2017, for instance, three analysts from the China National Petroleum Corporation, China's largest and most

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<sup>14</sup> "Venezuela's Dance with China," Armando.Info, February 14, 2021, <https://armando.info/en/venezuelas-dance-with-china/>.

<sup>15</sup> Liang Xiaohui [梁晓辉], "'A Historic Visit', Three 'Special Aspects' of Maduro's Trip to China ['一次历史性的访问', 马杜罗访华的三个'特别']," China News Service [中国新闻社], September 14, 2023, [www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2023/09-14/10077875.shtml](http://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2023/09-14/10077875.shtml).

<sup>16</sup> "China Backs Venezuela's Efforts to Safeguard Sovereignty: Xi," Telesur, September 13, 2023, archived March 8, 2024, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20240308170134/https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/China-Backs-Venezuelas-Efforts-to-Safeguard-Sovereignty-Xi-20230913-0010.html>.

geopolitically significant investor in Venezuela, published a report saying the country’s structural violence and growing income inequalities posed increased risks for Chinese businesses operating there.<sup>17</sup> Relatedly, in a 2019 study, two Chinese academics argued that “serious corruption in Venezuela, where a large amount of oil revenues have gone to the overseas asset accounts of the country’s dignitaries, have led to a number of anti-corruption demonstrations in the country.” They added that, in the event of regime change, “the oil benefits that China expected to gain will no longer be guaranteed, and the Chinese government and oil companies may suffer huge economic losses.”<sup>18</sup> A 2023 paper in China’s *Journal of Latin American Studies* seeking to explain the structural factors for Venezuela’s economic decline to a Chinese audience argued that this was precipitated by an oil sector that quickly consumed Venezuelan politics in the early twentieth century and remains an obstacle for the country’s economic prospects to this day.<sup>19</sup>

Lastly, a large proportion of Chinese lending has been focused on Venezuela’s oil sector. For instance, several loans have been extended to develop extraction pipelines and oil refinery capabilities, while other loans have been backed by the collateral of future oil sales to support local development projects.<sup>20</sup> Either way, since the United States lifted many sanctions on Venezuela, the former could once again become the primary destination of Venezuelan oil, which means China is getting less from the illicit market.

<sup>17</sup> Cao Minquan [曹民权], Wang Guowei [王继维], and Wu Qiang [吴强], “A Study into the Core Elements of a Country’s Security Risk Assessment: Venezuela’s Social Security Risks [国别社会安全风险评估中的软要素研究——兼论委内瑞拉社会安全风险],” *Chinese Journal of Safety, Science, and Technology* [中国安全生产科学技术] 13, no. S1 (2017): 36–39.

<sup>18</sup> Liu Mingde [刘明德] and Zheng Qingyu [郑晴予], “A Study on Sino-Venezuelan Energy Relations in a Global Impact Analysis Framework [全球影响力分析框架下的中委能源关系研究],” *Sino-Global Energy* [中外能源] 24, no. 9 (2019): 10. Author’s abbreviated translation of: “一方面，委内瑞拉国内局势不稳定、腐败严重，大量的石油收入进入该国政要的海外资产账户，导致国内多次出现反腐败示威游行，要求现任总统马杜罗下台。查韦斯派和反对派的权力斗争一直不断，政权存在异变的风险，一旦政权异变，中方本应获取的石油利益将无法保证，中国政府和石油企业将有可能承受巨大的经济损失。”

<sup>19</sup> Song Yiming [宋亦明] and Zou Yiting [邹仪婷], “Why Has Venezuela’s Energy Economy Not Taken Off? An Analysis Based on Economic Modernization, Industrial Coalitions, and Property Rights Regimes [委内瑞拉能源经济的增长何以不彰？——基于经济现代化—产业联盟—产权制度的分析视角],” *Journal of Latin American Studies* [拉丁美洲研究] 45, no. 3 (2023): 106–30, 157–58.

<sup>20</sup> “China-Latin America Finance Databases,” The Inter-American Dialogue, accessed August 8, 2024, [www.thedialogue.org/map\\_list/](http://www.thedialogue.org/map_list/).



## CONCLUSIONS AND OPTIONS FOR US OFFICIALS AND POLICYMAKERS

China's national oil companies operating in Venezuela continue to face significant risks, and likely far fewer Chinese companies are now seeking an economic stake in the country compared with a decade ago. Yet, China cannot turn its back on the relationship for its geopolitical significance in the region. China will presumably continue to go through the motions of supporting Maduro publicly, and signing nonbinding memoranda of understanding, but it has little will or tools to do anything significant about its declining popularity in the country. China rarely goes through nongovernmental channels in any country, let alone countries with authoritarian leaderships whom it seeks to collaborate with, so it is unlikely to significantly change the way it currently engages with Venezuelan audiences. Chinese media will also continue to produce content for Venezuela's Telesur to access a wider Latin American audience, but they will likely recognize the limitations of this politicized outlet, much like the Confucius Institute recognizes its own challenges to communicate outside of a pro-Maduro audience.

To conclude, the data above are valuable because they present more than just a cross section in time. Taken in the context of previous polls and the current state of Chinese engagements in Venezuela, the data reflect a trend that may continue to worsen for China without significant change in Venezuela's domestic politics. Such change is ultimately largely outside of China's control, yet it may also make matters worse for China before they improve. China is forced to steer the course, despite the diminishing returns on its investments and public relations overtures.

For the United States, there is little it can do to directly harm China's image in Venezuela. China's public relations campaigns are clearly not as successful as desired, and it is unnecessary for the United States to address this. The United States, however, cannot simply rest on its comparative advantages. This study reflects a relative decline of China's popularity vis-à-vis the United States, but US popularity has also declined since 2016, according to the LAPOP data, suggesting room for more American engagement.

In that vein, the United States could more easily play to its comparative advantage in popularity vis-à-vis China if it were more present. A reopening of US diplomatic presence in Venezuela, for example, would be a helpful step. While China engages Venezuelan society directly, US diplomats operate from a distance in Bogotá, Colombia. The United States has no direct access to Venezuelan students, journalists, civil society activists, or business leaders, other than those who travel outside the country. Nor is the United States positioned to offer academic or cultural exchanges as and when the security environment improves.

The United States's standing in Venezuela will also be driven by perceptions of its policy toward the country. Polls show that Venezuelans had embraced the Biden administration's diplomatic engagement with the Maduro regime and were grateful for the partial lifting of economic sanctions. With the July 28, 2024, election having been stolen and repression increased in its aftermath, Venezuelans are looking more to the international community to help ensure that the will of the people is respected. Reimposing some economic sanctions, which the United States is apparently considering, could put the United States at odds with Venezuelan public opinion given the public's long-standing preference for sanctions on Venezuelan officials over those that affect the broader economy.