

Growth and visibility of Latin American and Caribbean law journals (2008-2023): A focus on their language, collaboration, and open access trends

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ABSTRACT

Objective. The objective of this study was to examine the factors that have contributed to the growth and visibility of Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) law journals between 2008 and 2023. In particular, the impact of open access (OA) policies, national policies, and authorship trends will be investigated.

Design/Methodology/Approach. The study employed data from the Scopus database to analyze metrics such as SCImago Journal Rank, citation rates, and authorship patterns. It compared the growth trends of law journals from Brazil, Chile, and other LAC countries, as well as examining the role of OA platforms such as SciELO and regional collaboration.

Results/Discussion. The study revealed a significant increase in the number of indexed LAC law journals, particularly in Brazil, which grew from zero journals in 2008 to 34 by 2023. Chile also experienced an expansion, with an increase from four journals to thirteen. The findings highlighted the importance of OA policies, which have contributed to increased visibility and higher citation rates, especially for publications in Spanish and Portuguese.

Conclusions. The global impact of LAC law journals had increased as a result of a combination of OA policies, strong domestic authorship, and regional collaboration. The use of multiple languages, primarily Spanish and Portuguese, had facilitated regional participation, while English-language publications had also expanded to enhance global visibility.

Originality/Value. The paper adds novelty to the developing scientometric area on the emergence of LAC law journals, as it offers insights into the regional factors that contribute to their visibility and international impact

Keywords: law journals; legal scholarship; open access; excellence; academic publishing trends; Latin American and Caribbean.

1. INTRODUCTION

THE LANDSCAPE of academic publishing has undergone significant transformations

over the past few decades, driven by a number of factors, including digital developments, the open access (OA) revolution, new review processes, online citation indexes, and social

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media tools (Angeli, 2020; Baillieul *et al.*, 2018; Tappeiner & Lyons, 2013). The academic journal landscape has traditionally been dominated by publications from Western Europe and North America. However, there has been a notable emergence of academic journals from other regions, including Latin American and Caribbean (LAC). This region has made significant strides in improving the efficiency with which scientific results are compiled and communicated, as well as in disseminating journals to a broader audience (Arbaiza-Bayona, 2012; Reyna Espinosa, 2015). These developments are particularly noteworthy in light of the apparent inevitability of a scientific environment that is perceived to be exclusively “orientalist.” It is also worth noting that prominent scientific databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, along with scholars from North America and selected regions of Europe, tend to publish at a higher frequency than their counterparts in other regions (Ekdale *et al.*, 2022). As Demeter (2018) remarked, Western articles continue to predominate in Western journals, overseen by Western editorial board members. This indicates an intentional dominance of Western research. This Western “status quo” is particularly evident in legal scholarship—and even more so in law journals (Christián *et al.*, 2022)—which has been criticized for its lack of diversity (Silverman, 2024).

The reasons behind this dominance can be attributed to a number of factors. Wallace (2014) proposed that popular culture influences the formation of beliefs and values within global legal culture, creating a perception of uniformity across legal systems. Others, such as Susanto *et al.* (2018) and Matsubara (2018), approached this issue from a theoretical standpoint, arguing that the dominance of the positivist paradigm in legal research creates a gap between old values and contemporary changes, leading to exclusion from access to justice for those who are marginalized (in the present context, the Global South). The field of comparative law, which is frequently represented in legal scholarship, has become inevitably Western due to the existence of a globally shared common legal language. This poses a risk of anachronisms in the study of historical societies that did not share this language.

As Harrington and Manji (2017) posit, there is a call to reaffirm foundational commitments to anti-imperial and mainly Western scholarship and to address the challenges presented by critical, non-Western perspectives in socio-legal studies. In response to this call, this study aims to introduce a novel perspective on the scientometrics of law journals. It does so by presenting the emergence of LAC as a dynamically growing region in terms of both publication visibility and excellence. Since the 1990s, scholarly journals in LAC have experienced both quantitative and qualitative growth (Delgado-Troncoso & Fischman, 2014).

This research has two primary objectives. The first is to examine the growth trends of law journals in LAC from 2008 to 2023. This will entail an analysis of regional growth indicators, including indexing, visibility, and citation metrics. The second objective is to explore publication trends in LAC law journals, with a particular focus on OA dissemination patterns. In view of the above objectives, this study is built on two research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: What are the growth trends and regional indexing patterns of LAC law journals from 2008 to 2023?
- RQ2: How do publication language, collaboration, and OA affect the visibility of LAC law journals and the publications published therein?

This study employs a series of RQs to provide a comprehensive analysis of the emergence of LAC law journals in regional and global knowledge production. This analysis illuminates the growth, impact, and contributing factors of these journals.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Publication trends in law journals

Though law journals are “solely” parts of the research of law or “legal scholarship,” they are of extreme importance in the discipline for scientific, practical, and historical reasons. The historical legal scholarship effectively commenced in England in 1861 with the publication of jurist and historian Henry Maine’s seminal work, *Ancient Law*. This book introduced the

connections between society, status, and contract, popularizing historical understandings of law and spurring original “scientific” scholarship in legal history, particularly in the United States through the efforts of Henry Adams and his students at Harvard in the early 1870s. From a scientometric perspective, it is crucial to trace the origins of law journals. In this regard, Davies’ (2009) foundational review of the history of law journals is useful in that he noted that during the early years of the 19th century, numerous periodicals and journals addressed law as a topic or subject. In the context of American legal scholarship, the *American Law Journal* is regarded as the inaugural scholarly journal (Orol, 2012). Though attempting to identify the first law journal on a global scale is a challenging endeavor, in part due to the lack of uniform databases and the absence of contemporary standards for journal evaluation, it may be posited that the mid-to-late 20th century constituted a pivotal period in the development and dissemination of law journals. During this period, law journals flourished, becoming enriched with novel theoretical and empirical methods, as well as an interdisciplinary approach. Additionally, the geographical expansion of research, often referred to as “internationalization,” contributed to this growth (Aguilar 2022; de la Rasilla, 2018).

Despite the existence of a substantial body of literature on the development of legal scholarship and the fact that law journals are regarded as influential, with their impact assessed in part by the number of citations they receive in subsequent articles and judicial publications (Bopape, 2017), only a limited number of studies have sought to examine the performance-based trends and complexities associated with legal publications. Wolotira (2012) found that over the past 50 years, the number of general law reviews, specialized law journals, student-edited journals, and peer-reviewed law journals has grown significantly. However, the majority of existing research has focused on American journals. Christián *et al.* (2022) found that, despite the high number of law journals indexed in Scopus, their level of internationalization remains relatively low, thus stressing the necessity to enhance geographical diversity and foster greater international collaboration. Furthermore, the authors indicate that the majority of

journals are under the control of a limited number of publishers, which results in an unbalanced and biased market for law journals. Additionally, Reyes and Onofre (2023) identified substantial discrepancies in the formats and criteria utilized for article selection and publication in law journals, along with a notable absence of consensus on the decision-making processes employed for publication. Furthermore, Zhang (2018) questions the sufficiency of relying on quantitative indicators for ranking law journals, given the absence of consensus on substantive review criteria and Van Gestel and Vranken (2011) present an even more extreme case, stating that there is no standardized method for evaluating legal scholarly publications, with deficiencies in both peer review processes and the use of metrics.

From a technical standpoint, it is also noteworthy that law journals tend to lag behind in terms of digitalization. The predominant mode of formal communication in law journals remains largely entrenched in print publishing, although there is a growing trend in online accessibility and visibility (Keele, 2015; Spjeldnæs, 2022). Grosso (2021) indicated that the “advent” of electronic platforms has profoundly transformed the content and structure of law journals, significantly and positively affecting the dissemination of scientific research. This growth through digitalization is often interconnected with the increasing number of OA publication options (Francesconi & Peruginelli, 2012; Shah *et al.*, 2018).

2.2. LAC and publication performance with a special attention to legal studies

Since the 1990s, there has been a notable expansion in the number of scholarly journals in LAC. This growth can be attributed to the efforts of the LAC scientific community to enhance the quality and visibility of its academic journals (Delgado-Troncoso & Fischman, 2014; Quevedo-Blasco & López, 2011). Notwithstanding the uneven expansion of regional capacity (Delgado-Troncoso & Fischman, 2014), with both successful journals and persistent obstacles, improvements in LAC databases have enhanced communication, visibility, and access to scholarly publications (Alonso-Gamboa & Russell, 2012). LAC journals are similarly

striving for enhanced international visibility and impact (Arbaiza-Bayona, 2012). However, the underuse of Web 2.0 tools has constrained their reach, necessitating the identification of additional factors that could augment their visibility (Alonso-Gamboa & Russell, 2012; Flórez & Vargas, 2019).

In the context of publishing, Kippes and Cescut (2023) have highlighted the central role of universities in the LAC region as hubs for the dissemination of scientific knowledge through the publication of academic journals as they play pivotal roles in facilitating the exchange of ideas and the advancement of knowledge within the region. In the realm of legal scholarship, Sieder *et al.* (2019) have underlined the profound impact of LAC in shaping theoretical and methodological discourses pertaining to the nexus between law and society. The aforementioned nexus has encompassed a range of pivotal themes, including legal pluralism, legal globalization, transitional justice, and socio-legal and political mobilization. Despite the digitalization of law journals and materials in the region, which has posed significant challenges to the modernization of legal scholarship (García, 2021), and the tendency for Latin America to be overlooked in legal studies (Kleinheisterkamp, 2006), there has been a notable increase in the visibility of numerous countries' law journals in recent years - as evidenced by their inclusion in prestigious databases, most notably Scopus (Jimenez *et al.*, 2023).

In this context, Reyes and Onofre (2023) detected that the publication of LAC law journals is not only pervasive but also heterogeneous. The authors assert that there are over 700 law journals published on a regular basis in the region. Despite the region's dynamic growth, some scholars have expressed concerns regarding the technical aspects of publications, particularly formats and criteria, as well as the polemical editorial policies detected in the region's journals (Reyes & Onofre, 2023). Similarly, Jiménez *et al.* (2023) conducted a comparative analysis of the legal scientific output of journals indexed in Scopus across LAC countries in 2022, employing a descriptive, cross-sectional, and mixed-methods approach. The results demonstrate that countries such as Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru have a notable presence in Scopus-indexed law

journals, whereas Bolivia, Paraguay, Ecuador, and Uruguay lag behind, exhibiting considerable discrepancies in publication volumes and impact factor presence across the countries.

2.3. Free, open, and democratized: Insights from LAC publication policies

Latin American and Caribbean has made notable advancements in OA academic publishing, underscoring free access as a strategy for democratization. However, it confronts challenges from the marketization of scientific knowledge and international standards (Alperin *et al.*, 2008; Da Costa & Leite, 2016). Salatino (2020) points out that LAC has emerged as a prominent leader in academic publishing, advocating for the advancement of free access and OA to scientific research with the objective of democratizing knowledge. The region encountered obstacles due to the commercialization of scientific knowledge and the implementation of international standards, which led to a pivotal development in LAC science policy: a novel OA model that more accurately represents and elevates the visibility of regional scientific output (Salatino, 2020; Torres & Hartley, 2019). The OA "revolution" in the LAC region has been a prominent topic in regional and global science communication discourse.

In a communiqué, Melissa Hagemann, director of the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), highlighted that Latin America has spearheaded the advancement of community-driven, non-commercial OA initiatives. Public universities, scientific societies, and government organizations in the region have established infrastructures for OA, demonstrating a commitment to self-reliance and the absence of reliance on commercial publishers. Hagemann (2023) proposed that the global OA movement should draw upon the experience of Latin America to facilitate South-North and South-South collaborations and address inequities in research assessment. This would ensure that the future of OA is shaped by a community-centric approach rather than driven by commercialization. Additionally, McKenna (2024) indicates that Brazil has become the 10th most prolific producer of research publications in recent years, largely due to the proliferation of gold OA publications. Furthermore,

Alperin and Rozemblum (2017) have mentioned that other countries, including Mexico and Colombia, have begun aligning their evaluation policies with global standards through internationalization. Furthermore, government support has facilitated the establishment of OA digital libraries, which have enabled enhanced global knowledge communication both within and beyond the region (Minniti *et al.*, 2018).

It is also important to mention SciELO and Redalyc, which launched a new diamond OA strategy in 2019. These two scientific platforms have facilitated the dissemination of knowledge among researchers in the region in an open and free manner (Torres & Hartley, 2019). Other initiatives, such as LA Referencia, established

in 2010 as a collaborative network for OA science distribution, and AmeliCA, established in 2018, which regards scientific knowledge as a common good, were also instrumental in the establishment of a new science policy for the LAC region (Rico-Castro & Bonora, 2023). In conclusion, COVID-19 has had a considerable effect on scholarly journals, particularly in regard to production, growth, and the speed of the review process (Forti *et al.*, 2021; He *et al.*, 2023). Although there is a paucity of literature examining the impact of the pandemic on law journals, Gregorio-Chaviano *et al.* (2020) and Espinosa *et al.* (2021) have observed an increase in research dissemination during the pandemic in LAC (Figure 1).

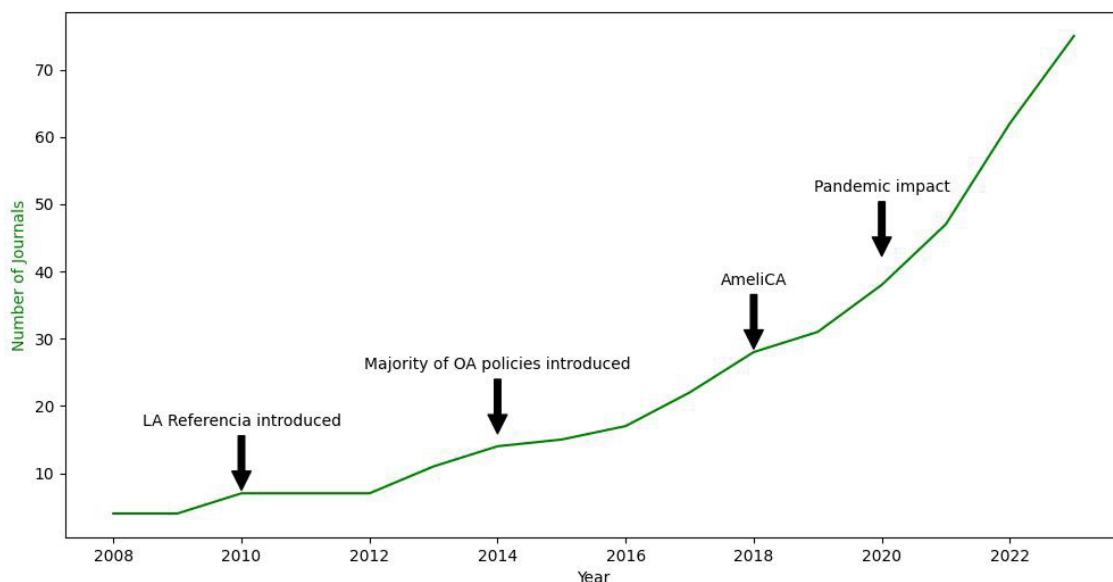


Figure 1. Key events marked in view of the number of LAC law journals.

Source: Own edit based on Scopus data.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research is based on data extracted from the Scopus database. The journals were selected based on the criteria set forth in SCImago (subject categories: “law”), and then, all journal data, including publications for each journal, were downloaded from Scopus. The period under investigation spans from 2008 to 2023. In the process of data collection, only those “journals” listed in SCImago were included, and then subsequently in Scopus. Other types of publications, such as book series, were excluded. This limitation allowed for a more accurate

reflection on excellence and quartile changes. The methods are summarized in Table 1.

It is imperative to provide a more detailed outline of the indicators. The SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) is a journal ranking system that categorizes journals into quartiles based on their scientific impact and prestige (González-Pereira *et al.*, 2010). It is employed to assess excellence based on citation-weighting schemes and eigenvector centrality. The SJR was exported from SCImago for each relevant journal. Although “Latin America and the Caribbean” is a more fitting term, SCImago uses “Latin America” to describe this region,

Indicator	Source	Benchmark years	Rationale	Calculation/Analysis Details
SJR and quartiles	Scopus, SCImago	2008, 2015, and 2023	To evaluate long-term trends in journal rankings and quality metrics	Quartile assignments and SJR scores were extracted and compared over years
Coauthorship patterns	Scopus	2015, 2019, and 2023	To analyze shifts in domestic and international research collaborations	Calculated DAR and ICRs
Number of indexed journals	Scopus, SCImago	2008, 2015, and 2023	To assess the growth in journal indexing across the LAC region	Counted indexed journals by region and country over selected years
Language distribution	Scopus	2008-2023 (annual)	To identify linguistic trends and their influence on visibility and impact	Analyzed publication languages across all indexed journals in the dataset
OA trends	Scopus, SciELO	2008, 2015, and 2023	To explore the role of OA in increasing visibility and access to research	Categorized journals as OA or non-OA and analyzed trends over the years
Citation metrics	Scopus, SCImago	2008-2023 (rolling avg)	To measure the impact of journals through citation rates	Calculated rolling averages of citations per document for a longitudinal view

Table 1. Summary of materials and methods. Source: Own edit. Notes: DAR: domestic authorship rate; ICR: international collaboration rate; OA: open access; SJR: SCImago Journal Rank

which includes all countries geographically south of the mainland United States. In the following sections, the study proposes using “Latin America” and “LAC” interchangeably. This decision was made not only to respect the database’s terminology but also due to the lack of Caribbean journals.

As illustrated in Table 1, in certain instances, benchmark years were utilized. To conduct a comprehensive longitudinal analysis of the growth and visibility of LAC law journals, the years 2008, 2015, 2019, and 2023 were selected for examination. The year 2008 marked the commencement of our 15-year investigation, occurring concurrently with the inception of substantial indexing initiatives within the region. The period saw the appearance of numerous journals in global databases such as Scopus, making it an optimal starting point for the analysis. The year 2015 was selected for two reasons. Firstly, it is situated at an intermediate point within the examined period. Secondly, as illustrated in Figure 1, the “OA movement” commenced in 2014, and its effects became more pronounced in 2015, providing a critical “midpoint” for evaluating interim progress. The most recent point in our timeline, 2023, was selected for analysis to provide insight into the current state of journal indexing and coauthorship patterns. To facilitate a more focused analysis, a shorter period with three benchmark

years for the coauthorship analysis was introduced (2015, 2019, and 2023). This amendment was not arbitrary; rather, it emerged from a methodological perspective designed to facilitate an examination of coauthorship in instances where the volume of publications is more representative and not illustrative, as in earlier years. The results indicate a notable expansion in the number of Latin American law journals from 2015 to 2023, with 2019 being identified as the “year of growth.” This growth in terms of individual publication volumes was considered and proposed that the research would offer more insights during a shorter yet more active period with more data to analyze, rather than including stagnant years with limited significant data on internationalization. Moreover, the year 2019 is of particular significance in the context of the subsequent proliferation of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in 2020. This period witnessed a remarkable surge in academic knowledge production, as documented by Dagdelen *et al.* (2023). In line with the methodology proposed by Raynaud *et al.* (2021), it is valuable to undertake a comparative analysis between the pre-COVID-19 research evaluation period and the subsequent years. In regard to collaborations, a multifaceted indicator system to more accurately assess the influence of such endeavors was implemented. This system is outlined in Table 2.

Name	Definition
DAR	The proportion of publications authored solely by researchers from the same country.
ICR-LATAM (as in "Latin America")	The proportion of publications involving authors from the journal's country and at least one other LAC country.
IAR-LATAM	The proportion of publications authored solely by researchers from other LAC countries.
ICR-INT (as in "international")	The proportion of publications involving authors from the journal's country and at least one from a non-LAC country.
IAR-INT	The proportion of publications authored solely by researchers from non-LAC countries.

Table 2. Explanation of terms and indicators with regard to collaboration analysis.
Source: Own edit. Notes: DAR: Domestic authorship rate; IAR: International article rate; ICR: International collaboration rate; LAC: Latin American and Caribbean.

The total dataset comprised 16,277 unique publications. In instances where the SJR and quartiles were examined, Scopus-indexed journals lacking a quartile were excluded (nexcl. excl. = 1,930), resulting in a total dataset of 9,112 rows. The data were visualized using *matplotlib* in Python (Hunter, 2007).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Growth trends and regional indexing patterns of LAC law journals from 2008 to 2023 (RQ1)

It is of the utmost importance to first identify the global context with regard to law journals. The data from SCImago were utilized to

download and compare all available law journal data. It is notable that two regions, Western Europe and Northern America, consistently demonstrate the highest levels of output in the field of law on an annual basis. In contrast, the Asiatic region, Eastern Europe, and Latin America exhibit comparatively similar levels of performance and advancement. The descriptive statistics indicate a notable increase in journal publications across regions. The Asiatic region exhibited an average growth rate of 17.7%, while Eastern Europe demonstrated a growth rate of 15.3%. Latin America exhibited the highest average growth rate at 25.9%. Despite Africa and the Middle East having lower initial numbers, all regions exhibited positive trends over the period (Figure 2).

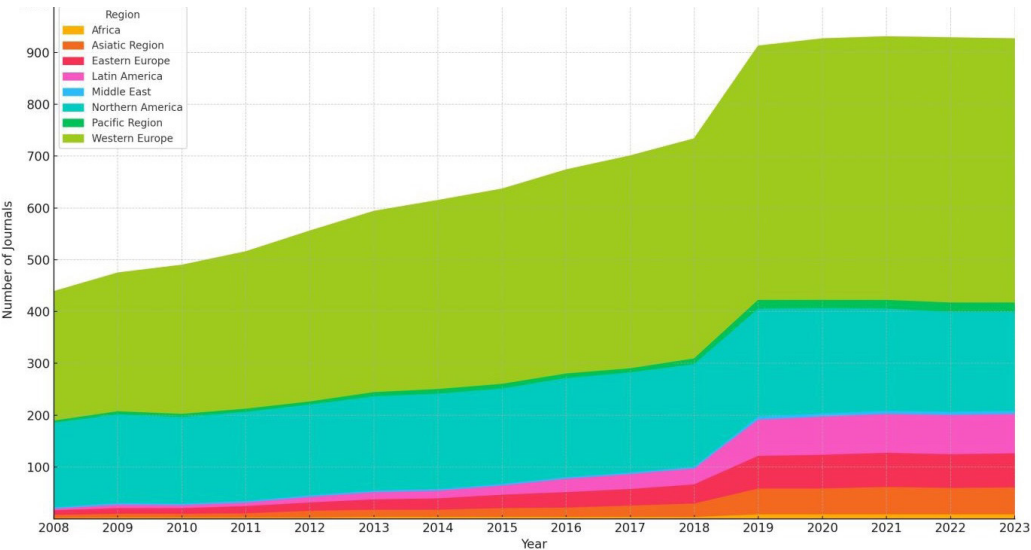


Figure 2. Area chart of the regional distribution of law journals between 2008 and 2023.
Source: Own edit based on SCImago and Scopus data.

To ascertain the extent of excellence and visibility, the SJR quartiles were examined for three benchmark years: 2008, 2015, and 2023. The investigation identifies significant trends and shifts in global scholarly output. Western Europe has consistently demonstrated the highest number of journals across all SJR quartiles in each of the benchmark years, with a notable concentration in Q1 for both 2015 and 2023. In 2023, Western Europe was the leading region with approximately 300 journals in Q1, followed by Northern America with approximately 150 journals in the same quartile. There is a discernible upward trajectory in the number of Latin American journals contributing to the corpus of knowledge,

particularly in the Q3 and Q4 quartiles. This can be seen from a mere handful of journals from fewer than 10 journals in 2008 to approximately 20 in 2023. By 2015, Latin America had augmented its presence across the quartiles, and by 2023, it had approximately 15 journals in Q2 and 10 in Q3, reflecting an expansion in academic output. As illustrated in the 2008 chart, Western Europe and Northern America were the predominant contributors to Q1 journals. However, by 2023, the distribution had become more diverse, with increased contributions from regions such as Asiatic and the Pacific regions. Journals indexed in Scopus but not assigned a quartile were excluded from the analysis (Figure 3).

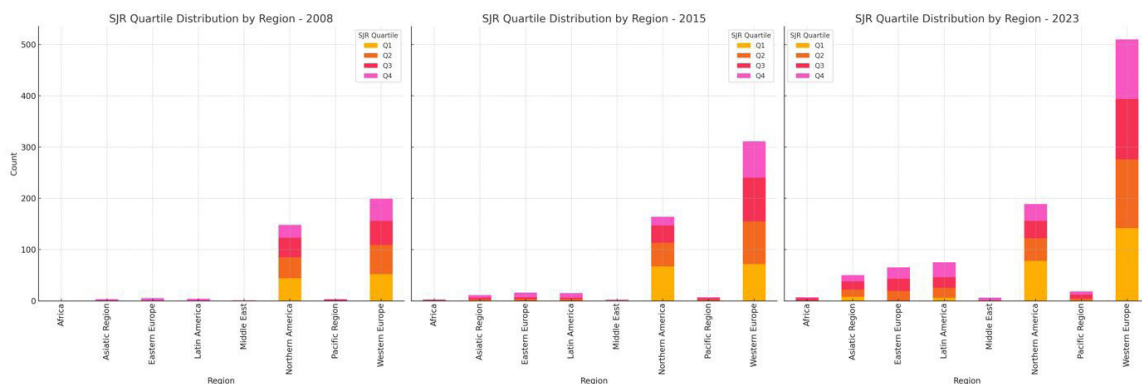


Figure 3. SJR quartile distribution by region for 2008, 2015, and 2023.
Source: Own edit based on SCImago data. Note: SJR: SCImago Journal Rank.

The initial objective was to examine the growth of law journals by country in Latin America (RQ1). It is notable that only 6 of the 33 LAC countries were represented by at least one Scopus-indexed journal during the examined period, which demonstrates an extremely limited distribution of indexed papers. Brazil demonstrates a notable increase in the number of journals, rising from 0 in 2008 to 34 in 2023, indicating robust growth and academic development. Chile maintains a consistent presence with a stable number of journals, reflecting a stable academic output. Colombia and Mexico both demonstrate moderate growth, starting from a nearly 0 base and reaching 14 and 9 journals, respectively, by 2023. Argentina and Peru, although starting from a later point in time, demonstrate emerging trends, with Argentina reaching four journals by 2023 and Peru reaching two journals by the same year (Table 3).

For journals with a quartile, the benchmark years demonstrate that the most dynamic period occurred between 2015 and 2023, with Colombia, Chile, and Brazil exhibiting the most pronounced growth. Mexico is also noteworthy as it is the sole country in Central America to have ever had a Scopus-indexed journal with a quartile (Figure 4).

The journals assigned to a given quartile were subjected to further analysis with regard to their excellence. Given the absence of Q1 journals between 2008 and 2012, this period has been excluded from the subsequent analysis. In this context, the term “excellence” is defined in accordance with the standards set by Q1 journals. LAC law journals are distinguished by a relatively limited number of journals that can be considered excellent, with only four countries represented in the Q1 quartile. While Brazil has made noteworthy progress in

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Argentina	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	4	4	4
Brazil	0	1	0	0	1	3	4	4	7	9	11	29	32	33	34	34
Chile	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	13	13	13	13	13
Colombia	0	0	0	1	4	4	3	6	8	8	8	14	14	14	14	14
Mexico	0	1	1	1	1	2	3	3	6	6	6	9	9	9	9	9
Peru	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	2

Table 3. Number of journals indexed in Scopus.
Source: Own edit based on SCImago and Scopus data.

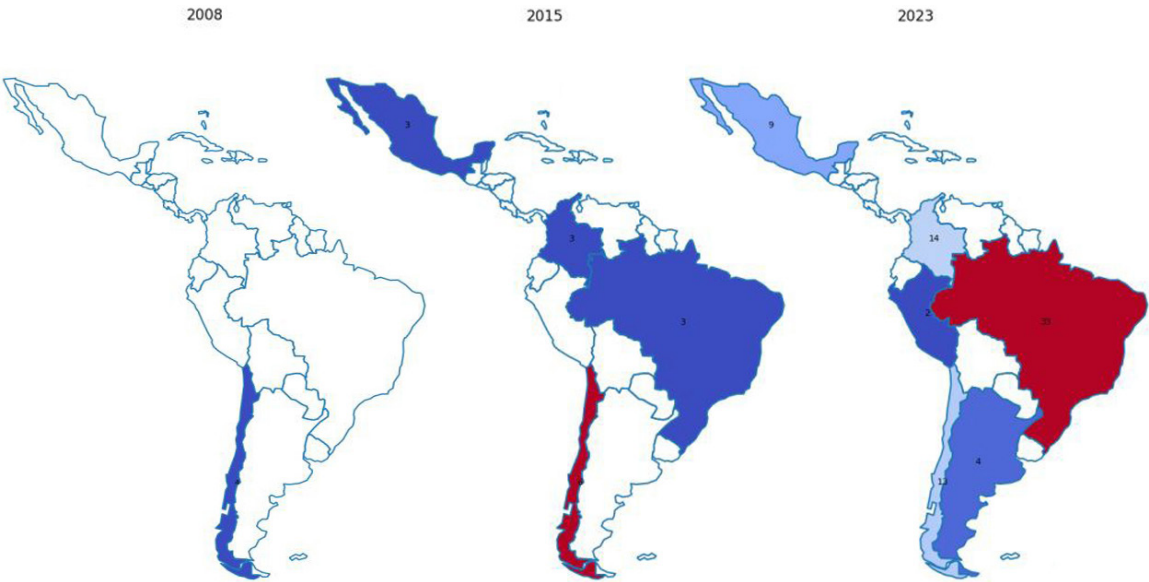


Figure 4. Geographical distribution of Scopus-indexed journals with an assigned quartile in 2008, 2015, and 2021. Source: Own edit based on Scopus data.

terms of indexation, it is noteworthy that only two Brazilian journals have been assigned to the Q1 quartile. Chile, on the other hand, has demonstrated a particularly impressive performance, with at least one Q1 journal each year between 2013 and 2023. Additionally, it is the only country in the region to have experienced notable peaks of three Q1 journals in 2020 and 2021 (Figure 5).

The number of journals have increased at a consistent rate, reaching a notable peak in 2019, during which the total number of journals more than doubled (from 32 to 70). To provide a more comprehensive perspective, the trends in journal growth were represented by three key factors: the total number of journals indexed, the average SJR score, and the

average H-index. A strong negative correlation (-0.96) was revealed between the total number of journals and the average H-index using correlation coefficient measures. This suggests that as more journals are indexed, the average H-index tends to decrease. This could imply that as the volume of indexed journals grows, the overall scholarly impact, as measured by the H-index, tends to be distributed more thinly, indicating that growth in size does not correlate with growth in quality. The weak positive correlation (0.108) suggests a slight tendency for the average SJR score to increase as the number of indexed journals rises. However, this relationship is not strong enough to be considered significant (Table 4 and Figure 6).

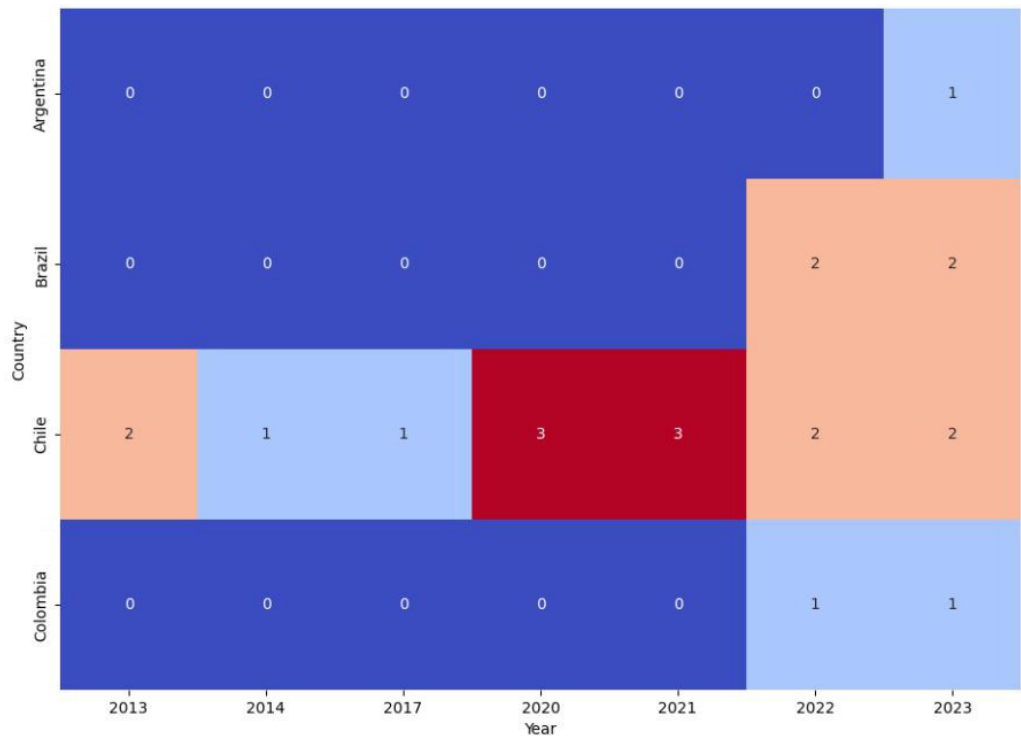


Figure 5. Heatmap of Q1 law journal distribution by country between 2013 and 2023. Source: Own edit based on SCImago and Scopus data.

	Total number of journals indexed	Average SJR score	Average H-index
Total number of journals indexed	1.0	0.108	−0.96
Average SJR score	0.108	1.0	−0.244
Average H-index	−0.96	−0.244	1.0

Table 4. Correlogram concerning the total number of journals indexed in Scopus, average SJR score, and average H-index. Note: SJR: SCImago Journal Rank.

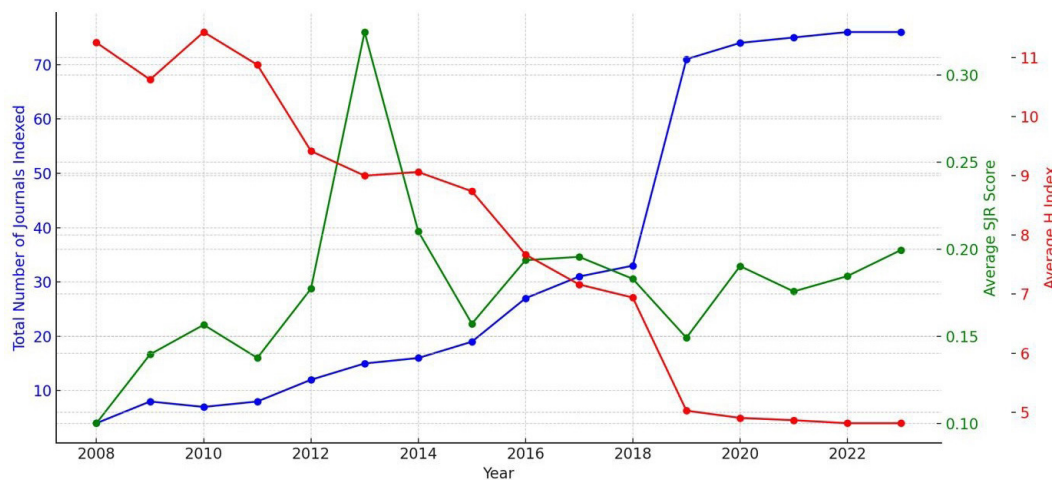


Figure 6. Total number of journals (blue), average SJR (green), and average H-index (red) of LAC law journals between 2008 and 2023. Source: Own edit based on SCImago and Scopus data. Notes: LAC: Latin American and Caribbean; SJR: SCImago Journal Rank.

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis further corroborate the findings of the preceding examination. The mean SJR scores appear to be relatively stable over time, exhibiting lower variability compared to the number of journals indexed. This suggests that, while the number of journals being indexed is

increasing, their average impact score remains relatively constant. However, it also highlights significant variability in the number of journals indexed each year, with a notable increase in the upper quartile. This indicates a trend of more journals being indexed in recent years (Table 5).

Statistic	Total number of journals indexed	Average SJR score	Average H-index
Count	16	16	16
Mean	34.5	0.18	7.912
Standard deviation	28.992	0.048	2.483
Minimum	4	0.1	4.816
25th Percentile (Q1)	11	0.155	4.997
Median (Q2)	23	0.18	8.202
75th Percentile (Q3)	71.75	0.194	9.719
Maximum	76	0.325	11.429

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of total number of journals indexed, average SJR, and average H-index.
Source: Own edit based on SCImago and Scopus data. Note: SJR: SCImago Journal Rank.

The SJR and Cites per Document indicators were subjected to examination. Both SJR and Cites per Document demonstrate considerable volatility from 2008 to 2014, with notable peaks and troughs. The SJR values exhibited a sharp increase around 2013, reaching a value above 0.30, and then declined. In contrast, the Cites per Document values demonstrated a sharp increase around 2018, reaching a peak of approximately 0.30 in 2020. In recent years,

both metrics have exhibited a trend toward stabilization and growth, particularly after 2018. The SJR has risen from approximately 0.15 in 2020 to approximately 0.22 in 2023, while the Cites per Document has shown a notable peak and then stabilized around 0.20 by 2023. The rolling averages serve to illustrate these trends, indicating an overall upward trajectory in the quality and impact of journals in Latin America (Figure 7).

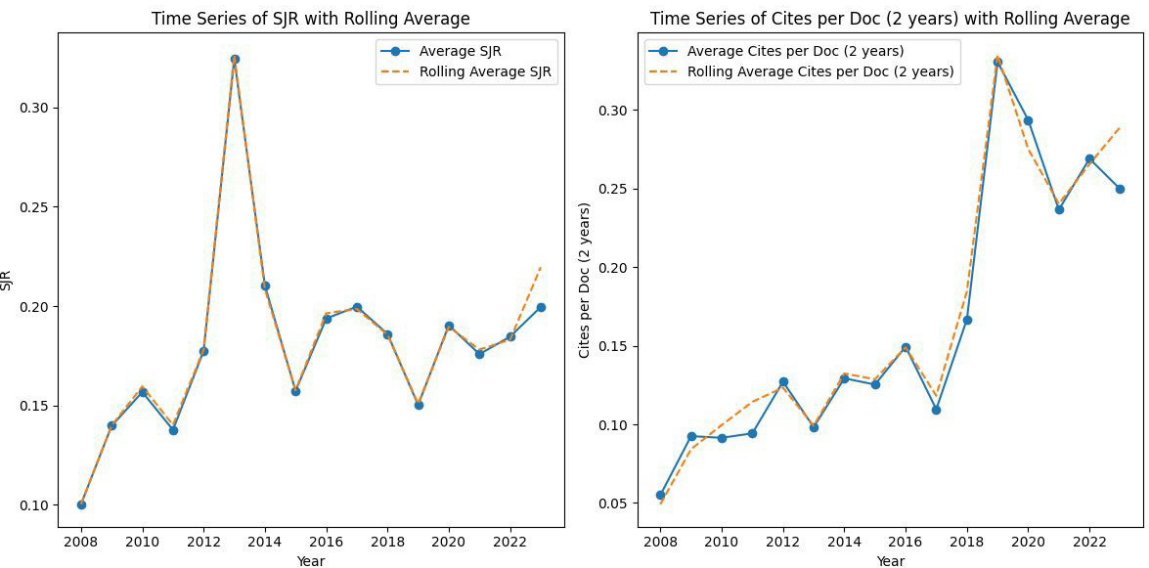


Figure 7. Rolling average graphs of SJR and citations between 2008 and 2023.
Source: Own edit based on SCImago data. Note: SJR: SCImago Journal Rank.

In consideration of the distinction between excellent (Q1) and non-excellent journals (Q1-Q4), with specific reference to the SJR, H-index, and citeability metrics, it can be concluded that Q1 journals exhibit a markedly higher mean SJR (0.511) in comparison to non-Q1 journals (0.168). This finding suggests that Q1 journals are generally perceived as more prestigious within the academic community. The higher standard deviation (0.174) observed in Q1 journals indicates a broader range of prestige within this category, whereas non-Q1 journals exhibit a more consistent but lower prestige level (standard deviation of 0.080).

The mean H-index for Q1 journals (10.619) is notably higher than for non-Q1 journals (6.595), which corroborates the aforementioned conclusions. Lastly, the mean citation rate per document for Q1 journals is 0.525, which is more than double the rate for non-Q1 journals (0.201). This illustrates that articles published in Q1 journals are cited more frequently within two years of publication. While the standard deviations are comparable (0.218 for Q1 and 0.229 for non-Q1), the higher mean value for Q1 journals indicates a consistently higher citation rate for these top-tier journals (Table 6).

Metric	Q1 Mean	Q1 Std	Non-Q1 Mean	Non-Q1 Std
SJR	0.511	0.174	0.168	0.080
H-index	10.619	3.485	6.595	3.660
Cites per Document (two years)	0.525	0.218	0.201	0.229

Table 6. Q1 versus non-Q1 descriptive statistics by SJR, H-index, and citations.
Source: Own edit based on SCImago data. Note: SJR: SCImago Journal Rank.

4.2. The impact of publication language, collaboration, and OA on LAC law journals and the publications therein (RQ2)

The linguistic aspects were also examined in the context of excellence, as indicated by the SJR quartile. The initial dataset comprised 16,277 publications; however, 395 of these lacked a quartile designation. Additionally, two publications lacked a defined language, and three publications were erroneously assigned the Polish language, despite manual verification indicating otherwise. These publications ($n = 5$) were subsequently excluded from the final dataset, which consisted of 15,877 publications (Table 7).

Language	Number of articles
Spanish	7,710
Portuguese	4,854
English	3,148
Italian	105
French	59
German	1

Table 7. Linguistic distribution of LAC publications in law between 2008 and 2023
Source: Own edit based on Scopus data.
Notes: LAC: Latin American and Caribbean.

The analysis of the distribution of publications across years and languages yields several key insights. From 2008 to 2023, there is a discernible upward trajectory in the total number of publications. It is noteworthy that there were pronounced peaks in 2019 and 2020, with the highest number of articles published in 2022, which reached 2,349. The majority of articles are published in Spanish and Portuguese, collectively accounting for the vast majority of articles. Spanish is the most prolific language, with 7,710 articles, followed by Portuguese with 4,854 articles. While English is less prevalent, it nevertheless has a significant presence, with 3,148 articles, which demonstrate a steady increase over the years, particularly from 2017 onwards. The contribution of other languages, such as Italian, French, and German, is insignificant, indicating a pronounced regional focus on Spanish and Portuguese. The increase in English publications suggests a growing international collaboration or a targeting of a broader academic audience. The consistent rise in total publications across all years signifies a surge in academic productivity and engagement in the region (Table 8).

Year	English	French	German	Italian	Portuguese	Spanish
2008	0	0	0	0	0	107
2009	2	0	0	0	2	184
2010	0	0	0	1	2	199
2011	75	0	0	1	0	125
2012	87	0	0	0	1	130
2013	124	0	0	0	35	224
2014	109	0	0	0	53	285
2015	41	3	0	2	64	369
2016	72	2	0	1	119	445
2017	148	12	0	4	186	470
2018	159	3	0	9	291	547
2019	283	10	1	26	749	868
2020	351	10	0	20	940	996
2021	486	11	0	22	870	930
2022	555	6	0	7	827	954
2023	656	2	0	12	715	877
Total	3,148	59	1	105	4,854	7,710

Table 8. Comprehensive overview of language distribution in publications between 2008 and 2023. Source: Own edit based on Scopus data.

The distribution of languages was also examined with regard to Q1 publications between 2013 and 2023, given the absence of Q1-indexed journals during the period between 2008 and 2012. It is noteworthy that English does not play a significant role in determining excellence, as only a minority (17.6%) of all Q1 publications were written in this language. The preponderance of Spanish and the dearth of Portuguese Q1 publications serve to reinforce and validate the earlier assertions that countries with a predominantly Spanish-speaking population, particularly Chile, are at the vanguard of scientific excellence. English, once again, is not a significant determinant of excellence, suggesting that the LAC scientific community has established itself as a new regional hub where regional knowledge production is flourishing and is sufficiently internationalized to supplant English with Spanish (Table 9).

The analysis of authorship trends in LAC journals over the benchmark years 2015, 2019, and 2023 reveals notable shifts in research collaboration and authorship patterns. In 2015, the domestic authorship rate (DAR) in Brazil was 41.49%. By 2023, this figure had increased to 55.68%, indicating a growing preference for domestic research. Conversely, the international article rate (IAR-INT) for Brazil exhibited a decline, from 35.11% in 2015 to 28.71% in 2023.

Year	English	Portuguese	Spanish
2013	45	0	59
2014	0	0	24
2017	2	0	37
2020	17	0	90
2021	22	0	111
2022	26	47	106
2023	25	76	92

Table 9. Linguistic distribution of Q1 publications between 2013 and 2023. Source: Own edit based on Scopus data.

This suggests a reduction in the number of international-only publications. Chile demonstrated a consistent pattern of maintaining a high DAR, reaching a peak of 65.19% in 2015 and exhibiting a slight decline to 54.73% in 2023. This was accompanied by a notable engagement in both regional (ICR-LATAM) and international collaborations (ICR-INT). The DAR in Colombia exhibited fluctuations, declining from 52.08% in 2015 to 46.27% in 2023. However, there was an increase in regional collaborations (ICR-LATAM) from 4.17% to 3.34% over the same period. Argentina exhibited elevated regional authorship rates (IAR-LATAM), notably in 2019 (41.67%) and 2023 (34.78%), underscoring considerable contributions from

other LAC countries. Peru exhibited comparable trends, with IAR-LATAM reaching a peak of 35.38% in 2019. Mexico demonstrated a notable presence in regional authorship (IAR-LATAM), with a peak of 25.24% in 2019 and a sustained level of 22.75% in 2023, along with a considerable IAR-INT of 30.69% in 2023.

The mean DAR across all countries exhibited a decline from 52.68% in 2015 to 48.29% in 2023. Conversely, the mean ICR-LATAM demonstrated minimal fluctuation, suggesting a consistent level of regional collaboration. The mean IAR-LATAM exhibited a notable increase from 17.04% in 2015 to 22.04% in 2023,

indicative of a growing regional authorship. The mean ICR-INT remained relatively stable, while the mean IAR-INT demonstrated an increase from 19.84% in 2015 to 21.91% in 2023, indicating the sustained internationalization of research. These trends underscore the dynamic nature of academic research in Latin America, with varying degrees of regional and international engagement across different countries. The growth in regional authorship (IAR-LATAM) and the stability of international collaborations (ICR-INT) indicate an increasing integration of LAC research into the global academic community (Table 10).

Year	Country of the journal	Total publications	DAR (%)	ICR-LATAM (%)	IAR-LATAM (%)	ICR-INT (%)	IAR-INT (%)
2015	Brazil	94	41.49	1.06	18.09	4.26	35.11
2015	Chile	181	65.19	0	16.02	6.08	12.71
2015	Colombia	96	52.08	4.17	14.58	5.21	23.96
2015	Mexico	77	51.95	0	19.48	7.79	20.78
2019	Argentina	36	50	0	41.67	0	8.33
2019	Brazil	916	61.9	0.87	3.93	11.46	21.83
2019	Chile	314	55.73	0.96	18.15	7.96	17.2
2019	Colombia	286	48.95	2.1	26.92	6.64	15.38
2019	Mexico	206	33.98	0.49	25.24	2.43	37.86
2019	Peru	65	46.15	0	35.38	0	18.46
2023	Argentina	69	47.83	1.45	34.78	0	15.94
2023	Brazil	1153	55.68	0.43	5.64	9.54	28.71
2023	Chile	349	54.73	1.15	18.62	9.17	16.33
2023	Colombia	389	46.27	3.34	19.54	9.25	21.59
2023	Mexico	189	43.39	0	22.75	3.17	30.69
2023	Peru	55	41.82	1.82	30.91	7.27	18.18

Table 10. Comprehensive authorship rate analysis and descriptive statistics thereof concerning legal publications in 2015, 2019, and 2023. Source: Own edit based on Scopus data. Notes: DAR: Domestic authorship rate; IAR: International article rate; ICR: International collaboration rate.

First, to provide a general framework, a trend analysis of OA versus non-OA publications was conducted, revealing a marked increase in OA publications over the years. Initially, publications that did not adhere to the OA model constituted the majority within the field. However, a notable shift towards OA can be seen in more recent years. This trend indicates an increasing preference for OA publishing, which reflects the broader movement within academia towards enhancing the accessibility of research. For example, in the initial years of the dataset, the number of non-OA publications was considerably higher, but this discrepancy has gradually diminished. A review of the dataset reveals that

in recent years, there has been a notable increase in the number of OA publications, which have now surpassed non-OA publications in certain instances. This shift can be attributed to the growing influence of funding bodies and institutions that are mandating the OA dissemination of research (Figure 8).

A country-based analysis was conducted to examine OA and The distribution of OA versus non-OA publications across different countries. Brazil exhibits a noteworthy disparity in the number of its publications, with a considerable number of OA publications (4,344) exceeding the number of non-OA publications (2,699). Similarly, Chile has a higher number

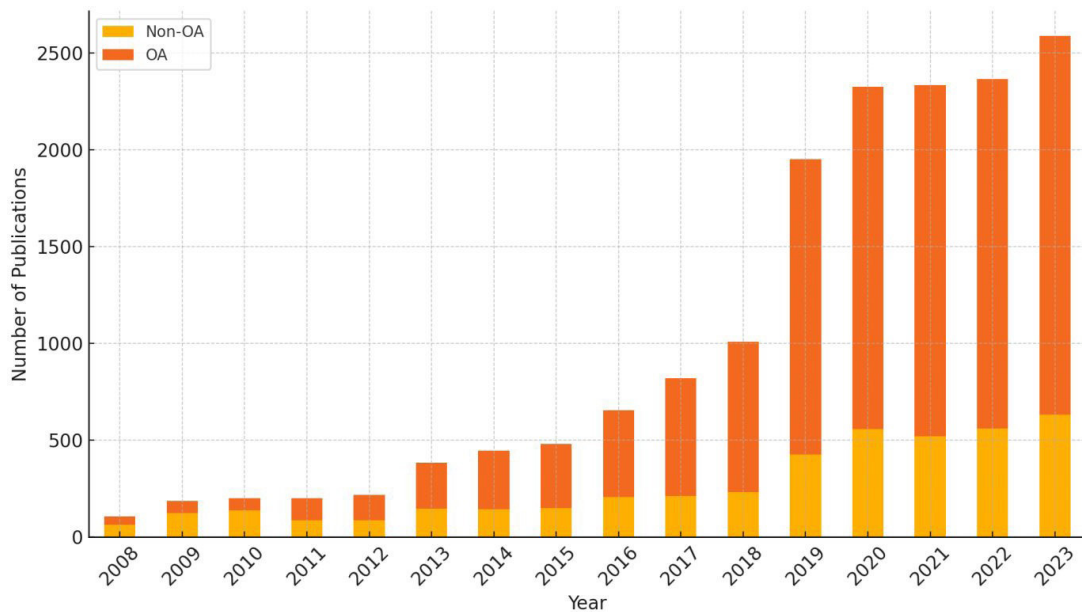


Figure 8. Distribution of OA and non-OA publications between 2008 and 2023.

Source: Own edit based on Scopus data. Note: OA, Open access.

of OA publications (3,295) compared to non-OA (484) and Argentina also displays a notable trend, with 313 OA publications and 59 non-OA. Colombia and Mexico demonstrate a proclivity for OA, with Colombia exhibiting 1,969 OA publications in comparison to 555 non-OA, and Mexico displaying 1,430 OA versus 414 non-OA. Though these numbers are significant, it is

imperative to clarify that this analysis is limited to Scopus-indexed journals. Consequently, a comprehensive examination of OA policies and their impact in the LAC region would necessitate the inclusion of additional databases or even micro-level analysis, which would overcome the limitations of database methodology (Figure 9).

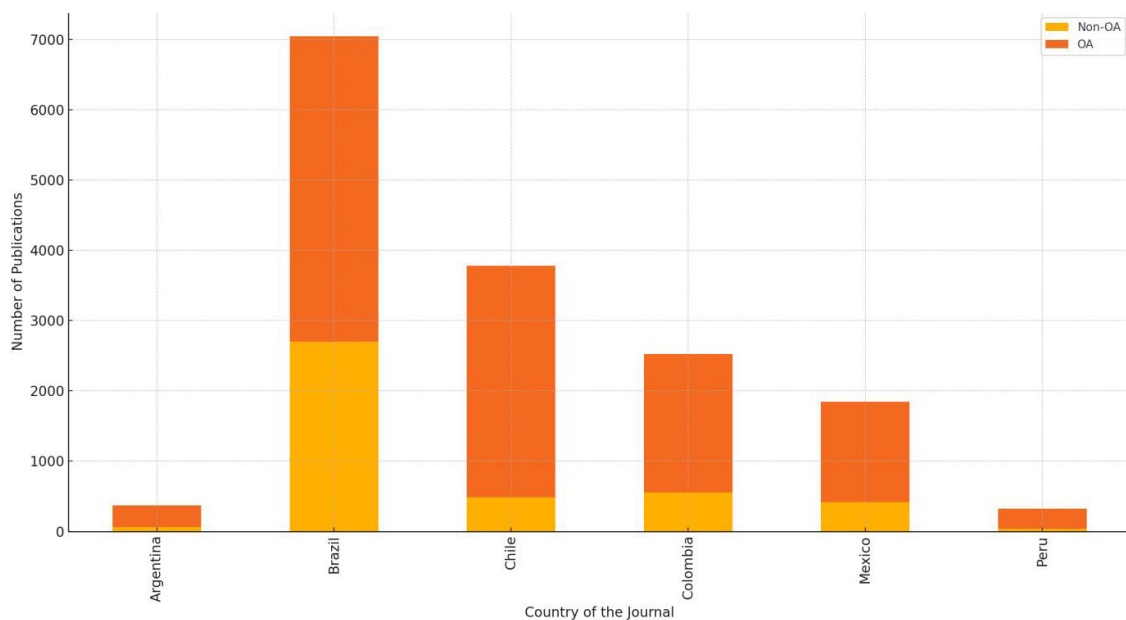


Figure 9. OA distribution by country considering Scopus-indexed journals between 2008 and 2023.

Source: Own edit based on Scopus data. Note: OA, Open access.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Trends in LAC law journal dissemination and evolution (RQ1)

The dissemination and evolution of LAC law journals between 2008 and 2023 illustrate a notable advancement in regional academic publishing. Although the representation of LAC in international legal knowledge production remains a “work in progress,” with only six countries collectively representing the entire region in Scopus-indexed law journals, the growth of these six countries’ journals is noteworthy. Brazil experienced a notable increase in the number of indexed law journals, reaching 34 in 2023. This growth can be attributed to the country’s robust institutional and governmental support, as well as a strong emphasis on accessible publishing. Chile is distinctive in that it is the sole country in the region to have consistently produced Q1 law journals since 2013, demonstrating consistent growth and maintaining a notable presence with 13 journals in 2023, a significant increase from four in 2008. Additionally, Chile is the sole country in the region to be included in Scopus each year over the 15-year period under examination. Other countries, including Colombia and Mexico, demonstrated moderate growth, while Argentina and Peru, which commenced their participation later, exhibited emerging trends, with four and two journals, respectively, being indexed in 2023. It can be stated that the majority of law journals in LAC are still in their developmental phase. They are concentrated in the Q3 and Q4 quartiles, with notable contributions from Brazil and Chile in Q2 journals. However, there is a scarcity of Q1 journals. Between 2015 and 2023, the number of indexed journals in the region increased by more than threefold, from 19 to 76, indicating an accelerated phase of development. The average SJR score is relatively low (approximately 0.200); however, there is a weak positive correlation between the number of indexed journals and the SJR score. On a micro-level, citations also demonstrate a gradual yet relatively slow growth.

It is important to note that the proportion of Q1 journals in the region is relatively low. However, there appears to be a promising upward trajectory in this regard. The mean SJR

score for Q1 journals (0.511) is notably higher than that for non-Q1 journals, as is the mean H-index and number of citations. This indicates that a small number of top journals receive the majority of visibility. This phenomenon may be linked to or associated with Robert K. Merton’s (1968) Matthew effect, whereby established and highly visible journals tend to garner more citations and recognition, thereby further consolidating their status as top-tier publications. Using this theory, it can be claimed that as for law journals in the region, a limited number of journals exert significant influence on the landscape of excellence and visibility which results in an unequal scholarly domain.

5.2. Language, collaboration, and OA: Factors fostering visibility (RQ2)

The visibility of LAC law journals and the publications therein has been significantly enhanced by the fundamental roles played by language, collaboration, and OA. Our research has produced multiple analyses of language trends, which have revealed the preponderance of Spanish (7,710 articles) and Portuguese (4,854 articles), collectively accounting for over 80% of all publications. Although English is less prevalent, it has consistently shown an upward trend, with 656 articles published in 2023 which may indicate a growing effort to target broader international audiences. The Spanish language continues to be the predominant language for Q1 publications as well, with 63% of all Q1 documents written in Spanish between 2013 and 2023. These results, though in particular manner, lend support to the notion of the resilience of regional knowledge production despite the pervasive influence of English in academic publishing (Flowerdew, 2019). A review of the literature on collaboration trends reveals a complex pattern of domestic and international authorship. The proportion of domestic authorship remains high in countries such as Brazil (55.68% in 2023) and Chile (54.73% in 2023), which is indicative of robust national research ecosystems. However, regional collaboration, as indicated by the international collaboration rate within LAC (ICR-LATAM), has increased considerably. Countries such as Argentina and Peru have demonstrated elevated rates of regional authorship, with figures reaching

34.78% and 30.91%, respectively, in 2023. The rate of international collaboration with non-LAC countries (ICR-INT) has remained stable, with Brazil leading at 9.54% in 2023. This indicates a balance between regional integration and global outreach.

The implementation of OA policies has markedly increased the visibility of journals and documents. In recent years, OA publications have surpassed non-OA publications in terms of visibility. Brazil and Chile are at the vanguard of this phenomenon, with 4,344 and 3,295 OA publications, respectively, in comparison to a significantly smaller number of non-OA outputs. The role of platforms such as SciELO and Redalyc in this transition has been pivotal, providing accessible avenues for research dissemination and aligning with global trends in OA publishing (Aguado-López & Becerril-García, 2021; Bojo-Canales & Melero, 2021).

6. CONCLUSION

The objective of the study was to examine the growth and visibility of law journals from LAC, investigating indexing trends, linguistic factors, collaboration patterns, and OA policies. The findings reveal a significant increase in the number of LAC law journals, particularly in Brazil and Chile. The expansion of OA has been a crucial factor in this growth, with academic platforms and progressive policies significantly enhancing accessibility and visibility. Spanish remains the dominant language of publication, with a substantial presence in Q1 journals, highlighting the strength of regional knowledge production. This study establishes a foundation for understanding the evolution of LAC law journals and underscores the necessity for sustained efforts to achieve global excellence and equitable representation in legal scholarship. For future research, it is recommended that the scalability of OA models across underrepresented LAC countries be explored, with a particular focus on equitable growth. It is of the utmost importance to foster linguistic inclusivity and diversify the bases of authorship, particularly in Q1 publications, if the goal of sustainable regional integration is to be achieved. Furthermore, comparative studies across other emerging regions could shed light on best practices for balancing growth, quality, and inclusivity.

7. LIMITATIONS

Although they were mentioned in the paper, two crucial limitations were highlighted. First, the study focused exclusively on Scopus-indexed journals, which are highly regarded in scientometric research. Consequently, this paper presents a significant yet not comprehensive representation of law journals in the LAC region. Second, it also examined the impact of OA policies and practices on Scopus-indexed journals. This study strongly recommends that future research considers other databases and scholarly platforms to gain a more holistic understanding of OA publishing and scientific visibility.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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Statement of data consent

The data and information concerning the journals and their publications generated during the development of this study has been deposited in Scopus and ScimagoJR, and it is accessible at <https://www.scopus.com/search/form.uri?display=authorLookup&zzone=header&origin=AuthorProfile#basic> (Scopus) and <https://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php?category=3308&type=j&country=Latin%20America> (ScimagoJR). ●

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