

Demystifying Colombia's Foreign Policy: Exploring Foundations and Practical Implications

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Abstract

The conceptualization and execution of foreign policy in Colombia and Latin America face significant challenges, particularly within foreign affairs agencies and diplomatic services. A major concern is the prevailing tendency in the literature to attribute these difficulties solely to political factors, often overlooking the conceptual foundations critical for the effective implementation of political actions. In addition, scholars often struggle to clearly define and distinguish foreign policy from international politics. To address these issues, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining an extensive review of academic literature with interviews and surveys conducted among scholars and government officials. This methodology aims to identify and analyze conceptual ambiguities that obstruct a deeper understanding of foreign policy. The analysis unfolds in three stages: first, identifying conceptual gaps in the existing literature; second, examining stakeholder perspectives through interviews and surveys; and third, synthesizing the findings to propose a more refined framework for understanding foreign policy. The study concludes by highlighting the need for a clearer and more comprehensive conceptualization of foreign policy—one that effectively distinguishes it from international politics and enhances its practical implementation. **Key Words**— Decision-Making; Foreign Policy; Public Policy, International Politics; Colombia.

Resumen

La conceptualización y ejecución de la política exterior en Colombia y América Latina enfrentan desafíos significativos, especialmente dentro de los organismos de asuntos exteriores y servicios diplomáticos. Una preocupación importante es la tendencia en la literatura a atribuir estas dificultades únicamente a factores políticos, pasando por alto los fundamentos conceptuales esenciales para la efectiva implementación de acciones políticas. Además, los académicos suelen enfrentar dificultades para definir y diferenciar claramente entre política exterior y política internacional. Para abordar este problema, este estudio utiliza un enfoque de métodos mixtos, combinando una exhaustiva revisión de literatura académica con entrevistas y encuestas a académicos y funcionarios gubernamentales. Esta metodología busca identificar y analizar ambigüedades conceptuales que dificultan una comprensión más profunda de la política exterior. El análisis se desarrolla en tres etapas: primero, identifica vacíos conceptuales en la literatura; segundo, recoge las perspectivas de actores clave; y, tercero, propone un marco más claro para entender la política exterior. El estudio concluye enfatizando la necesidad de una conceptualización más clara y completa de la política exterior, que permita distinguirla de la política internacional y mejorar su implementación práctica. **Palabras Clave**— Toma de Decisiones; Política Exterior; Política Pública; Política Internacional; Colombia.

1 Introduction

This article constitutes a preliminary approach to critically analyzing the literature produced in Colombia on the conceptualization, implementation, and execution of foreign policy (FP hereafter). Although the emphasis is on the Colombian case, it includes

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some regional references as the Latin America region is experiencing numerous difficulties affecting its foreign affairs agencies and diplomatic services. FP often resides in a nebulous conceptual space and is often conflated with international politics. This conflation becomes apparent when scholars, analysts, policymakers, and government officials discuss international issues (e.g., the ongoing conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East) as if these matters exclusively pertain to the foreign policies of the respective governments. Instead, they should take into account the fundamental principles of FP and how it should be implemented.

This article aims to bridge the study of FP with its conceptualization and interpretation. The challenges inherent in understanding the meaning of FP often arise from the complexities in both its practice and scholarly study. The literature highlights that this issue is particularly pronounced in Spanish-speaking nations, where *La Política* is perceived as a unified concept encompassing three distinct connotations. There is no clear distinction between the concepts of politics, policy, and polity. In addition, a portion of the literature presents some arguments to avoid determining FP as a public policy, adding more complexity.

The challenges surrounding this issue stem from the lack of rigor in understanding the meaning of FP, which may help explain why governments often fail to achieve their stated objectives. In Colombia, for example, society continuously demands improvements in living conditions from the government. However, the difficulty in strategically designing policies that gather support from international actors hinders systematic progress toward comprehensive development. Another significant challenge is the divergence between the academic approach to FP and the frameworks proposed by Foreign Policy Analysis (hereafter FPA). Confusing FP with international politics limits the capacity to address domestic demands and could lead to the state's inappropriate involvement in unrelated matters.

This work explores the existing literature to present a more robust framework for understanding and studying FP, providing more precise explanations. Although the discussion on terminology may seem trivial, it is essential to distinguish FP from public policy and international politics. Although theoretical arguments exist to support this distinction, the design and implementation of FP do not always align with the processes involved in the creation of public policy. In other words, this work examines the conceptualization, design, implementation, and execution of FP while offering insights into why the term is often misused.

The article uses a primarily qualitative methodology. It extensively reviews the FP literature and analyzes empirical information from various interviews, surveys, discourse analyzes, and observations about the Colombian experience. This work approaches the understanding of the reality constructed around Colombian FP. To this end, the author interviewed two groups: (1) scholars who have studied the topics of FP and international politics of the country and (2) policymakers and official representatives affiliated with entities directly involved in international affairs, some of whom are part of the foreign service. In addition, a survey was conducted with 73 academics and internationalists from both national and international contexts. The research process also involved the analysis of primary sources, including press reviews, journalistic sources, and official documents issued by various state entities. Furthermore, the author participated actively in academic events, interacting with government representatives and FP experts. This direct involvement provided a unique opportunity to observe the language used in discussions about Colombia's

FP and international politics within the country.

The study reveals several notable findings, including the observation that the terms FP and international politics are frequently used interchangeably, often without distinction. This conflation suggests a lack of conceptual clarity, which can hinder precise analysis and understanding of these distinct fields. In addition, the research identifies a notable degree of confusion about the meaning and scope of FP, particularly in the Colombian context. This confusion underscores the need for clearer definitions and a more robust framework to distinguish FP from other areas of international relations.

This work proceeds in five sections. After the introduction, the second section deals with the dynamics of language use in the Spanish-speaking world and the difficulties of distinguishing politics, policy, and polity since the all-encompassing word *política*. Based on the literature review, the analysis addresses the possibility of understanding FP as a form of public policy. In the third section, this work discusses the need to differentiate FP from international politics and seeks to provide a clear understanding of what FP is. Fourth, by showing the research design, the reader can access the details of the research process and the application of the method. In the fifth part and considering the negative consequences of misunderstanding the previous concept, the text opens a debate about what Colombian officials, academics, representatives, and policymakers tend to identify in the international field. Lastly, the work concludes that one of the most critical imperfections in implementing FP in Colombia is the lack of understanding of what it truly means.

2 Literature Review

Examining the FP literature highlights specific challenges that arise in Spanish-speaking contexts. One key issue is the complexity of the term *política*, which encompasses at least three distinct meanings in Spanish. This linguistic ambiguity becomes problematic when these nuances are overlooked. Furthermore, the lack of clarity within the field has contributed to the conflation of FP with international politics, treating them as interchangeable concepts. Although this is not the only obstacle to achieving an effective FP strategy, it represents a significant hurdle that hampers progress and contributes to amplify the setbacks in the field. Additionally, a considerable body of literature has fostered a tendency to study FP as it is equivalent to public policy. In that vein, this review of the literature provides a foundation for addressing these challenges and tracing a clear explanatory path in this direction.

2.1 Linguistic Issues: Politics, Policy, and Polity

Before discussing the conceptual issue of FP in Colombia, it is critical to address the semantic implications of studying FP with the English literature¹. As this study will later show, this assessment is pivotal in addressing whether (or not) FP should be grouped under the banner of public policy. For starters, the word politics is complex and sometimes confusing for the Spanish-speaking world. When a concept is limited to the Spanish expression *política*, among those who use that language,² in many cases, it is assumed that the term implies the general act expressed in politics, that is, the activity surrounding the fight for power. Despite the political complexities and the adversarial element of power struggle, Arendt's (1997) terms invite us to understand politics as "acting in concert."

Politics also fundamentally aspires to resolve conflict, being the most necessary form of human activity involving the interaction between free and equal citizens. According to this perspective, politics is no longer the search for or the competition for power, but rather a “sequence of conducts” in which “individuals and collectives are dynamically chained” (Vallès & Martí, 2016, p. 45)³.

Politics is also a diversity of processes through which a given government reacts to society’s pressures and demands, using the assignation of rewards, benefits, and sanctions. These processes operate within a culturally binding “system of values” (Schmitt, 1981). Thus, politics could be seen as a competitive game in which one may find many actors “bargaining along regular circuits, with players positioned hierarchically within the government” (Allison & Selikow, 1971, p. 255); it is a bid for the achievement or the increase of power (Ordoñez-Matamoros, 2013). Although Aristotle approached politics as the activity through which human beings seek to improve their lives and build a good society, Bismarck described it as an art rather than a science in which the exercise of control and power implements collective decisions (Heywood, 2013). So, although the variety of conceptualizations about politics is vast, all of them point out that they are a practical activity. In addition, there has been an evolution toward its understanding. Sartori (2013) highlights a recent change towards a horizontal, inclusive, and subversive dimension in political activity, in contrast to the vertical characterization of centuries ago. However, he does not define the political realm as different, independent, or self-sufficient; in fact, he barely develops a specific conceptualization⁴.

Connecting with those conceptual elements, applying the term politics necessarily leads to the policy concept. This concept cannot be fully disengaged from politics as “the political game and public action are two actions that cross and reinforce mutually” (Ordoñez-Matamoros, 2013, p. 28). Despite this exception, encompassing both terms in the Spanish world often generates misdirection.

Reference to policy in Spanish-speaking societies is often scarcely distinguishable conceptually from politics. However, it is necessary to elucidate how the former term has been used. Many authors have worked on the public policy issue, making it difficult to choose a specific definition. However, Roth (2004) wrote that there is a trend toward more practical purposes in American tradition.⁵ It is also important to point out that, despite the conceptual differentiation inherent in the politics and policy concepts, these concepts cannot be understood in isolation. The political game and public action are two fields that intersect and reinforce each other. In effect, “to make policy is to make politics too in the matter that, in practice, there is almost always a concern on the part of policymakers for receiving the merits or credits associated with the initiatives of public impact” (Ordoñez-Matamoros, 2013, p. 28).

Policies are sustained in the activity of politics. This may be why it is difficult to differentiate the result (as decisions) from the process. However, the characterization, as a result, is what should prevail. Vallès and Martí (2016) point out that everyone does not use the word politics in the same way: “Politics is a multivocal term, provided with different meanings depending on the field and the moment it is used.” This observation is anchored in the problem developed in this section, that is, the same word describes three different approaches.

There are different formulations and descriptions of what a policy is. Some are broader than others, some more technical and others more complex, but finally, all highlight the

same actions that enable solutions to issues. The Ordoñez-Matamoros's (2013) publication offers several such definitions. Among the broadest is that of Dye (2017), who suggests that policies are everything the government does or does not do. Similarly, Mény and Thoening (1992) defined a policy as the action of authorities within society and the program of action of public management. More pragmatic definitions include those of Dubnick and Bardes (1983), who understand policies as governmental actions in general and what governments say and do regarding problems or controversies. Likewise, others propose it as a governmental action or inaction in response to public issues (Kraft & Scott, 2007). Others view it as an orientation deliberately followed by an actor or group of actors when dealing with a problem that concerns them (Anderson, 2003). Hogwood and Gunn (1984) identified different pathways to understanding a policy. They define it as decisions of governments and the formal authorization of decisions on one side and as a process and series of decisions, not an event or single decision over another. In short, it is feasible to point out that conceptual approaches converge in generating helpful guidelines to solve an issue.

At this point, a third dimension emerges in discussing *la política*: the third English semantic variation is polity. This term connotes a political framework. Both Ordoñez-Matamoros (2013) and Vallès and Martí (2016) have further suggested that the word coincides with the conception of political regime, since it describes the stability accomplished by decision-making norms, rules, and procedures applicable to the organization of a society's political actions.

In political science, polity refers to the institutional framework that defines and organizes a political community or society. As written, it encompasses the structures, norms, and rules through which power is exercised, decisions are made, and authority is distributed within a given territory. Unlike politics, which focuses on negotiation, competition, and decision-making, or policy, which pertains to the specific outcomes and measures derived from governance, polity emphasizes governance's systemic and structural aspects. As Easton (1965) argued in his systems theory, polity serves as the structural foundation of the political system, facilitating the allocation of values within society and maintaining systemic stability. It includes constitutions, government institutions, and legal frameworks that provide order while shaping the interactions between actors within the political system. Thus, the study of polity is essential to understand the foundational mechanisms that sustain political authority and legitimacy in diverse contexts.

In sum, policies can be understood as the consequences of exercising politics. According to Vallès and Martí (2016, p. 46), from the combination of the process (politics) and the structure (polity), the results arise (policies). Therefore, policy, seen as outcomes in the form of decisions, is the "final product of politics, destined to regulate the existing tensions in different areas of collective life." As stated previously, the discussion of understanding FP as public policy will be resumed later. So far, the goal has been to discriminate the meanings implicit in the Spanish language word *política*.

Essentially, using the Spanish language, *política* means politics only to the extent that it describes a fight between different interests to obtain or increase power; *política* means policy insofar as it expresses the content of plans, programs, strategies, and projects designed to achieve specific goals regarding social order; and *política* means polity since the term connotes institutions and differentiates administrative entities from civil society. Also, politically independent societal units, whether states or proto-states (in the case of

pre-modern times) can establish formal or informal relations with one another. Although this reflection could look less relevant in the Anglophone sphere, it is not relevant at all within Spanish-speaking societies.

Having offered this brief approach to the word *política*, it should be noted that the conceptual problem is partly rooted in this triad of concepts. As such, the dilemma of analyzing the international strategies of states (governments) emerges from the idea of policies. In any case, FP is not international politics, as this work will elaborate on later.

2.2 Approaching FP as a Public Policy

The previous discussion suggests that, in the context of the English language, FP is often understood as public policy. However, the concept still requires further clarification. Is FP truly a public policy? This question becomes particularly thought-provoking when examining Latin America, and even more so in the case of Colombia. Theoretically, FP refers to a framework that guides decisions with global implications. Nevertheless, numerous questions arise about how FP is formulated and constructed.

Initially, considering Velasquez's (2005, p. 5) definition of policy as "an integrating process of decisions, actions, inactions, agreements, and tools, advanced by public authorities with the eventual participation of particulars and aimed at mitigating, solving or preventing a situation defined as difficult", FP can be understood, studied and analyzed as a public policy. Lowi's (1992) characterization helps to advance the discussion. Although Lowi classifies policies in general into three categories (distributive, regulatory, and redistributive), he emphasizes that FP must be categorized distinctly, as "it is not part of the same universe" (Lowi, 1992, p. 101). Monroy (2014) takes a similar position, arguing that FP resides outside the "universe" of political science.⁶ Instead, it falls within the purview of international relations. Since it is an external state policy, it often has no direct domestic implications, as with distributive, regulatory, and redistributive policies. Additionally, its formulation can quickly come from non-democratic processes where citizen participation is limited, restricted, and may not be considered. The leaders' perception in elaborating policies would prevail then (Monroy, 2014).

However, Monroy suggests that FP can be viewed as a public policy, provided that various conditions are met; among others, these include understanding the state as a social actor and opening the proverbial black box via the analysis of the behavior of bureaucrats, interest groups, pressure groups, and other actors (political, civil, and military) who exert pressure and influence decision-making processes. The study of policies is centered on the state's (government) actions. At the same time, "foreign policy addresses elements of public action within the state and has external purposes undertaken through diplomacy. This would be the main difference" (Monroy, 2014, p. 138). Along these lines, it is appropriate to clarify what a policy is composed of from its conceptualization and operational activity. That is why a brief but more precise definition of public policy is essential.

Muller and Surel (1998), cited by Roth (2004), define public policy as the process by which public action programs are developed and implemented, that is, political-administrative devices coordinated around explicit objectives. Cuervo (2010) understands it as the actions of the state that the government guides. Accordingly, governments seek to respond to social demands coherently, comprehensively, legitimately, systematically, legally, and sustainably, resorting to different analysis methods, management models, and evaluation

criteria with the actors' participation. However, other definitions include Cochran and Malone (2005), who say that policies are the government's actions and the intentions that determine those actions. According to Colebatch (1998), diverse activities by different bodies are combined into stable and predictable patterns of action, which (as often as not) come to be labeled "policy." In addition, "policy designs are observable phenomena found in statutes, administrative guidelines, court decrees, programs, and even the practices and procedures of street-level bureaucrats" (Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 2). On the other hand, there is an underlying assumption that policy is a good thing and fixes things up (Bacchi, 2009). Thus, Jenkins (1978) and Roth (2004) agree in considering public policy as a set of objectives, actions, and decisions managed by state institutions to monitor and define the behavior of actors, whether individuals or groups, and to modify situations perceived as undesirable or unsatisfactory.

Some authors argue that FP is inherently a form of public policy as it follows structured decision-making processes to promote national interests, much like domestic policies address internal concerns. Lasswell (1965) viewed policy making, including FP, as a rational decision-making process to allocate resources and achieve societal goals. Similarly, Rosenau's (1966) concept of linkage politics underscores the interconnectedness of domestic and foreign issues, particularly in areas such as trade, climate change, and migration. Allison and Zelikow (1971) demonstrate that FP decisions are shaped by bureaucratic processes and organizational behavior, aligning them with domestic public policy frameworks. This perspective is further supported by the governance approach, where scholars like Putnam (1988) assert that FP operates as a two-level game, balancing international obligations with domestic demands, a hallmark of public policy. Hence, FP is often seen as an extension of public governance designed to protect national welfare in a globalized world.

In contrast, critics argue that equating FP with public policy overlooks its unique focus on sovereignty, power dynamics, and the anarchic structure of the international system. Waltz (1979) contended that FP is primarily shaped by systemic pressures, such as power balancing, rather than by considerations of public welfare or participatory decision-making. Morgenthau (1954) similarly emphasized that FP is rooted in the national interest and the enduring struggle for power among sovereign states, distinguishing it from the welfare-oriented objectives of public policy. Bull (1977) underscored the distinct challenges of international relations, in which states operate as autonomous actors in an unregulated global system, necessitating secrecy and exclusivity in decision-making, attributes antithetical to the transparency and inclusivity of public policy. Krasner (1999) further asserted that foreign FP serves as an expression of state sovereignty, prioritizing autonomy and control, which contrasts with the collective and participatory aspirations of domestic public policy. Thus, the strategic and security-driven imperatives of FP distinguish it from the broader goals of public policy.

For now, this brief section about the nature of policies may be concluded with Ordoñez-Matamoros' (2013, p. 31) remark about the design and analysis of policies: "Public policy is the set of actions implemented within the framework of government plans and programs designed by analytical exercises of some degree of formality, where knowledge, together with political will and available resources, makes viable the achievement of social goals." It is difficult to consider FP under this portrayal. There needs to be more clarity between policies and practical FP. Nonetheless, this work will show that most policymakers, aca-

demics, and political representatives need clarification regarding this distinction. In addition, as we can see in the next section, there is also a misperception between FP and international politics.

3 The Difficulties in Understanding FP

The study of FP has been central to Political Science, similar to the discipline of International Relations after the 1960s. Despite its long-standing debate and improvement over the years, there are still manifest divergencies in the study of FP. This section provides a fine-grained discussion of that evolution and consequences and how its study can move towards a better understanding.

3.1 Divergences in Understanding FP

Regarding the approach to studying FP, it is essential to note that within the International Relations discipline, the development of the second American epistemological debate provided scholars with tools that allow engagement with at least three valuable categories for studying the subject. Thus, decision-making processes, comparative FP, and the contextual approach (integrated decisions) to its design and execution have become three fundamental approaches for a better understanding (Hudson, 2008).

The methodological divergence introduced during the second debate significantly influenced the distinction between FPA and international politics. On one side, traditionalists, emphasizing qualitative, historical, and normative approaches, laid the foundation for understanding the internal, often state-centric processes that shape FP decision-making. This subfield prioritizes factors like leadership psychology, domestic politics, bureaucratic dynamics, and cultural influences to explain state behavior within the international system. On the other side, behavioralists, advocating for empirical, systemic, and quantitative methods, contributed to the evolution of international politics, which focuses on broader global patterns and structures. This includes examining interstate relations, systemic dynamics, and macro-level theories such as realism and liberalism (Kubáľková, 2001). The divergence was not only methodological but also conceptual. FPA takes an “inside-out” perspective, investigating how states formulate policies, while international politics adopts an “outside-in” view, analyzing states as units interacting within an anarchic global system (Waltz, 1996).

As Kubáľková (2001) points out, at the center of this division is the question of opening the state, previously understood as a “black box” whose contents were of exclusive interest to political scientists. Thus, FPA turns its attention to the attributes of disaggregated states to conclude their relations. In contrast, international politics directs its attention toward the relations between states and other political units (Intergovernmental Organizations, IGOs) to learn about the particularities of the interstate system: “One proceeds from the parts to the whole, the other from the whole to the parts. Once FPA had “moved inside the box” [...], scholars on each side saw little need for each other, and the two subfields began to grow apart” (Kubáľková, 2001, p. 15).

These discussions are pertinent here because they solidified the key distinctions between international politics and FP (Jackson, 2011; Waltz, 1996).⁷ During the debates, influential scholars such as Morgenthau and Carr opposed the application of the scientific

method to the study of international relations (Jackson, 2011). In the course of the second academic debate, greater emphasis was placed on the value of empirical and scientific approaches. This shift in focus, in turn, led to a more refined understanding of the differences between FP and international politics. According to Schmidt (2013), this intellectual exchange was shaped by the contrasting views of Bull (1966), who championed the “classic method,” and Kaplan (1966), one of the early proponents of a “scientific focus”.

As in the case of Political Science, the polarized debate between those who believed scientific principles could be embodied and adopted in the study of international politics and those who argued that the rigorous empirical methods of the natural sciences do not apply to social sciences (Schmidt, 2013). Nonetheless, in the view of Waltz (1996), a theory of international politics could not be the same as one of FP. It is necessary to bear in mind this differentiation as one of the direct consequences of the second debate and novel studies on the cognitive approach to FP⁸.

For instance, in *Politics Among Nations*, Morgenthau (1954) defines international politics as the global struggle for power, emphasizing realism and the central role of power in state relations. Building on this, Waltz (1979) argues that international politics is shaped by the anarchic structure of the international system, where states operate without a central authority, driven by the need for survival and the pursuit of balance of power. Bull (1977), on the other hand, defines international politics as the coexistence and cooperation of states within an anarchic society, underpinned by norms, rules, and institutions (international regimes). This view aligns with Keohane's (1984) perspective on the role of international institutions in mitigating uncertainty and fostering cooperation across the international system. Moving toward a more nuanced understanding, Nye (1990) introduces the concept of soft power, emphasizing that international politics also involves influence and persuasion, extending beyond military and economic might. Overall, the literature supports the view of international politics as a dynamic arena of state engagement, in contrast to the more strategic and internally focused nature of FP formulation.

After all, conceptualizing FP with a unified criterion has proven to be a challenging task. Debates persist between those who view it as a form of public policy (within Political Science) and those who define it as a state strategy (within International Relations and FPA). Its usage remains varied, but what is crucial is distinguishing it from international politics. Whether or not FP is categorized as public policy is secondary; what truly matters is recognizing that it exists within a distinct realm. Rephrasing Waltz (1996), FP is not the same as international politics. He characterizes FP as a product of government, which, from a theoretical standpoint, requires a disaggregated explanation focused on government performance at the core of the discussion. FP differs from international politics because it operates under different orientations. As such, studying FP offers valuable insights into behaviors shaped by internal circumstances, variables, and needs.

It is important to note that applying the theoretical frameworks of International Relations to FP has created confusion in Latin America, and specifically in Colombia, where these concepts are often seen as interchangeable. The challenge in conceptualizing and implementing FP in Colombia stems from the frequent focus on international politics as the central object of analysis. Many attempts to explain FP through International Relations theories have complicated the issue. Additionally, there is a lack of consensus among scholars and analysts regarding the meaning of FP, which hampers both government strategy development and academic research. These difficulties arise from the absence of a

unified understanding of FP and the gap between its conceptualization and practical application. In this context, *Política Exterior* is not the same as *Política Internacional*. The following sections review key authors whose work helps clarify the conceptualization of FP within the framework of FPA.

So far, the difficulty in formulating and defending a possible FP theory originates from how it has been conceptualized. This is even related to how complex it is to draw up FP strategies. One of the most notorious difficulties in achieving an accurate concept revolves around how literature has offered multiple conceptions about it.

The study of FP in Latin America often leaves scholars grappling with conceptual ambiguities. The debate over whether FP should be treated as a form of public policy has already been explored, and this work rejects that notion while calling for clearer definitions of the concept and a deeper commitment from governments to develop comprehensive FP strategies. Despite this lack of clarity, most academics, policymakers, and officials show little concern, as few studies directly address these foundational issues. Consequently, this academic gap underscores the urgent need to examine the fundamentals of FP. Even if theoretical frameworks cannot always be applied, a solid conceptual foundation is essential for effective policy formulation and decision-making.

It became common in the relatively condensed proposition of definitions and approaches about FP, a limited simplification of an exercise (activity) that is complex because of the strategic to simple phrases that synthesize the actions of governments, some of which lack depth and content. This reductionism leaves out several elements and variables that conform to and determine FP, from its formulation process to its application in the various existing international regimes and systems. Petrič's (2013) work raises this conceptual discussion, illustrating several FP definitions offered by a series of authors.⁹ Despite certain similarities, those authors define it differently, reinforcing one of the theses of this work regarding the lack of unified criteria concerning the conceptualization of FP. Table 1 illustrates Petrič's inspection and other approaches based on the literature review made by the author.

These are some conceptualizations that have been revealed, and the FP concept has been placed in a nebula. Thus, based on this work's arguments, those concepts could affect FP activity (implementation of strategies) since not all could recognize the same goals or purposes. For instance, in a globalized world in which international relations are constantly intensifying, FP is centrally important while being powerfully dynamic. Thus, the minimum requirement for academics and officials is to achieve precision in the conceptual elements that can favor their practical understanding and contribute to the analysis and implementation of government strategies. In this direction, the cited work conveys that those responsible...

“[F]or making and implementing foreign policy decisions were not to depend solely on momentary inspiration, their own ingenuity, and skills. Equally, they should not be led by the opinion and mood of the [...] public [...] without having a theoretical basis for their decisions [...] efforts to make sense of foreign policy and provide a theoretical justification for it [...] are not only urgent but necessary [...].” (Petrič, 2013, p. 10)

Based on the above, it should also be considered that despite the existence of a significant number of non-state actors that affect the generation of a specific FP, the activities

Table 1: Conceptualization of Foreign Policy (FP)

Author	Conceptualization of FP
Brockhaus <i>Enzyklopaedie</i> (1967)	The institution to manage a state's relations with other states, intending to preserve its independence and promoting social, economic, and cultural interests.
Rosenau (1968). <i>Political Science and Public Policy</i>	A systematic decision-making by constitutionally authorized officials of individual states.
Crabb, Jr. (1972). <i>American Foreign Policy in the Nuclear Age</i>	The interaction between objectives and means is the essence of 'statesmanship' and 'foreign policy.'
Dictionary of Foreign Policy and International Law (1980)	The policy of the ruling class of a state, which is directed toward the outside, i.e. toward the external relations of the state.
Vukadinović (1981). <i>Foundations of the Theory of Foreign Policy</i>	An organized activity of a state that tries to maximize its values and interests in other states and subjects operating within the foreign environment.
Kaltefleiter (1982). <i>Aussenpolitische Willensbildung in der Demokratie</i>	A network of communications that connects other areas of politics and covers a wide span of activities, ranging from summit meetings to informal talks among diplomats at social gatherings.
Calvert (1986). <i>The Foreign Policy of New States</i>	Decisions and activities primarily concerning relations between one state and the others.
Benko (1997). <i>The Science of International Relations</i>	Process and system of activities performed by a state-organized community of people within the international arena.
Hill (2003). <i>The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy</i>	The sum of official foreign relations administered by an independent actor, usually the state, in international relations.
Hudson (2008). <i>Foreign Policy—Theories, Actors, Cases</i>	The national government's strategy or approach to achieve its goals in its relations with external entities.
Petrič (2013). <i>Theoretical Fundamentals of Foreign Policy</i>	The activity of the state through which it pursues and fulfills its aims and interests within the international arena.
Carlsnaes, Risse & Simmons (2013). <i>Handbook of International Relations</i>	Actions, expressed as stated goals, commitments, or directives, undertaken by governmental representatives on behalf of their sovereign communities, aimed at affecting objectives, conditions, and actors beyond their territorial legitimacy.
Velásquez & Monjaraz (2017). <i>Para entender la política exterior de México.</i>	Set of decisions and actions that a state takes in the international environment, which are based on national interest.
Lamy & Masket (2019). <i>Making Foreign Policy</i>	The articulation of national interests (the goals of a nation-state) and the means chosen to secure those interests, both material and ideational, in the international arena.

Source: Authors' compilation based on Petrič (2013, pp. 1–2, 14) and other sources.

that they develop at the international level are not considered part of it since such action is exclusive to the state (government). This precision is critical for researchers and officials, as it can implicitly represent a national security matter associated with international politics. If these non-state actors and their activities in the international arena were considered FP, then any action taken in the global environment would be it. This would not only blur the FP boundaries but also call into question the responsibility for the state's and its inhabitants' safety and welfare. It would also render it impossible to separate FP from other activities in the international arena (Petrič, 2013, p. 5). It is thus a return to Waltz's (1996) position when he stated that FP is not international politics.

The aim is to advance the connection between conceptualization and practice to establish a conceptual approach that helps overcome misunderstandings related to understanding FP in its broadest sense. Comprehending this subject will allow scholars and practitioners to approach political practice more precisely. In this way, FP development can lead to better societal decision.

3.2 Concept and Practice: Toward a Better Understanding

If international relations involve a wide diversity of global actors (and domestic, depending on the circumstances), FP also does it, involving decisions and actions (Hazleton, 1988). According to Hazleton's view, decisions are made posteriorly to diverse types of processes at multiple levels in the minds of policymakers. At the same time, actions are developed in the physical environment due to previous mental processes or reactions to unexpected stimuli.

FP became increasingly common from the beginning of the seventeenth century. In addition, until 1950, it was the subject of increasing comments, some technical and other political. From that decade, its study became formal (Hill, 2003a), fundamentally with the first academic works about the relevant variables in the decisional processes, resulting from the second American debate on International Relations discipline, as it was presented. After the 1960s, the study of FP started a progress that became increasingly specialized within the subfield of FPA.

According to Weber and Smith (Webber & Smith, 2002, pp. 9–10), FP is composed fundamentally of goals set or defined, fixed values, decisions, and actions taken by states or national governments, acting on their behalf in external relations. Thus, this constitutes an attempt to design, manage, and control the foreign relations of domestic societies. However, not all the answers governments give to international conjunctures can be considered part of an FP strategy (Hudson, 2008). Unexpected events could obligate governments to react in ways unaligned with their FP. It demands the analysis of the state's behavior based on its FP strategy. Those answers or reactions to unexpected global events are generally understood as performances in international politics.

Although the initial lines of the article presented the position of Vallès and Martí (2016), highlighting relative semantic flexibility regarding the use of the term politics, this section argues for the need to differentiate between the existence of an FP strategy aimed at achieving a domestic objective and any behavior within the practice of international politics. Both can align within a global political scenario, but this is not necessarily true. FP can become abolished, isolated, or fruitless in the face of international political contingencies. The official's ability and astuteness prevent FP from being subordinated to

the forces of global politics.

In the complex and diverse context worldwide, Hill's (2003a) position observably shows that FP tasks are inherently linked to each state's role in the international system, but especially to its internal composition. FP is the product of society, the form of government, the specific interpretation of a situation, and the decision to act or react in a particular way to external stimuli. To deepen the definition of FP, several authors and works will be used to facilitate the creation of a concrete approach. Hill (2003a, 2003b), Waltz (1996), Bacchus (1988), Hernández-Vela (1999), and Webber and Smith (2002)¹⁰ allow us to opt for the following definition because of the crossing of their work. Initially, from Hernández-Vela, it is obtained that FP is. . .

“[T]he set of policies, decisions, and actions that integrate a coherent and consistent body of doctrine, based on transparent, solid, and immutable principles, forged through its evolution and historical experience [...] and that is systematically applied to prosecute and take advantage of the international environment for the best fulfillment of the objectives set for the general good of the nation [...]” (Hernández-Vela, 1999, p. 24)

Those ideas are complementary to Hill's observation of the dynamics that are involved in it. He says:

“Foreign policy is a continuing and serious site for political action. What states do concerning one another, transnational actors, and (or in) international organizations involves politics in several important senses, namely, shaping the international political system and the balance of power within it, affecting the terms of operation of the international political economy; and articulating competing value-systems.” (Hill, 2003b, p. 254)

Based on this sequence of quotes, FP must be oriented toward concrete objectives that respond to the most pressing internal needs and external conditions of a given time (Velásquez, 1999). Hence, as Hill (2003a) explains, FP is complex and envelops our world understanding. It is a social construction involving various positions exposed by multiple actors while it is created. Similarly, it is adequate to conceptualize it as “[...] the set of priorities and precepts established by national leaders to serve as guidelines for choosing among various courses of action (behaviors) in specific situations as they strive to achieve their goals.” (Pearson & Rochester, 2000, p. 127). These authors differentiate FP from foreign policy behavior (FPB), mentioning some actions that “usually are not taken as ends in themselves but are tied in some way to larger purposes.”

Thus, based on the previous clarifications and seeking a valuable synthesis, this work conceptualizes FP as an institutionalized domestic strategy conducted exclusively by official representatives.¹¹ This strategy combines the nation's principles, values, priorities, and interests¹² to be used internationally to achieve the objectives internally defined by public policies. As said, this strategy could be for getting a domestic goal, not necessarily for setting an issue. It explains why it should not be understood as a public policy *per se*. The emphasis on the nature of domestic strategy is essential since FP is exclusively proposed to get internal outcomes. Governments have an essential tool in FP since they can achieve development supported by external actors.

In addition, the strategy comprises specific guidelines that governments must contemplate and define, which Webber and Smith (2002) establish as an essential tool for the administration of the external relations of national societies. Hudson (2008)¹³ defines it as a strategy that governments select. Hill (2003a, p. 3) also coincide in taking FP as “the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually but not exclusively a state) in international relations.” Nevertheless, those actions could be more associated with the implementation of the strategy than its formulation. In sum, as Hermann (2012, p. 2) points out, it is “a guide or plan of action centered around a set of goals or objectives that are enunciated by those with authority to commit the resources of the (...) government.”

The FP conceptual knowledge prepares state representatives with the tools to act thoughtfully, strategically, and effectively worldwide. It bridges the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application, ensuring that FP is a tool for national development, security, and influence in an interconnected world. After reviewing the perspectives and approaches of multiple authors regarding what they conceive as FP, this work is committed to a conceptualization that aims to provide both scholars and practitioners with some clarifying elements on the subject. Rather than viewing it as public policy, the proposal focuses on the strategic nature of its composition. To make this conceptual gap evident, this work utilizes the Colombian case. This case is critical because a robust understanding of the FP concept could help policymakers navigate challenges such as regional integration, drug trafficking, or migration by linking these issues to broader international dynamics. The next section introduces the empirical strategy or research design to do so.

4 Research Design

For a long time, academics and decision-makers have limitedly recognized Colombian Foreign Policy (hereafter CFP). Several government representatives who have experienced this firsthand can publicize that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs lacks importance in making strategic decisions because of presidential power. The conceptual understanding of FP has not been focused on the academic literature, research issues, or practical discussions. Therefore, this work aims to explore the Colombian case in detail. In doing so, it offers a brief overview of the most relevant aspects of its research design and the methods and techniques used to test the arguments throughout this paper.

4.1 The Colombian Case

To genuinely comprehend the absence of conceptual knowledge regarding the CFP, a clear example would be the scarcity of systematic and consolidated works in national diplomacy since the country’s republican times. Adding to what has been mentioned until this point, there were not many studies concerning the topic throughout the nineteenth century, which could be attributed to specific leaders at the time as most works were written from the perspective of international politics instead of FP (Ghotme, 2007). There have been distinguished phases in the study of CFP, but none have effectively addressed it from a conceptual point of view.

The initial actions the CFP acquired can be traced back to the 1800s when the first political movements were endorsed by the Cucuta’s Constitution in 1821.¹⁴ It took over a

century to clarify the priorities and principles the CFP would embody. Only in the early beginnings of the twentieth century was the matter firmly approached due to the initial proclamations of the CFP doctrines associated with *respice polum* and *respice similia*.¹⁵ The first of these doctrines marked closeness to Washington, while the second focused more on what the Latin American region offered the country.

Despite these limitations, a literature review allows us to identify significant progress on the topic, even though the studies trace back to the eighties.¹⁶ After that, the interest in Colombian international relations (even International Relations, like a discipline), FP, and international politics grew exponentially during the first quarter of this century. However, this literature is defined by the need for more theoretical, conceptual, and analytical information. In contrast, many works are based on information regarding what the governments did and some anecdotic episodes. For instance, the literature review is categorical in the lack of FPA works about the Colombian case.

In other words, an abundant CFP diagnosis focuses on the diversity of imperfections that eventually became commonplaces. Topics such as the presidential character, the submission towards Washington, the fragmentation, the hermetic nature, the dichotomy between junctures and structural issues, and the low institutionalization are features recapitulated in all those writings.¹⁷ Thus, a set of texts is proposed from the perspective of FPA.¹⁸ However, their authors offer descriptive narratives of the politician's actions at the time, not really a disaggregation of decisions, comparative analysis, or contextual approaches. This collection includes titles about specific agendas or themes, such as drug trafficking, bilateral relations with the US, and international cooperation.

The CFP studies can be divided into five main categories, which allow for the classification of the studies, analyses, and information around the topic.¹⁹ After a lengthy literature review, it is appropriate to point out that the Colombian case presents this categorization: (1) a few writings with a theoretical-conceptual component (including the doctrinal body initially exposed), (2) presidential periodization works, (3) writings created from the bilateral analysis, (4) texts from the Colombian multilateral participation, and (5) the proposed publications from a thematic agenda. This categorization has benefited the voids regarding works and publications associated with FPA. At the same time, it has reinforced the commonplaces and limited advances in CFP studies.

So far, an extensive literature review indicates that the academic work offered is reduced as it approaches the use of FPA. Tickner (2002), Amaya (2009), Bernal and Tickner (2017), Monroy and Sánchez (2017), Jaramillo and Monroy (2021), and Espinosa-Arias (2022) are authors who have explored the IR subfield to review the Colombian situation.²⁰ Thus, although FPA was proposed several decades before, as has been observed by Hudson (2008), it has only recently been applicable in Colombia.

At this point in the analysis, progress has been made in studying CFP from the FPA perspective. However, further development is necessary for a more mature understanding of this field. Methodologically, studies of this nature demand a commitment beyond merely generating descriptive works, as has traditionally been the national case. The following section explores the specifics of the Colombian case, analyzing the data gathered through the empirical research conducted for this study.

4.2 Methodological Approach: Surveys and Interviews

Due to its geographical location, Colombia is significant for both the Caribbean and the Andean regions, highlighting the need and relevance of studying its international profile and global performance. In addition, Colombia’s long-standing relationship with North America and its involvement in regional integration processes make it suitable for comparative FP studies with other Andean and Caribbean nations. In that sense, FPA is an appropriate approach to studying CFP due to the need to achieve a more accurate understanding in decision-making processes, the interplay between domestic and international factors, and the role of individual agencies and institutions. In addition, some conceptual and theoretical factors.

The development of this research involved several years of fieldwork during which the author, as an active member of the *Red Colombiana de Relaciones Internacionales* (RedIntercol), gained access to various sources of information provided by academics, businesspeople, opinion leaders, civil society representatives, and government officials (decision-makers) with knowledge and participation in CFP. By combining interviews, surveys, and academic discussions, this work seeks to better address CFP through its conceptualization and practical application. It is an accurate route for the state to achieve the goals outlined in the national development plans.

Table 2: Distribution of Surveys and Interviews

Sources	Surveys	Interviews
Scholars	73	17
Policymakers and official representatives	-	19
Total	73	36

The research process included a survey of 94 scholars via the Qualtrics software; however, only 73 answered it.²¹ Additionally, 36 interviews were conducted with scholars, officials, and researchers to gather information on how these individuals understand FP (see Table 2). Table 5 in the Appendix Section presents more detailed information about the interviewees, such as their reference identifiers, institutional affiliations, type of interview, and when and where they were conducted.²² Interviewees are considered reliable sources due to their direct government involvement or academic careers focused on the country’s international issues. It is appropriate to note that the interviewees were not provided with questions or questionnaires before the interviews. They had no preparation time for their responses. These were prearranged interviews on CFP but without prior preparation.

The coding and subsequent processing of this information has been a multi-year endeavor. This has allowed former government individuals to provide insights and perspectives that they might have previously found inconvenient to share. FPA, particularly about decision-making processes, continues to face challenges when advancing scientific research. Officials are often reserved or avoid giving interviews about their work while in charge. The information will address the conceptual gap by showing two basic assumptions: first, the tendency to treat FP and international politics as interchangeable concepts, and second, the prevalent confusion surrounding the understanding of the FP concept, particularly in the context of Colombia.

5 Results: The Zoom in Colombia and Latin America

This section provides an overview of the positions held by academics, policymakers, and government officials regarding the country's approach to international affairs. Additionally, it cross-references these perspectives with the development of literature on CFP and international politics over this century. Complementing the analysis of empirical evidence, the section also offers a brief approach to the Latin American context, highlighting that the same gaps identified in the Colombian case extend to studies on FPA across the region. Although it is not a central matter of this study, it is feasible to note that Latin America lacks FPA advances. This findings section includes, firstly, how FP and international politics are treated interchangeably; then, it shows some difficulties in understanding the FP concept.

The empirical work developed around this research has made it possible to visualize a gap between the conceptualization of FP and its practice internally in Colombia. The topic can be contrasted with articles and books addressed in the literature review. There are cases of distinguished academics²³ whose works use the concepts of FP and international politics interchangeably. Although this is relevant, due to space limitations in this article, it is not possible to present specific references to this exchange of words; however, it is worth highlighting how Cardona and Tokatlián (1991) and Tokatlián (2000) address the terms in their works for the journal *Colombia Internacional*, frequently using them interchangeably without distinguishing whether the author refers to the country's FP or international politics.

The systematized and coded information on the responses regarding the meaning of FP and how to differentiate it from international politics revealed numerous positions, making it difficult to unify them within the strategic framework presented in this work. However, the most striking aspect was to notice that some interviewees did not consider it significant: "Finally, trying to conceptualize within the social sciences can be considered dogmatic. I totally disagree with this because the possibility of interpretation must be preserved" (Interviewee 03, 2017). Another interviewee accepted the confusion but did not give relevance: "Yes, international politics or FP, whatever, it does not matter, so at the end of the day, Colombia has difficulties in its global interaction" (Interviewee 13, 2017).

Table 3: Distinction Between Foreign Policy (FP) and International Politics (IR)

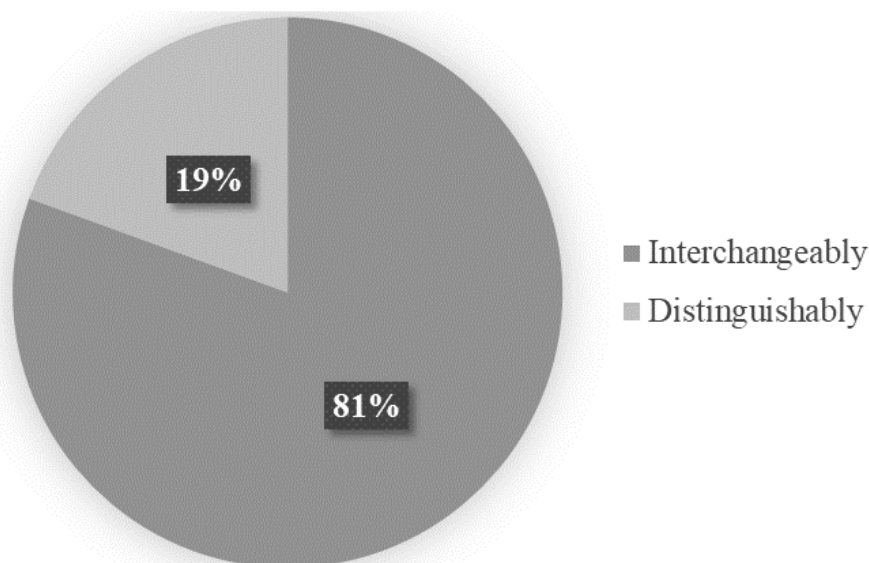
Interview Sources	Yes	No	Not clear
Scholars	4	5	8
Policymakers and official representatives	3	4	12
Total	7	9	20

Source: Author's elaboration based on the analysis of the interview content.

In addition, particularly noteworthy in this regard are the responses of some of those who accepted talking publicly about CFP, such as Interviewee 4 (2017), Interviewee 6 (2017), and Interviewee 14 (2018). The views of Interviewee 2 (2016) and Interviewee

16 (2017) also generated significant controversy, adding a layer of intensity to the discussion.²⁴ Some academics and representatives of the national government insist that distinguishing the FP strategy from maneuvering within the practice of international politics is irrelevant. Among the interviewees (36 individuals), there is a prevailing trend to overlook the conceptual distinction between these terms. Additionally, across all interviews, 81% used the two concepts interchangeably (see Table 3). Only seven Interviewees 4 (2017), 5 (2017), 7 (2017), 14 (2018), 20 (2017), 28 (2017), and 32 (2017) exercised caution in their responses, avoiding the indiscriminate use of the terms, representing 19% of the academics and official representatives recognized the need for differentiation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: How Interviewees use Foreign Policy (FP) and International Politics (IP) terms



Source: Author’s elaboration based on the analysis of the interview content.

Based on this, it is reasonable to indicate the divergences and difficulties among academicians, policymakers, and official representatives²⁵ in getting an accurate conceptualization. Numerous surveys and interviews indicate problems, confusion, and an inadequate understanding of what FP means conceptually. Of the 73 survey respondents, only 2,7% (2 scholars) showed concern about understanding the FP concept. Although most of the interviewees did not show interest in conceptual FP comprehension, particularly Interviewees 9 (2018), 14 (2018), and 32 (2017) pointed out the need to start the dialogue based on it. Most of the interviewees did not show interest in it.

In addition, the absence of analytical works and the lack of use of FPA methodologies further compound the difficulties, underscoring the urgent need for better analytical frameworks. The distinction between Political Science (public policy) and International Relations (FPA) has not yet been developed in the country. The CFP publications, for instance, are abundant in descriptions and facts. As indicated previously, some work is based on the decision-making process.

Evidence of that situation, as mentioned above, is reflected in the survey results conducted among RedIntercol members in the country. These findings have the potential to significantly impact the field of FP. Only 11.1% of the respondents indicated that they had engaged in academic research on FP during their graduate studies. In comparison, 5.5% (of the 41 professionals who wrote a doctoral thesis) specified that their thesis addressed issues related to FP. This is further corroborated by another low percentage response, indicating that only 6.9% of the respondents are involved in teaching FP. In addition, a review of third-level studies (undergraduate) in the country shows that a few courses are explicitly associated with the CFP study.²⁶ Regarding this, the scarcity and limited academic production make conceptualization difficulties more critical.

The survey shows that 30 respondents understand what FPA refers to, although not all engage with its epistemic and methodological framework. Finally, only seven individuals in the sample have conducted academic research related to the country's FP (see Table 4). In summary, although the FPA is not distant or indifferent from their academic approaches for many scholars, academic production remains limited in this work area. As the survey shows, most of the respondents indicate interest in areas of study different from FP, and even more so in the Colombian case.

Table 4: Characteristics of Surveyed RedIntercol Members

Characteristics	Number of scholars	Percentage (%)
Do research on other subfields	57	78.1%
Do research on CFP	7	9.6%
Teach CFP courses	5	6.8%
Wrote doctoral thesis about CFP	4	5.5%
Total	73	100%

Sources: Author's elaboration based on the analysis of the survey content.

Colombia is one of the Latin American countries where, despite the progress observed, the academic community remains lagging behind in undertaking the systematic and rigorous study of FPA. It is appropriate to broaden the focus to the Latin American context. Generally, the region is in the initial stage of approaching the study of FP through the lens of FPA. Traditionally, in Latin America, FP has been studied -as an academic object- through International Relations theories or Political Science approaches, often treating FP as a public policy. Studying the Colombian case has allowed us to reveal circumstances that may be common in several Latin American nations. To confirm this, this type of study will need to be conducted in other countries. In this regard, the field remains largely open to further exploration from the perspective of the internationalist discipline, specifically within the FPA subfield.

According to Tomassini (1988), there has been a continuous tendency to offer a more descriptive interpretation of FP in Latin America than an analytical one. At the same time, studies are more inclined to analyze policies from the historical perspective than to examine available information about the response mechanisms to concrete situations. Correspondingly, Giacalone (2012, 2015) recognizes and explains how the initial academic

production was associated more with international politics than with FPA. Although her text presents a rich series of publications, all are linked to IR issues such as realism, autonomy, dependency, and constructivism as appropriate approaches to studying international politics.

The impossibility of taking advantage of the FPA in contexts outside the United States, in addition to the demonstrable lack of interest, motivation, or ability to develop alternative schemes, has meant that in Latin American countries, the formulation of FP is verified within a conceptual framework that is highly bare, traditional, or simply nonexistent (Tomassini, 1988, p. 505). Tomassini's writings are relevant for a better understanding of this matter. However, as he pointed out more than three decades ago, the current evidence shows that FPA has not been well received in Latin America due to the exclusiveness of the inner circle in charge of decision-making, unlike in developed countries. This explains why the conception of the «black box» and the rational model (Kubáľková, 2001) is so prevalent in Colombia and the Latin American region.

After approaching another group of experts on the matter and some official representatives inquiring about certain fundamental conceptions of FP and international politics, it can be identified that many of them maintain ambiguities and inconsistencies when referring to these concepts. The diplomatic and consular apparatus traditionally execute FP. In the Colombian case, the *Augusto Ramírez Ocampo* Diplomatic Academy prepares applicants to become diplomats.²⁷ Therefore, it could be subtracted that they are highly trained in the topics related to the subject. However, when interviewing some officials, several difficulties were found. A series of inconsistencies was identified in their conceptual approaches. The most notorious is the confusion between FP and international politics, both in theory and practice.

For example, when asked about the concept and definition of FP, many of them defined it as an “action or tool to promote the country's international relations with other state or non-state actors” (Interviewee 26, 2017). Some others mentioned the “defense of the national interest”, even without clear explanations about what national interest is or how it is fashioned: Interviewees 33 (2017) and 34 (2017). However, the definitions offered by some officials seem to align more with the concept of international politics than FP. Some answers were more associated with the country's international relations than the FP viewpoint. One more said, “there are, maybe, more substantive issues when you are in the juncture or a critical situation. So, the conceptual issue would be relevant in our first years of training, not now” (Interviewee 30, 2018).

In contrast, academics and officials commonly refer to FP as a public policy in Latin America and, specifically, in Colombia.²⁸ Based on the means and actions to make CFP, it is neither accurate nor authentic, defining FP as an actual public policy. Stages, negotiation process, participation, deliberations, and assessments are only sometimes included when an FP strategy, if so, is fashioned and proposed. The Colombian case is prone to relate FP with “políticas públicas” according to Interviewees 2 (2016), 4 (2017), 5 (2017), 9 (2018), 12 (2018). However, “it is one of the country's most imperfect, non-institutional and fragmented policies.” (Interviewee 17, 2017). IN that vein, the core of this research is not understanding FP as a “public policy”, but to encourage academics to explore it in future projects. For example, the stages to formulate the FP guidelines in Colombia do not involve standards to make a policy in a strict sense.

It is particularly remarkable to find in the empirical work that understanding FP conceptualization and how it can achieve good results has not been relevant for most Colombian scholars. Few disciplinary debates have been developed in this direction, and the research agendas have been precarious or nonexistent. This can be explained by the deficiencies that have already been cited in the face of the country's possible developments of the FPA. When consulting experts and government officials, reference could be made to difficulties differentiating the object of study from International Relations when it bifurcates between International Politics and FPA. Something similar is evident when the approach leans towards possible FP theories. Although some people express ignorance of them, others are targeted at pointing out that the classical internationalist discipline (International Relations) approaches are FP theories.²⁹ Finally, as has been mentioned, some officials refer to the formulation processes of public policies that, as has also been expressed in this work, are far from how FP is conceived in Colombia.

Finally, the indiscriminate use of these concepts, which may have a sensible or well-intentioned origin, threatens the rigor of academic research and against the possibility of achieving high-level results and adequate scope. Colombia will be able to design a FP strategy that produces positive results if there is clarity regarding the elements that make up it or even with awareness of its value. In addition, it applies to Latin America as a region experiencing similar difficulties.

6 Conclusions

This research focused on explaining the difficulties generated in Spanish-speaking societies (emphasizing the Colombian case) regarding the dynamics of politics while differentiating from the design of policies within the polity framework. Although it may seem like a banal discussion, it affects the approaches that can be made toward FP. At least in the Colombian case, this has been possible to verify.

From the preceding, it can be gotten that although it is theoretically possible to refer to FP as a public policy, evidence distorts this fact in practical cases. In making and executing CFP, the weight of the elites, the secrecy of the discussions, and the exclusion of possible actors who may be affected by the decisions make it less adequate to refer to a public policy. In this direction, studying and analyzing FP in Colombia requires approaching the FPA instead of the epistemological proposals of Political Science or international politics. This work allows us to avoid FP as a public policy *per se*. Although it is a policy, it is not always public; however, it is crucial to emphasize that this debate remains unresolved.

In developing this analysis, this work approaches an integral conceptualization of FP, which helps steer new discussions. Although international politics is conceived as a broad scenario of political interactions between states and intergovernmental organizations, FP is an institutionalized domestic strategy conducted exclusively by official representatives. Strategically, it combines the principles, values, priorities, and interests of a nation to be used in the international arena to achieve internal political objectives. As said, this strategy could be in place to achieve a national goal, not necessarily to set an issue. This explains why it should not be understood as a public policy *per se*. The emphasis on the nature of the domestic strategy is essential, as FP is proposed exclusively to achieve internal results. Governments must use FP to improve internal conditions in all areas supported by international actors. This is why FP is strategic instead of temporary or interim, as

international politics could be.

The preceding ideas underscore the importance of avoiding exclusion from US debates, which have solidified the distinction between FP and international politics. The emphasis of this work on that distinction is particularly relevant, as the empirical analysis reveals a misperception within the country, where the two concepts are often conflated. The empirical work proposed during this research demonstrated that understanding FP from a conceptual perspective is irrelevant to various scholars and decision-makers. Furthermore, a recurring confusion between the concept of FP and international politics was also evident. It is troubling that such shortcomings are even present within the Colombian diplomatic apparatus. Ultimately, formulating effective FP strategies becomes challenging when the nature of the endeavor is unclear.

Finally, this work raises a question that can be a starting point for further research on the matter: How can it be possible to design, create, propose, and execute FP when the actors involved present the identified confusions? In Colombia, it is mandatory to emphasize academic research, analysis and training in FP as a proper state strategy. It is not by accident that the actual international profile of the state (or country, if so) is limited.

Notes

¹ This differentiation does not exist in Latin America, wherein the word *política* encompasses three different meanings at the time, as the reader will see ahead. The issue is also the same in French, Portuguese, and Italian, and surely in other languages derived from Latin.

² In this section it should be noted that in Latin America most countries have Spanish as their official language, which makes this reflection essential, based on the comparison of how concepts are handled when using a different language.

³ They also define politics as a structure and an outcome, hence the need to differentiate between the three dimensions mentioned earlier. This discussion is included in other works that is not possible detailing here. However, the reader should consider Skocpol, Orloff and Weir (1988) and Schmitt (2009)'s works for this academic approach.

⁴ Sartori (2013, p. 208) points to the autonomy of politics from philosophy, naming both Machiavelli and Hobbes for developing this distinction.

⁵ Some other helpful authors regarding this concept are Jenkins (1978), Dubnick and Bardes (1983), Anderson (2003), Kraft and Furlong (2007), and Aguilar (2009).

⁶ It is complex to remove the analysis of FP from the discipline of International Relations, even when the line of scientific research of FPA has been consolidated. In this context, Hudson's work is so relevant. See Hudson and Vore (1995) and Hudson (2008).

⁷ This distinction, however, scarcely took hold in Colombia and Latin America. The empirical work demonstrated that confusion is evident in Colombia. Most believe international politics and FP could be interchangeable words. It was covered by the literature and in many interactions with officials. Academics and representatives erroneously visualize FP as international politics.

⁸ For a wide array of perspectives about International Relations disciplinary discussions and the place of FP, see Sprout and Sprout (1956), Rosenau (1966), Jervis (1976), Putnam (1988), and Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin (2002).

⁹ It is worth mentioning the varied bibliography used by Petrič (2013) in his work. It stands out in its content, which makes use of both Western European and North American authors as well as Eastern European and non-European scholars. This breaks with the Eurocentric and Anglo-Saxon centralism of FP studies and allows the analyst access to a broader range of voices.

¹⁰ In this section, the FP definitions set forth by Laviña and Baldomir (1983) and Calduch (1993) could also be contemplated. Still, the conceptual theme would be reiterated insofar as they are not distant proposals to what was raised by the authors cited in the body of the work.

¹¹ It necessarily means that FP is an institution. Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1997), argued a theoretical approach based on the state power as singular or unique to propose a FP.

¹² Or set of nations, like it is the European Union case. The EU makes a singular FP strategy for all member states. The EU FP has just an official representative, who currently is Josep Borrell.

¹³ This author indicates that "within the strategy (of FP) the possibility of declaring himself as a passive actor (doing nothing) in the face of specific global situations must be considered."

¹⁴ Basic historical information indicates that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had its origins in 1821, when the Constitution of Cúcuta (1821) [article 136 of section 4, of Title 5] defined the establishment of five Secretariats of State, among which included Foreign Relations.

¹⁵ An important part of the academic production after the Gerhard Drekonja's work was reiterated in the position adopted by him regarding his understanding of the CFP. Paraphrasing the terms of one of the most far-reaching works on CFP, it is necessary to note that such reflections revolved around "commonplaces" that were hardly overcome. To this effect, readers may review works such as those by Cardona and Tokatlián (1991), Galeano (2009, 2012), Ghotme (2007), Forero (2011), and Palacio, (2011). Despite working on those principles, no radically different lines were drawn from what was proposed by Drekonja in 1983, except for the proposal of a *respite Omnia* (Fernández de Soto, 2010).

¹⁶ Paradoxically, several academic texts about the CFP had the foreign author Gerard Drekonja as the fore-runner for such studies.

¹⁷ According to the literature review, CFP has been presidential, hermetic, fragmented, and non-institutional. Most of the literature highlights those features as notable. Although CFP could be strategic, it is far away

from the strict sense of a policy. Some interviewees expressed being identified with those characteristics and “irregularities” in formulating FP in the country. It helps to explain and argue why CFP is not a “public policy.”

¹⁸ FPA is still assumed in Colombia as a review of what a government does or fails to do in international matters. The FPA is still not deepened to the required level, understanding it as a field of study of the International Relations, with objectives that point to understanding the decision-making process. Although there are some advances, much efforts are pending in this academic subfield.

¹⁹ Putting aside the much-needed differentiation between FP and international politics in publications. It is an issue to break down both lines in the production addressed since the authors generally omit that aspect.

²⁰ Journal *Desafíos* (34), a special volume of 2022, is the last relevant and prominent publication about FPA of the Colombian case. It is highly recommended.

²¹ The survey was applied to 94 scholars which yielded 73 responses. Of the 73 satisfactory surveys, only 16 members of RedIntercol included a record associated with FP academic products and/or FP teaching courses. The survey included questions about the International Relations discipline, FPA, CFP and FP future studies interests. Different than semi-structured interviews, the survey was closed.

²² Interviews conducted with representatives from the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Relation were anonymous.

²³ Some of them are: Drekonja (1982, 1983), Ardila (1991, 2009), Tokatlián (1996, 2000, 2008), Borda and Tickner (2011), and Ramírez (2011), among others.

²⁴ This group of interviewees downplayed the issue and considered that it is not necessary to differentiate both fields of study from a conceptual perspective. All of them are academics and have improved the research on CFP. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The author saves the files.

²⁵ The author applied a survey regarding International Relations, International Politics, and FP to the RedIntercol (*Red Colombiana de Relaciones Internacionales*) academic community. Juan Pablo Betancur Cuartas conducted more interviews while he developed his research to finish his Political Science studies at the Universidad de Antioquia.

²⁶ This is a recent review made by the author, analyzing all accredited universities in the country. Another finding is that most international studies or International Relations programs are located in the universities of Bogotá. Thus, the academic offer is so limited. For example, there is no single program on international studies in Antioquia, the second most relevant territory (department) in Colombia, just after Bogotá.

²⁷ This Academy is part of the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Relations.

²⁸ It is not inadequate since from the political science approach it is understandable. However, the FPA approach is a field of International Relations. Thus, in practical terms, this research argues for the FP universe far away from the “public policy”. That is another open debate between Political Science and International Relations and an interesting inquiry question for other academic articles.

²⁹ As result of the empirical work, it has been so common finding attempts to explain CFP based on International Relations theories or approaches. Some officials do not distinguish the subfields of the discipline. It was demonstrable with the responses of Interviewees 18 (2016), 21 (2015), 25 (2017), 29 (2017), 31 (2017), 34 (2017), and 36 (2018).

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- Interviewee 36. (2018). Interview with Diplomat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Conducted in November, 2018].

Appendix

Table 5: Information of Interviewees

Information Source	Entity or Institution	Interviewee Reference	Interview Type	Date	Place
Scholars	U. de Antioquia	Interviewee 1	Face-to-Face	April 2017	Medellín
	U. Nacional	Interviewee 2	Face-to-Face	February 2016	Bogotá
	Pontificia U. Javeriana	Interviewee 3	Written	March 2017	Bogotá
	U. Sergio Arboleda	Interviewee 4	Face-to-Face	February 2017	Bogotá
	U. del Norte	Interviewee 5	Face-to-Face	March 2017	Barranquilla
	U. Externado	Interviewee 6	Face-to-Face	September 2017	Bogotá
	U. Pontificia Bolivariana	Interviewee 7	Face-to-Face	April 2017	Medellín
	U. Icesi	Interviewee 8	Written and Telephone	March 2017	Cali
	U. del Rosario	Interviewee 9	Face-to-Face	July 2018	Bogotá
	U. Central de Chile	Interviewee 10	Virtual	April 2017	Santiago
	U. Jorge Tadeo Lozano	Interviewee 11	Written	March 2017	Bogotá
	U. Externado	Interviewee 12	Face-to-Face	September 2018	Bogotá
	U. Jorge Tadeo Lozano	Interviewee 13	Virtual	February 2017	Bogotá
	U. de los Andes	Interviewee 14	Face-to-Face	February 2018	Bogotá
	U. de la Salle	Interviewee 15	Written	March 2017	Bogotá
	Independent*	Interviewee 16	Written and Telephone	May 2017	Cartagena
	U. del Rosario	Interviewee 17	Face-to-Face	December 2017	Bogotá

* This interviewee was affiliated to the Universidad Nacional de Colombia until 2015. She is a retired professor, working as independent.

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Information Source	Entity or Institution	Interviewee Reference	Interview Type	Date	Place
Policymakers and Official Representatives	Senate, 2010-2014	Interviewee 18	Face-to-Face	May 2016	Bogotá
	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Interviewee 19	Face-to-Face	May 2017	Bogotá
	American Chamber of Commerce	Interviewee 20	Face-to-Face	June 2017	Bogotá
	Senate, 2010-2014	Interviewee 21	Face-to-Face	May 2015	Bogotá
	Senate, 2010-2014	Interviewee 22	Face-to-Face	May 2015	Bogotá
	Mincit	Interviewee 23	Face-to-Face	June 2017	Bogotá
	ProBogotá*	Interviewee 24	Telephone	May 2017	Bogotá
	Interamerican Development Bank	Interviewee 25	Virtual	August 2017	Washington DC
	Mincit	Interviewee 26	Face-to-Face	September 2017	Bogotá
	Honeywell**	Interviewee 27	Face-to-Face	August 2017	Bogotá
	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Interviewee 28	Virtual	September 2017	Tokyo
	Mincit	Interviewee 29	Virtual	August 2017	Bogotá
	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Interviewee 30	Face-to-Face	February 2018	Bogotá
	Asociación Nacional de Empresarios	Interviewee 31	Face-to-Face	June 2017	Bogotá
	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Interviewee 32	Face-to-Face	August 2017	Bogotá
	Mincit	Interviewee 33	Face-to-Face	August 2017	Bogotá
	Mincit	Interviewee 34	Virtual	December 2017	Bogotá
	ProColombia***	Interviewee 35	Face-to-Face	June 2018	Bogotá
	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Interviewee 36	Virtual	November 2018	New York

* ProBogotá is the Bogotá's Promotion Office. The interviewee was a Ministry of Foreign Affairs

** Honeywell is a business firm. The interviewee worked the the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism as Director of Economic Integration during the Santos' presidential administration.

*** ProColombia is Colombia's office in charge of promoting exports, international tourism and foreign investment.