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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

The Political Culture of Democracy, 2010

Democratic Consolidation in the Americas in Hard Times

Report on the Americas — Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

How do citizens' democratic attitudes and behaviors change under crisis conditions? As the 2010 AmericasBarometer survey went into the field, the Americas were undergoing one of the worst worldwide economic crises of the past century. In this report we seek to understand the impact of the crisis on citizens' lives and democratic values in the Americas. We ask such questions as: *Did pro-democracy attitudes decline under crisis conditions? Is support for the political system lower? And, who has been most affected by the economic crisis?* As the reader will find, there are many surprises, a number of them pleasant ones for those who might have feared that democracy would collapse under the weight of economic crisis.

In Part I of this report, we present a descriptive overview of the economic crisis at the global, regional, and individual levels. We also provide the main descriptive cross-national evidence regarding key economic variables from the AmericasBarometer 2010, comparing the countries and regions in our sample. In other words, we are able to assess who within the Americas has been most affected by the crisis and in what ways, if any, their attitudes and behaviors toward democracy may have been altered under crisis conditions.

The introductory chapter first provides an overview of the economic crisis, documenting its impact on economic growth, poverty, employment, and remittances across the hemisphere. It then describes the regional and worldwide “democracy recession,” and discusses reasons to be concerned that the economic crisis might affect democratic attitudes and values.

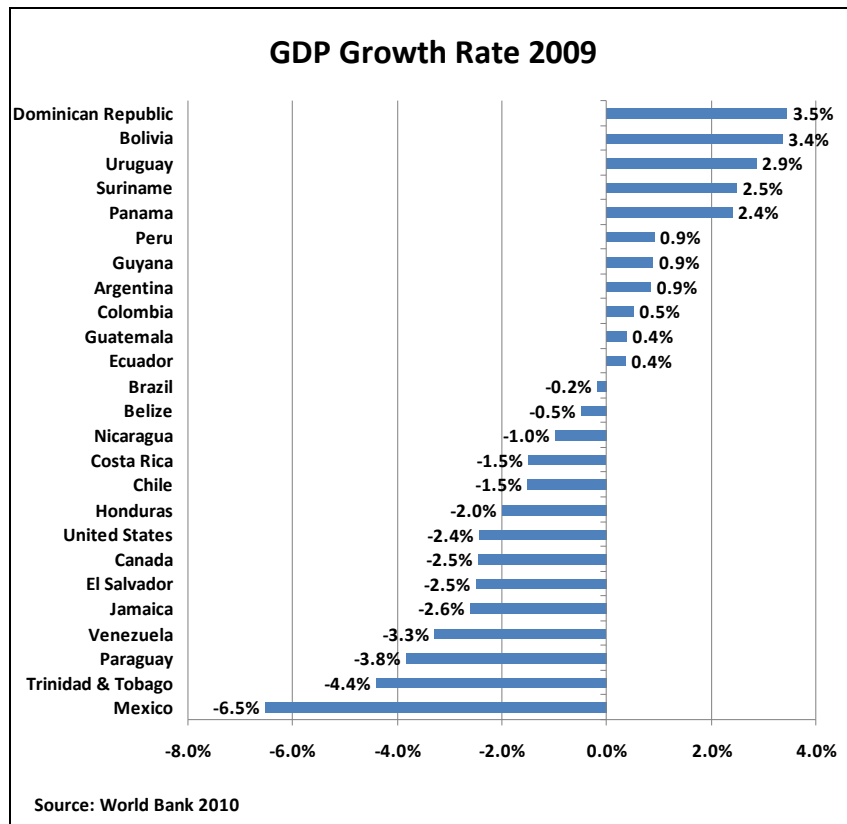


Figure 1. Change in Real GDP, 2008-2009

In Chapter II we assess economic experiences and perceptions in 2010 across the Americas. Results indicate that the vast majority of citizens, 90%, perceive that there is an economic crisis in 2010, and that they are evenly split between those who perceive it as not very serious and those who perceive it as very serious. Perceptions of crisis are higher in countries such as Jamaica, Honduras, Nicaragua and the United States, where nearly all respondents report that their countries have faced an economic crisis. Interestingly, when asked who is responsible for the economic crisis, 40% percent of citizens across the Americas point to either their own previous or current administration; few citizens of the Americas blame the advanced industrial nations for the crisis, although those with greater access to political information are more likely to do so. Yet, even though most economists would argue that the crisis began with a serious meltdown of the financial systems in the advanced industrial nations, citizens of Latin America and the Caribbean do not see those nations as the primary cause of the crisis.

Regarding personal impacts of the economic crisis, 27% of households in the Americas have seen at least one of their family members lose their jobs; unemployment has especially affected countries such as Mexico and Colombia, where almost 40% of respondents reported that someone in their household lost his or her job in the last two years. At the same time, a little over a quarter of households in the Americas report a drop in income in the past two years, while a little under a quarter report a rise in income. Still, about half of all respondents report no real change in their incomes, leaving us with about three out of every four citizens telling our interviewers that they either gained income or did not lose it during this period of worldwide economic decline. Because of that, it is not surprising that we find that citizens of many countries in the Americas are actually more positive about the national and personal economies in 2010 than they were in 2008. Nonetheless, we should highlight that the economic crisis has not affected all citizens equally. Reduction of income has been more widespread among citizens living in rural areas, especially those within the lowest wealth brackets, than among their urban and wealthier counterparts.

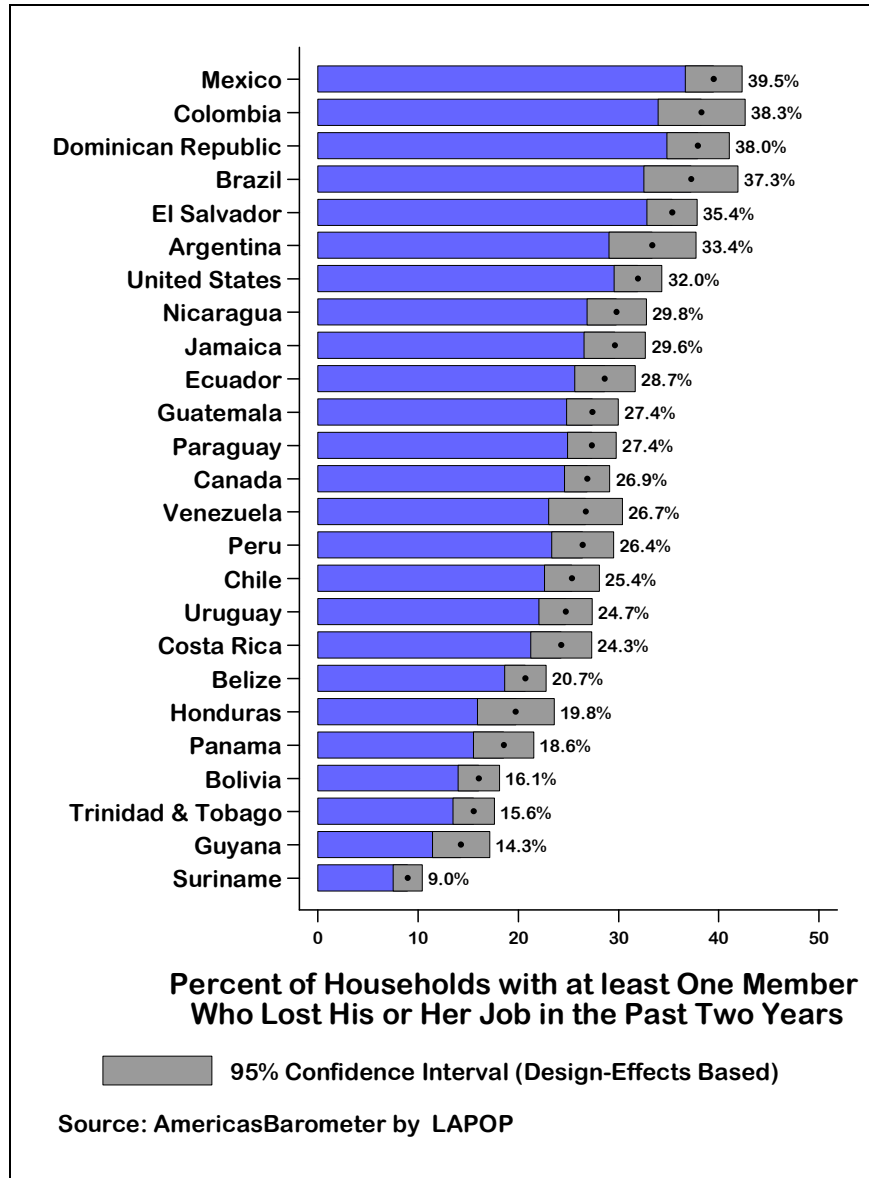


Figure 2. Percentage of Households with at least One Family Member Who Lost a Job in the Past Two Years, 2010

In the third chapter we examine respondents' life satisfaction (happiness) and democratic values in the context of the economic downturn. On the one hand, the survey data suggest that respondents who report that they are less satisfied now than they were two years ago are also likely to have reported that their personal economic situations have deteriorated over the past two years, that they have had a drop in household income, that they perceive a national economic crisis and that someone in their households has lost a job. On the other hand, the finding that most stands out in this round of surveys is that citizens who perceive that the national government has been doing a good job are more likely to report increased levels of satisfaction and stronger support for democratic values. In other words, we find that good governance matters; during times of crisis, good governance can help citizens retain their confidence in democracy and other key values.

We examine further democratic values in the context of global economic crisis. In this section, we uncover a puzzle. At the individual level, we find strong evidence that positive perceptions of government economic performance and of the national economy are a major determinant of support for democracy and the political system. In addition, economic variables such as the perception of a serious crisis and experiences with unemployment are negatively linked to support for democracy and system support, while they are positively related to support for military coups in the Americas. However, our results also demonstrate that in general in the Americas support for democracy, system support and satisfaction with democracy have not declined substantially in the past two years as a consequence of the crisis (although there is some variation across countries). We resolve this puzzle by showing that changes in these democratic attitudes were very strongly linked to changes in perceptions of both the national economy and the economic performance of government in the 2008-2010 period. The fact that in many countries perceptions of both actually *improved* over this period buoyed political support in the Americas despite hard times. Governments have confronted the crisis more ably than they have done in many prior crises in the Americas, suggesting a new level of improved governance in many countries. We thus conclude the first part by arguing that unprecedented levels of macroeconomic stability coupled with pro-poor policies that helped mitigate the crisis for those most affected by it, in the midst of a worldwide economic crisis may well have staved off not only more serious economic decline but also threats to democracy itself.

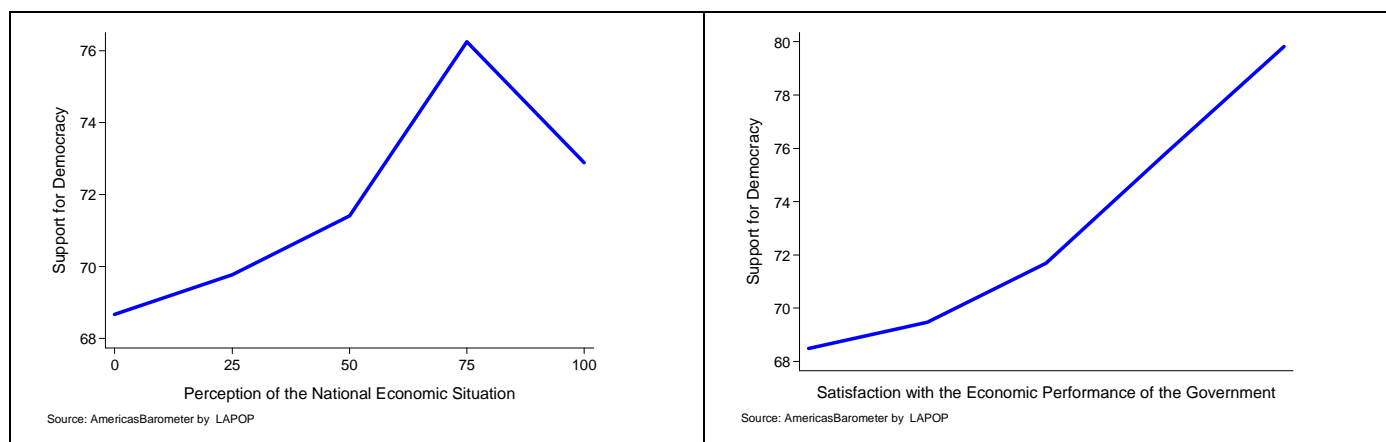


Figure 3. The Impact of Economic Attitudes on Support for Democracy in the Americas, 2008 vs. 2010

Part II shifts the focus away from the economic crisis and deals with the rule of law, crime, corruption, and civil society. Chapter IV investigates the association between crime and corruption and democratic values in the region, showing that corruption and crime hurt support for the political system and the rule of law, or the belief that all citizens should be subject to the law. Results from the 2010 AmericasBarometer show high levels of perceived insecurity in the Americas, with Peru topping the list. Moreover, almost 20% of respondents across the region report having been victims of crime in the past year. In this case, Peru and Ecuador are the countries with the highest levels of victimization as reported to our survey teams. Important variation exists by the type of crime (violent vs. non-violent) and across countries and regions. One pattern uncovered in the study is that men, those with higher incomes, and the highly educated are more likely to be victims of crime in the AmericasBarometer countries.

We then investigate perceptions and experiences of corruption among public officials. We find that in every country in the region, citizen perceptions of public corruption are quite high. We find, however, that perception of corruption is not closely linked to actual victimization by corruption, and we

believe that the latter is a better measure of corruption levels than the former. The carefully developed and reliable LAPOP corruption series measures corruption victimization at the level of the common citizen and therefore does not claim to measure high-level corruption. Yet, there is strong reason to believe that levels of corruption found in everyday life are closely linked to the levels of corruption among high public officials. The data from the AmericasBarometer show that experiences with corruption present a very diverse pattern across countries. For instance, in Haiti half of respondents reported having been asked for a bribe in the year prior to the survey, while only 4% of Canadians did so. We think that variation is a valid reflection of corruption levels in the two countries, yet Haitian and Canadian citizens differ little in their perceptions of the level of corruption in their countries. It is encouraging to find that whereas perceptions of corruption have remained high over time, actual corruption victimization has declined since 2004, at least in the eleven countries for which we have data from that year. Finally, as with crime victimization, we find that men and citizens with higher levels of wealth are more likely to be victims of corruption. We interpret this to mean that those who demand bribes direct their attention to those who have the money to pay (the wealthier) and to those who are more likely to be conducting public transactions (men).

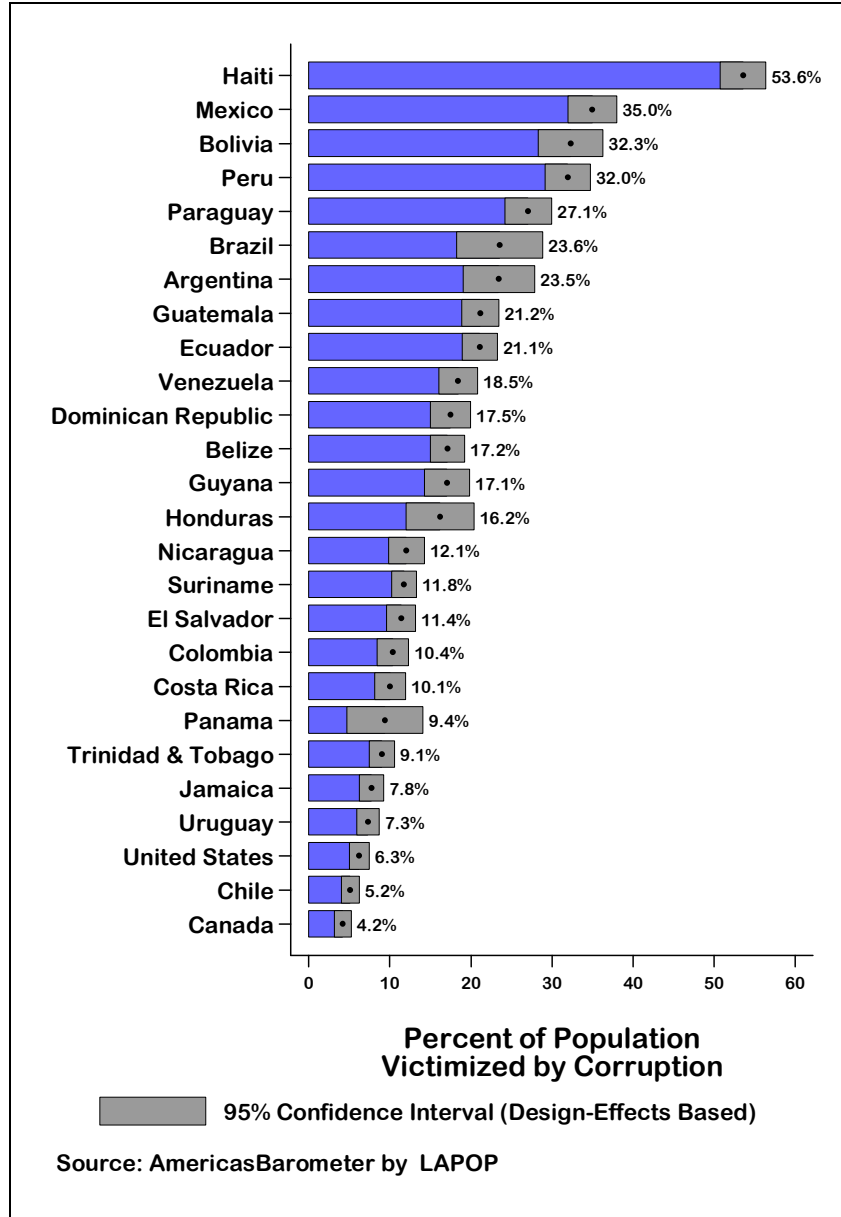


Figure 4. Corruption Victimization in Comparative Perspective, 2010

Chapter V examines levels of system support and political tolerance in the Americas along with levels of trust in the main institutions and support for and satisfaction with democracy. The evidence shows that the percentage of citizens with attitudes favorable to stable democracy, that is those with high levels of both support for the political system and political tolerance, varies from country to country in the Americas. For instance, whereas half of Uruguayans hold the combination of attitudes most conducive to stable democracy, only 3.7% of Haitians do so. The survey data also reveal that levels of support for stable democracy are affected negatively by perceptions of and experiences with crime and corruption and by poor evaluations of the performance of the incumbent president, one of the key variables that emerges throughout this report.

We also measure levels of confidence in the main political institutions in each country, contrasting those levels with trust in certain social institutions. Across the Americas, respondents trust the Catholic Church and the Army the most, while political institutions such as congresses and political parties receive the least trust. Finally, we observe that support for the idea that democracy is the best form of government is relatively high and stable over time. Moreover, in 2010 in the Americas as a whole almost 60% of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with the way democracy is working in their countries.

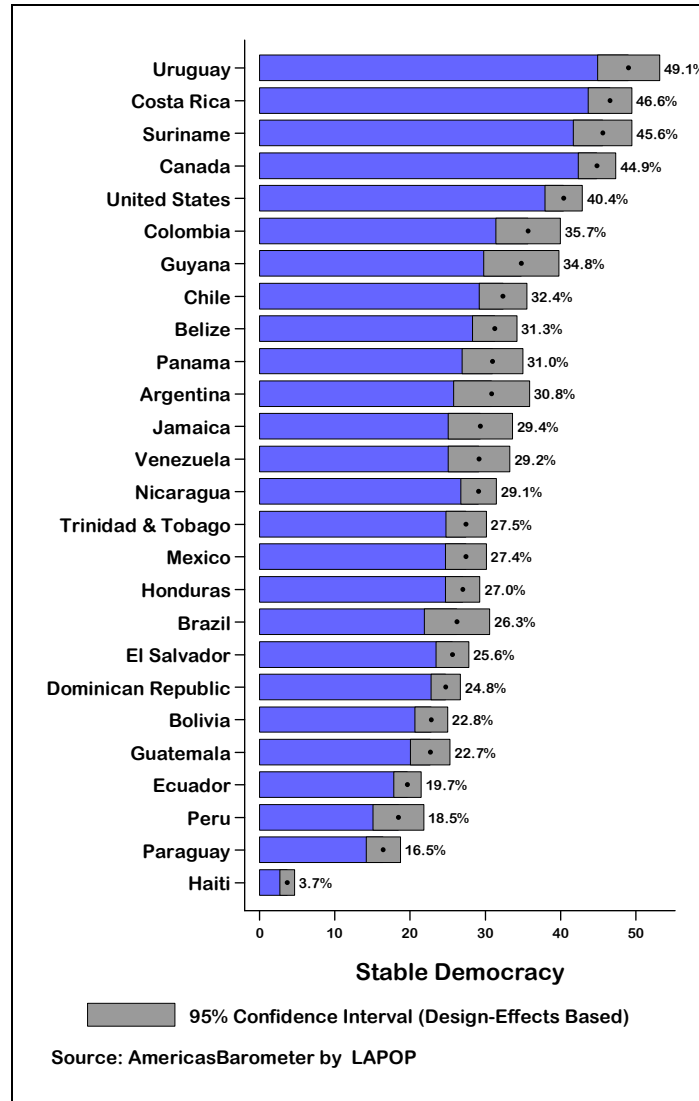


Figure 5. Support for Stable Democracy in Comparative Perspective, 2010

Chapter VI is devoted to civil society and political participation. First, we examine levels of interpersonal trust and find that the majority of respondents across the Americas consider the people in their communities to be either somewhat or very trustworthy. However, we find sharp contrasts among countries. Citizens in Costa Rica, one of the most consolidated democracies in the Americas, express the highest levels of interpersonal trust (an average of 70.2 on a 100-point scale), whereas those in Haiti express the lowest (at 32.7 on the same scale). Many studies confirm that social capital, measured in terms of interpersonal trust, is important for democracy. The data also reveal that levels of interpersonal trust are shaped by respondents' perceptions of insecurity, crime victimization, and perceptions of the economy.

Second, in this chapter we assess participation in civil society organizations. This chapter shows that citizens in the Americas participate in religious meetings more than in any other type of organization, and that Haitians are exceptionally participatory within civil society groups. When we consider participation in protests and electoral participation we find wide variation across countries. For instance, Haiti has the highest levels of participation in protests and Chile has the highest turnout levels, while Jamaicans engaged in the lowest levels of participation in these two types of activities. Protest levels, however, vary by circumstances, so the earthquake in Haiti probably has a lot to do with the current high levels of participation found there. Furthermore, we also see that most citizens throughout the Americas report little or no interest in politics, though this is a common phenomenon worldwide. Still, we find great variation in political interest throughout the Americas, with average reported political interest ranging from 28 in Haiti, Chile, and Guyana to 73 in the United States.

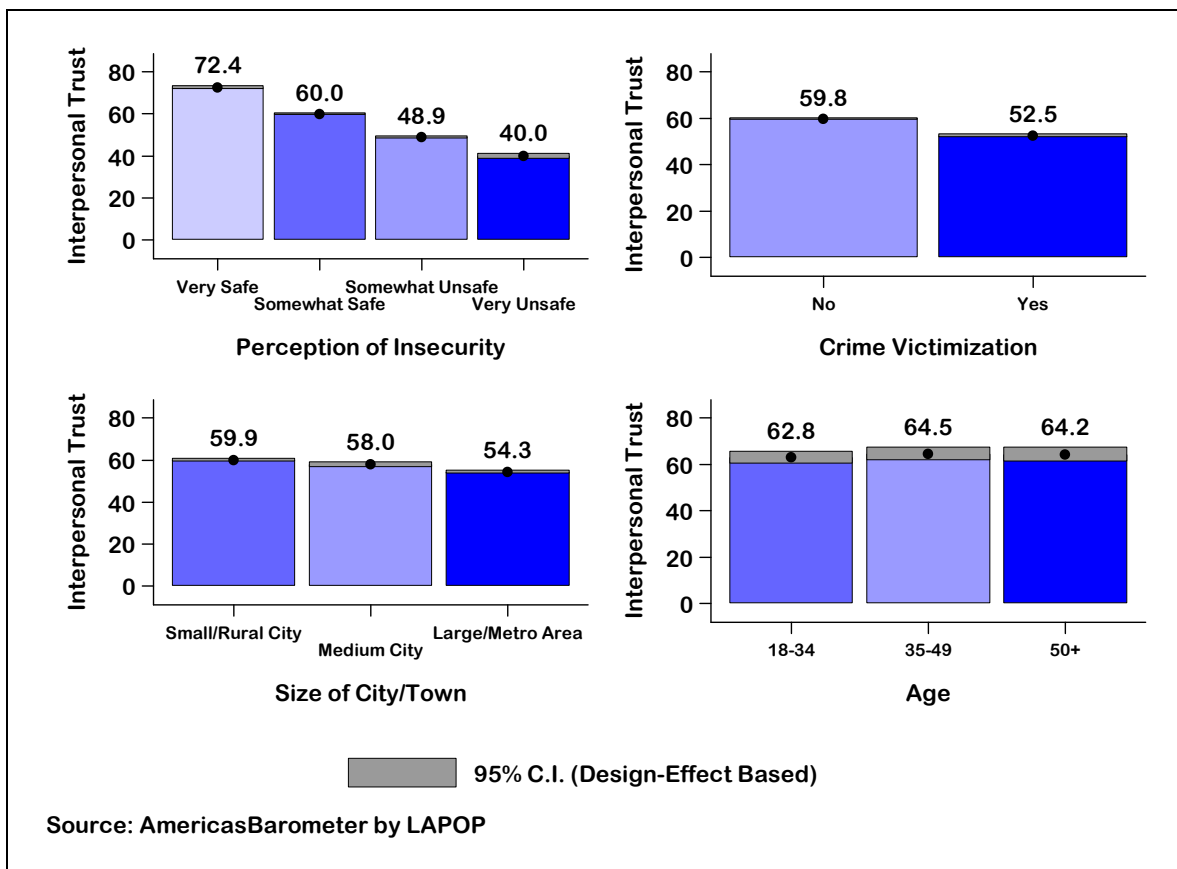


Figure 6. Interpersonal Trust by Perception of Insecurity, Crime Victimization, Size of City/Town and Age in the Americas, 2010

Finally, Chapter VII addresses citizens' perceptions and experiences related to local government. In general, we observe low levels of attendance at municipal meetings in most countries. The Dominican Republic has the highest levels of attendance, while Panama and Chile have the lowest ones. The survey data reveal that 13% of respondents have made demands or requests to local government in the past year, but that most report that despite their demand-making, their problems went unresolved. We find that those who attend municipal meetings and who perceive their family economic situation as negative are

most likely to make a request or demand of a local government official. Last, levels of satisfaction with local services are generally moderate. Colombia and Canada have the highest levels of satisfaction with local services, while Haitians, not surprisingly in light of the devastation of the earthquake that preceded our survey, are among the most dissatisfied.

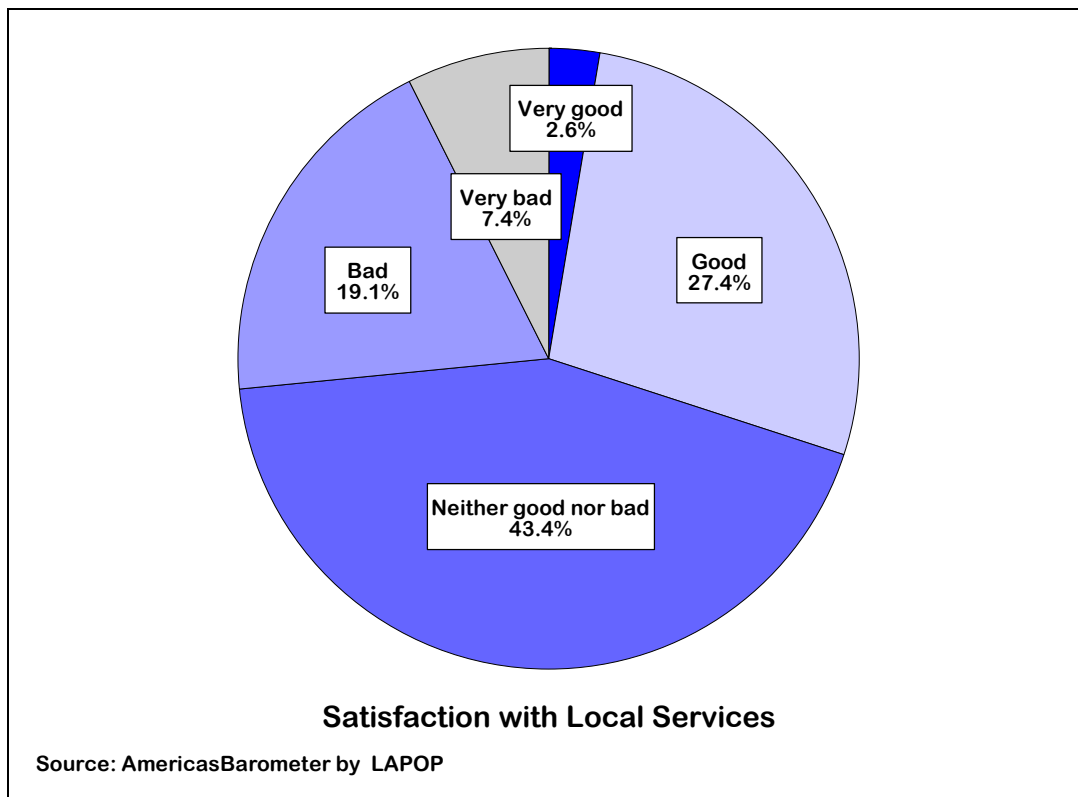


Figure 7. Satisfaction with Local Government Services in the Americas, 2010

Our goal in this report is to take a citizen-eye view of the quality and prospects of democracy in the Americas at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. We are driven in particular by concern for the possible negative impacts of the economic crisis that rolled across the hemisphere over the past two years, and for the potential effects of intensifying crime and corruption in the region. A number of our empirical findings, based on over 40,000 interviews in 26 countries, should allay many of these concerns, though others point to areas in which democracy continues to be at risk in terms of citizen support. On the positive side of the regional democratic balance sheet, we find that the economic crisis did not correlate with declining democratic attitudes in the region, that support for and satisfaction with democracy remain high, and that there has been little change in support for the political system over the past six years.

On the other hand, however, we find that economic experiences and perceptions *do* affect democratic attitudes, such that an even more severe economic crisis might have a more deleterious impact. Crime and corruption continue to pose barriers to democratic consolidation at the citizen level. And, citizens holding both high system support and high political tolerance, the combination of attitudes we believe are most conducive to creating a political culture supportive of stable democracy, remain in the minority in the region. While support for democracy as a system of government is high, participation

in many forms of civil society as well as in politics is low in most countries, suggesting that most citizens in the Americas support democracy in theory but are disengaged from the activities and behaviors that can contribute to a more robust democracy. Most importantly, this report reveals great variation among countries, both across the hemisphere and within Latin America and the Caribbean; democratic attitudes and behaviors are highly consolidated in some countries, while in others we find worrisome democratic weaknesses.

To read more, please see the full report online:

www.AmericasBarometer.org

The AmericasBarometer

This study forms part of a research program that the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) of Vanderbilt University has been carrying out for more than two decades. LAPOP is a consortium of academic institutions spread throughout the Americas, with its headquarters in Vanderbilt University in the United States. More than 30 institutions throughout the region participate in LAPOP, whose efforts are directed at producing objective, non-partisan, and scientifically sound studies of public opinion. Those studies focus primarily on the measurement of attitudes and behavior related to democracy. The Project has received generous support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Département of Political Science of Vanderbilt University, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), as well as the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile and the Kellogg Institute of Notre Dame University. LAPOP also maintains linkages with the World Bank, the Organization of American States and others.

The most recent surveys, whose results are analyzed and discussed in this publication, were carried out in 2010, using a nationally representative sample in both urban and rural areas. The 2010 round of studies included 26 countries in the Americas, which allows for comparison of the results of each individual country with other countries in the region.

The public can access the data at no charge via our web page: www.lapopsurveys.org. The data, reports, articles and books that the Latin American Public Opinion Project produces are free and available to the public. This research and the data can also be accessed at our "data repositories" and subscribers at such universities as Columbia, Duke, Harvard, Notre Dame, Oxford University, Princeton, Stanford, the University of Texas, the University of North Carolina, Yale, and the Brookings Institution; and at institutions in Latin America such as the University of Costa Rica and Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. With these initiatives, LAPOP continues to collaborate with the development of academic and policy excellence throughout the Americas.

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