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Mano Dura in the Americas: Who Supports Iron Fist Rule?

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Executive Summary: This *Insights* report investigates the extent to which performance failures, and other factors, influence public attitudes over so called "iron fist" policies, which is centralized get-tough approaches to governance, known in Spanish-speaking Latin America as "*mano dura*." Using data from the 2010 AmericasBarometer survey, we examine the extent to which citizens support a policy of iron fist rule rather than preferring widespread public participation in governance issues. We find that support for *mano dura* varies across countries, though support for it is not the majority opinion in any country in the Americas. We find that education is the strongest predictor of opposition to *mano dura* among socioeconomic variables, while level of wealth is less consequential. Focusing on the influence of government performance failures in predicting support for *mano dura* policies, we find that crime victimization, perceptions of insecurity, direct experience with corruption, and perceptions of corruption all independently predict increased support for *mano dura*. In addition, we find that interpersonal trust matters: those lower in social trust are more supportive of iron fist rule.

LAPOP is pleased to note that this report was developed and written by undergraduate students participating in a Vanderbilt University honors seminar in the Spring of 2012. That class, HONS186, was taught by Professor E. J. Zechmeister and Margarita Corral acted as teaching assistant. Author names are listed here in alphabetical order; biographies of the authors are provided in the report appendix.

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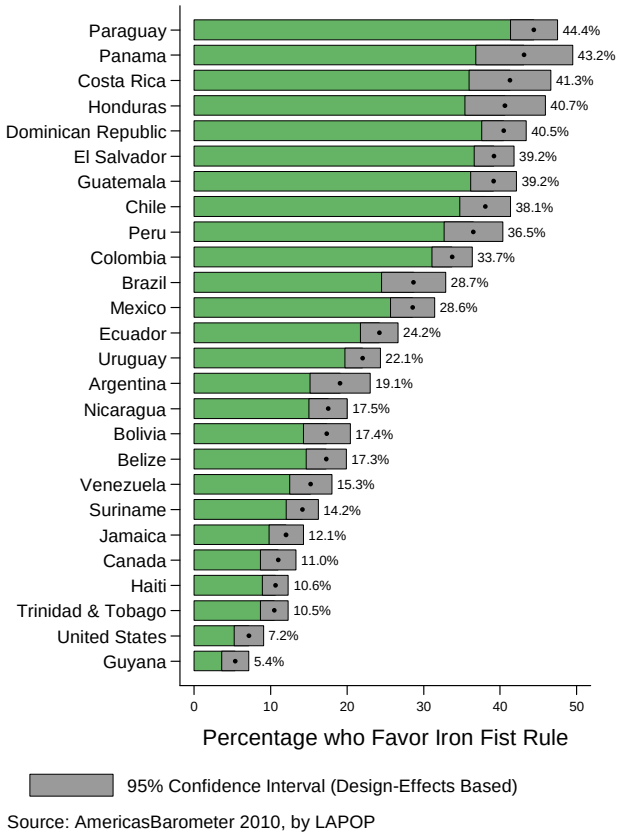
In recent times, crime rates have been steadily increasing and widely affecting societies within the Latin American and Caribbean regions (e.g., Malone 2010). Crime and the insecurity it fosters pose major obstacles to democratization (Pérez 2003-2004). Some governments in Latin America have turned to *mano dura* programs or iron fist policies, which use hardline and militaristic approaches to combat crime. People's support for *mano dura* differs depending on a range of factors, but most scholars have hitherto focused predominantly on crime. When fear of crime is high, people are more likely to accept a *mano dura* authoritarian approach to combat crime (Goldstein, Achá, Hinojosa, and Roncken 2007). Additionally, support for *mano dura* is highest in countries where crime rates are the highest (Malone 2006). In order to examine more broadly what factors lead to support for *mano dura* across the Americas, we assess and compare the extent to which various indicators of performance failure, as well as interpersonal trust, predict attitudes toward iron fist governance in the Americas.

This report focuses on the following question from the 2010 AmericasBarometer[1] survey by LAPOP[2]:

DEM11. "Do you think that our country needs a government with an iron fist, or that problems can be resolved with everyone's participation?"[3]

Figure 1 shows the percentage of people who favor iron fist rule, as opposed to "everyone's participation," by country with confidence intervals. We notice that fewer than 50% of people favor iron fist rule in all countries surveyed, which suggests that the public in the Americas generally does not support iron fist rule. Yet, support for iron fist rule varies across countries. Guyana demonstrates the least support for iron fist rule at 5.4%, while Paraguay exhibits the highest support at 44.4%. Not surprisingly given prior research connecting violence to preference for iron fist rule, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, the three countries with the highest homicide rates in the Central American region,[4] have some of the highest rates of support for *mano dura*. We also notice that the countries are not grouped at

Figure 1. Support for Iron Fist Rule in the Americas, 2010



Source: AmericasBarometer 2010, by LAPOP

[1] Funding for the 2010 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University

[2] Prior issues in the *Insights* Series can be found at: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php
The data on which they are based can be found at http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php

[3] The question was asked to 42,486 respondents across all 26 countries (a split sample format in the US and Canada meant the question was asked of only 750 individuals in each of these two countries); the non-response rate across the pooled sample is 2.7%.

[4] Casas-Zamora, Kevin. 2011 (May 25). "U.S.-Central America Security Cooperation." United States Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, Written testimony.

the two extremes; instead, the figure shows a steady increase of support for iron fist rule from 5.4% to 44.4%.

We find Costa Rica's support level for iron fist rule at 41.3% particularly interesting, because people in Costa Rica generally have comparatively high levels of support for democracy.[5] This seeming discrepancy between support of iron fist rule and democracy illustrates that the two are not mutually exclusive (see Seligson 2003).[6] Further, it suggests that the word "democracy" may have different nuances and connotations in different countries. Despite the interesting cross-national differences that we see in the data, in this report we focus on individual-level explanations of support for *mano dura*.

[A]s levels of education increase, people become less likely to support mano dura.

Socioeconomic and Demographic Predictors of Support for an Iron Fist Rule

What at the individual level predicts support for iron fist rule? In this section we first examine a simple model in which we predict support for *mano dura* with five standard socioeconomic and demographic measures: urban (versus rural) area of residence; wealth (measured in quintiles)[7]; age; sex; and education. Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, we run a logistic regression. We also exclude the U.S. and Canada from this and additional analyses, in order to focus on the Latin American and Caribbean regions.

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Figure 2. As with all *Insights* reports, the dot in the figure represents the standardized regression coefficient and the lines represent the 95% confidence intervals around that estimate. The results in Figure 2 demonstrate that living in urban versus rural areas does not have a significant effect on people's support for *mano dura*, which is seen in the figure by the confidence interval lines overlapping with the vertical "0" line. On the other hand, the results show that people who are wealthier, younger, and female are significantly less likely to support *mano dura*.

To evaluate the effect of education on support for *mano dura*, we compare respondents with primary, secondary, and university educations to those with no education (the latter is the omitted comparison category in the analysis). We expect that people with higher education levels will be more likely to support "everyone's participation" over *mano dura*. Glaeser, Ponzetto and Shleifer (2007) argue that education promotes civic participation by socializing children and teaching them how to cooperate. Additionally, these authors note that "education raises the benefits of political participation" (5); thus, education may encourage people to support systems that allow significant levels of public participation in politics. Consequently, education should be negatively correlated with people's support for *mano dura*.

We notice from Figure 2 that as levels of education increase, people become less likely to support *mano dura*. The figure shows that primary education has the smallest negative coefficient, secondary education has a middle-

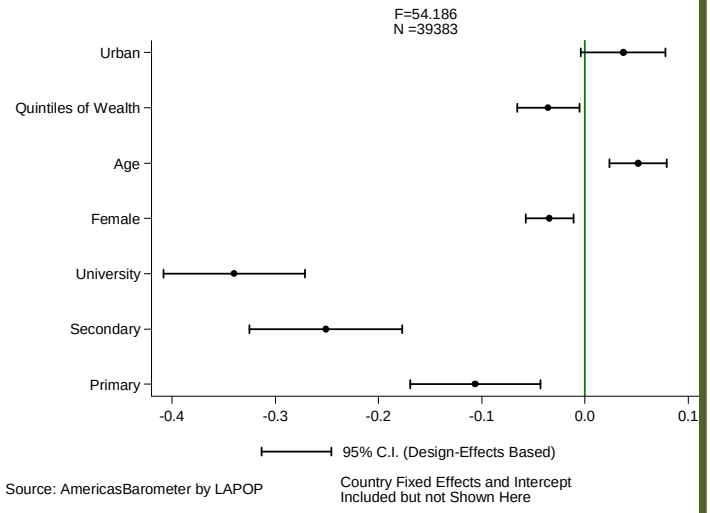
[5] Seligson, Mitchell A. and Amy Erica Smith. 2010. "The Political Culture of Democracy, 2010." *AmericasBarometer Insights Series*. (December 13, 2010). <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/2010-RegRep-en2.pdf>. (April 3, 2012).

[6] Seligson (2003, p. 563) discusses survey research showing that "respondents in Latin America can simultaneously prefer leaders who rule with a strong hand while preferring democracy over dictatorship."

[7] See Abby Córdova, 2009, "Methodological Note: Measuring Relative Wealth using Household Asset Indicators" for a description of the construction of the wealth index: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/I0806en.pdf

valued coefficient, and university education has the largest negative coefficient. These effects should each be interpreted in comparison to the reference category, which are those respondents reporting having received no formal education. In particular, we find that each education level is a significant negative predictor of support for *mano dura*. Additionally, we find that the higher the education level is, the more negative the predictor is. Therefore, the likelihood of supporting *mano dura* decreases with every level of education. This negative correlation between education and support for *mano dura* fits our expectation.

Figure 2. Socioeconomic and Demographic Predictors of Support for an Iron Fist Rule



Performance Failures, Interpersonal Trust, and Support for *Mano Dura*

In this section we explore what other factors might render a person more likely to support *mano dura*. More specifically, we formulate expectations about the effects of various "performance failures" and interpersonal trust on support for *mano dura*. We examine performance failures through public opinion about problems related to crime and corruption (though, as we note later, we also tested and found similar effects for economic factors). For both crime and corruption, we find that both direct victimization and higher perceptions of these problems are associated with higher support for *mano dura*. With respect to interpersonal trust, we find that those who are more trusting of their neighbors are less likely to support *mano dura*. In the analysis that follows, we first explain the logic behind our expectations for these variables, and then describe the results in more detail.

We expect that those who are victimized by crime and who perceive insecurity are more likely to support *mano dura*. Scholarship indicates that crime victims seek swift solutions to issues of crime; thus, victims turn to *mano dura* policies, which tend to implement quick and harsh programs to suppress crime (Dammert and Malone 2006; Pérez 2003).[8] Other scholars contend that perception of insecurity or fear of crime puts pressure on governments to respond to crime in overt and punitive ways, which again encompasses *mano dura* (Goldstein et al. 2007, Hume 2007; Smulovitz 2003). Seligson (2003) indicates that crime victimization may not be directly correlated with support for *mano dura*; rather, crime victimization produces fear of crime, which then affects democratic attitudes. Since the scholarship is conflicted about whether crime victimization or perception of crime matters more, we test both factors. We expect that both crime victimization and perception of insecurity will be positively correlated with support for *mano dura*.

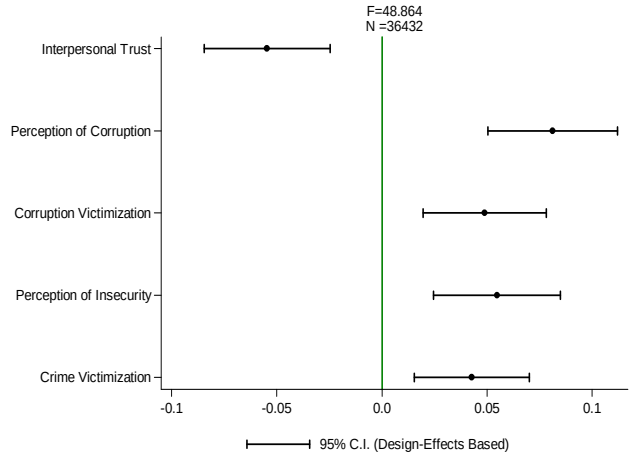
Little has been written about either the relationship between corruption victimization and perceptions of corruption, or the

[8] Pérez (2003, p. 638) argues that *mano dura* "in many instances results in highly repressive and undemocratic measures."

relationship of these variables and support for *mano dura*. However, we believe that corruption victimization and perception of corruption will both be positively correlated with support for *mano dura*. We theorize that, in a manner analogous to the reactions to crime described above, those who have been victimized by corruption seek fast solutions to the issue of corruption, and thus turn to *mano dura* policies. Seligson (2006) finds that corruption victimization, independent of perception of corruption, erodes democratic legitimacy. Thus, we expect victims of corruption to be less likely to support solving problems with "everyone's participation." However, Seligson (2006) also argues that "even if corruption is at low levels, if perception is that it is high, democracy could be weakened" (Seligson 2006, 382). Morris and Klesner (2010) suggest that perception of corruption and the resulting lack of trust make citizens less likely to "work actively with others or the government to seek solutions to the problem of corruption" (1276). For these reasons, we also expect those with higher perceptions of corruption to be less likely to support "everyone's participation."

We also expect that those who trust their neighbors will be less likely to support *mano dura* and will desire everyone's participation in democracy instead. Almond and Verba (1989) claim that social attitudes affect political attitudes. They state that those who have more "faith in people" tend to believe that they can work with each other to "influence the government" (228). Consequently, we expect that people with higher levels of interpersonal trust will tend to value other citizens' abilities and contributions more. Thus, they are more likely to support everyone's participation rather than *mano dura policies*. Using the 2008 AmericasBarometer survey data, Pérez (2009) finds that people with lower levels of interpersonal trust are more likely to support military coups. Since support for military coups represents a preference for hardline policies in a way that is somewhat analogous to *mano dura* approaches, we expect that people with lower levels of interpersonal trust are also more likely to support *mano dura*.

Figure 3. Support for *Mano Dura* Varies by Performance Failures and Interpersonal Trust



To test our expectations, we created a multiple variable logistic regression model, which includes the individual level characteristics seen in Figure 2[9] and the following variables: crime victimization, perceptions of insecurity, corruption victimization, perceptions of corruption, and interpersonal trust.[10] As

[9] Full results appear in the Appendix.

[10] The item that measures crime victimization is **VIC1EXT**. "Now, changing the subject, have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, have you been a victim of robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats or any other type of crime in the past 12 months?" Perception of insecurity is measured using **AOJ11**. "Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being victim of assault or robbery, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?" Corruption victimization is based on a series of questions asking about whether the respondent has been received a request for a bribe from the police, public employees, municipal officials, anyone at work, in the justice system, when using health services, and at school. Perception of corruption is measured using the item **EXC7**. "Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption among public officials is very common, common, uncommon or very uncommon?"

illustrated in Figure 3, the results of our statistical analysis support our expectation that performance failures (as measured by crime victimization, perception of insecurity, corruption victimization and perception of corruption) are positively correlated with support for *mano dura*. We also find that interpersonal trust is negatively correlated with support for *mano dura*. All five variables are statistically significant.

Figure 3 illustrates how crime victimization and perception of insecurity are both statistically significant, independent of one another. Similarly, corruption victimization and perceptions of corruption are statistically significant, independent of each other, and while controlling for all other variables in the model. Thus, while prior research has focused primarily on crime, we can conclude that not only crime, but also other performance failures – such as corruption – can cause individuals to prefer iron fist rule in the Americas.[11]

Conclusion

The strong predictive effects of education levels and performance failures prove to be our most important findings in respect to explaining support for *mano dura* policies. We expected education to be linked with democracy, but it is interesting that support for *mano dura* continues to decline with each increased level of education. It is also significant that, in contrast, wealth levels are less important in our study. Our findings about performance failures suggest that support for *mano dura* can be a reflection of *overall* government performance rather than only issues related to crime prevention and punishment. This finding is important because it suggests that support for *mano dura* could remain high even if victimization rates decline as long as other insecurities remain.[12] Additionally, perceptions of corruption appear to have a substantially stronger relationship to support for *mano dura* than victimization itself. This is important because support for *mano dura* could still be high even if corruption rates go down.

These findings are significant for politicians and policymakers, since they suggest that crime victimization and insecurity are not the only or even the most significant factors in determining support for *mano dura*. In fact, our analysis suggests that perception of corruption may be the strongest predictor among measures of performance failures. It is important to note that increased media attention on anti-corruption efforts could actually increase rates of corruption perception even when actual corruption is declining (Seligson 2006). Thus, an unintended side-effect of anti-corruption campaigns could be to increase support for iron fist rule. Therefore, we advise policy makers to continue efforts to stamp out corruption while focusing on the importance of broadly inclusive civic and political participation, which are crucial aspects of the democratic process. To the degree that policy makers seek to decrease support for iron fist rule, we advise increasing access to education because even primary education significantly decreases support for *mano dura*.

Responses were recoded so that larger figures mean greater perceived corruption. Finally, we measure interpersonal trust using **IT1**. "Now, speaking of the people from around here, would you say that people in this community are very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy or untrustworthy...?" Again, the responses were recalibrated so that larger numbers mean more interpersonal trust.

[11] In an analysis that we conducted but have not shown in this report, we found that negative perceptions of the economic situation of the country were also positively correlated with support for *mano dura*, while perceptions of the personal economic situation were statistically insignificant. A line of scholarship suggests that it is difficult for people to relate their personal situation to the broader economic situation or politics (Villarreal 1999, 136). The finding for the national economic situation, though, suggests that even perceived economic performance failures matter for support for iron fist rule.

[12] A study of national crime rates might be interesting to pursue in future research, but we do not include it here for the sake of brevity in this report.

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Appendix –

Table 1. Predictors of Support for Iron Fist Rule in Latin America and the Caribbean 2010

	Coefficient	**Standard Error**	**Coefficient**	**Standard Error**
Primary Education	-0.106*	0.0322	-0.1081*	0.0357
Secondary Education	-0.251*	0.0377	-0.2693*	0.0414
University	-0.339*	0.0349	-0.3607*	0.0377
Female	-0.034*	0.0117	-0.0272*	0.0123
Age	0.051*	0.0140	0.0544*	0.0146
Urban	0.037	0.0208	0.0218	0.0213
Quintiles of Wealth	-0.035*	0.0153	-0.0346*	0.0155
Crime Victimization			0.0428*	0.0139
Perception of Insecurity			0.0548*	0.0154
Corruption Victimization			0.0489*	0.0149
Perception of Corruption			0.0812*	0.0157
Interpersonal Trust			-0.0547*	0.0153
Mexico	0.064*	0.018	0.0478*	0.0194
Guatemala	0.145*	0.017	0.1333*	0.0182
El Salvador	0.155*	0.016	0.1508*	0.0172
Honduras	0.155*	0.026	0.1528*	0.0264
Nicaragua	-0.051*	0.021	-0.0573*	0.0207
Costa Rica	0.164*	0.024	0.1619*	0.0239
Panama	0.197*	0.026	0.1906*	0.0245
Colombia	0.132*	0.017	0.1241*	0.0179
Ecuador	0.045	0.025	0.0309	0.0259
Bolivia	-0.052	0.033	-0.0642*	0.0314
Peru	0.154*	0.020	0.1324*	0.0205
Paraguay	0.198*	0.017	0.1879*	0.0187
Chile	0.177*	0.020	0.1809*	0.0216
Brazil	0.074*	0.028	0.0643*	0.0300
Venezuela	-0.070*	0.023	-0.0797*	0.0235
Argentina	-0.021	0.026	-0.0385*	0.0268
Dominican Rep.	0.152*	0.017	0.1359	0.0182
Haiti	-0.161*	0.024	-0.1866*	0.0266
Jamaica	-0.120*	0.024	-0.1211*	0.0242
Guyana	-0.288*	0.037	-0.2829*	0.0358
Trinidad & Tobago	-0.148*	0.022	-0.1640*	0.0235
Belize	-0.065*	0.022	-0.0800*	0.0226
Suriname	-0.071*	0.022	-0.0628*	0.0241
Constant	-1.174*	0.021	-1.1774*	0.0204
F	*54.19*		*48.86*	
Number of Observations	*39,383*		*36,432*	
* p<0.05				

Note: Coefficients are statistically significant at *p<0.05, two-tailed.
Country of Reference: Uruguay

Appendix: Author Biographies*

At the time of writing this report, **Cornelia Buchanan** is a freshman in the College of Arts and Sciences at Vanderbilt University. She is pursuing an interdisciplinary major in Spanish, Portuguese, and European Studies and minors in Latin American Studies and World Politics. She is a Cornelius Vanderbilt Scholar and a member of the College Scholars Honors Program. She serves on the board of Manna Project International and is also a member of the Vanderbilt Equestrian Team and Kappa Delta Sorority.

Liz DeAngelo has recently finished her sophomore year at Vanderbilt University and is a member of the College Scholars Honors Program. She is double majoring in Classics and Interdisciplinary English and History. She has worked as an office aid in the Classics Department and will be a peer consultant at the Vanderbilt Writing Studio next year. She also has been a peer editor for the Vanderbilt Undergraduate Research Journal for two years. After graduation, she plans on attending graduate school.

Ruidan Ma has just finished her sophomore year at Vanderbilt University and is a member of the College Scholars Honors Program. She is majoring in Chemistry and minoring in Spanish and Biological Sciences. She works as a student tutor in College of Arts and Science and an Undergraduate Research Assistant in the Department of Chemistry. She will also be a student mentor in Vanderbilt Visions next year. She plans to attend dental school after graduation.

Chris Taylor has finished his sophomore year at Vanderbilt University and is a member of the College Scholars Honors program. He is majoring in Philosophy. He is a peer editor for the Vanderbilt Undergraduate Research Journal and a member of the Vanderbilt Ultimate Frisbee Team. After graduation he plans to attend graduate school.

**Author names are listed alphabetically. Margarita Corral, a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at Vanderbilt University, acted as a technical consultant on this report.*