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## One in Four Condone Spousal Violence, Though Attitudes Vary across Countries and Individuals in the Americas

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**This report examines and assesses acceptance of spousal violence in the Americas.**

**Main Findings:**

- On average across 16 countries, 1 out of 4 individuals either approves or understands a man hitting his wife if she neglects household chores
- Rates vary significantly across countries: Guatemalans express the highest acceptance of spousal violence (53.9%); Paraguayans express the lowest support among the countries studied (8.3%)
- Women, those in the oldest age cohorts, those with more years of schooling, those in urban areas, and those who are wealthier are less likely to accept spousal violence against women
- Stress and dislocation matter: Individuals whose households are facing economic hardship and those who intend to live or work abroad are more likely to accept spousal violence against women

G ender-based violence in the form of physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse is a violation of human rights (Jejeebhoy 1998). Often such violence is perpetrated against women by men with whom they are acquainted (Bott et al. 2013). Unfortunately, per a report by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), "[i]ntimate partner violence against women is widespread" in the Latin America and Caribbean region (Bott et al. 2013, p. 6; see also WHO 2014). The prevalence and normalization of gender-based domestic violence renders progress on these issues particularly difficult (Ross 1996), despite decades of modernization and democratization, as well as the 1993 UN General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Consequently, it is important to consider norms that fuel tolerance, or even approval, of gender-based violence in the Americas.
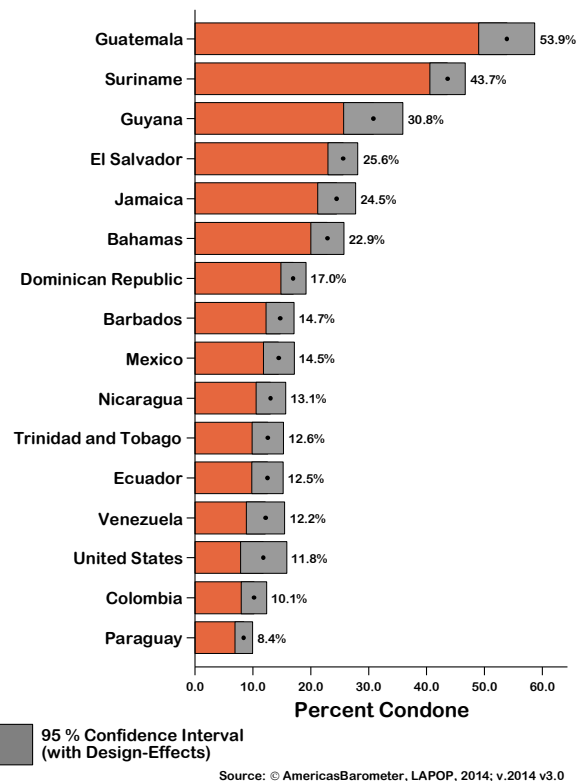
This *Insights* report examines norms regarding domestic violence against women by analyzing the following question, which was asked in 16 countries within the 2014/15 round of LAPOP's AmericasBarometer survey.

**[INTRO]** Now I am going to read some situations in which some people think that it is justified that the husband hits his wife/partner and I will ask your opinion…
**DVW1:**[1] His wife neglects the household chores. Would you approve of the husband hitting his wife, or would you not approve but understand, or would you neither approve nor understand?

This question measures acceptance of spousal abuse when household chores falling under the women's responsibility are neglected. Figure 1 displays, by country, the percentage of those who condone, to some degree, spousal violence against women under this scenario. The statistic displayed for each country reflects the percentage of all respondents who selected



**Figure 1. Percent Who Condone (Approve or Understand) Violence against a Wife Who Neglects her Chores, by Country, 2014/15**

| Country | Percent Condone |
|---|---|
| Guatemala | 53.9% |
| Suriname | 43.7% |
| Guyana | 30.8% |
| El Salvador | 25.6% |
| Jamaica | 24.5% |
| Bahamas | 22.9% |
| Dominican Republic | 17.0% |
| Barbados | 14.7% |
| Mexico | 14.5% |
| Nicaragua | 13.1% |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 12.6% |
| Ecuador | 12.5% |
| Venezuela | 12.2% |
| United States | 11.8% |
| Colombia | 10.1% |
| Paraguay | 8.4% |

95 % Confidence Interval (with Design-Effects)

Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2014; v.2014 v3.0

"approve" (explicit approval) or "not approve but understand" (implicit approval or tolerance) (per Azpuru 2015).

When it comes to expressed tolerance for spousal violence against women for the set of countries examined here, the average percentage of approval is 25.3%. Guatemala ranks at the top, with over 53.9% of respondents indicating that they would tolerate domestic violence against women in this scenario. Given the particularly high number of individuals condoning spousal violence targeted at women in Guatemala, a recent *Insights* report took a detailed look at the issue in this country (Azpuru 2015). In neighboring El Salvador,

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[1] The response rate for this question was 98.3%. Fewer than two percent of those interviewed responded with "Don't Know" or refused to answer the question.

approximately 1 in 4 individuals condone spousal violence against women for failure to tend satisfactorily to household chores. Approval of spousal violence is higher in the United States (11.8%) than Colombia (10.3%) and Paraguay (8.3%).[2]

While the cross-national differences displayed in Figure 1 are important, the next sections of this report examine individual-level attributes that that may influence attitudes toward spousal violence against women as captured by the question about tolerating (approving or understanding) spousal violence if a wife neglects household chores.

## Who Condones Violence by a Husband against his Wife?

Figure 2 presents the results of a logistic regression model that assesses the degree to which basic socioeconomic and demographic factors predict tolerance for spousal violence in the case of a wife neglecting chores.[3] The dependent variable is the same as in Figure 1: tolerance (approval or understanding), coded as "1", versus explicit disapproval of a man hitting his wife in the case that household chores have been neglected, coded as "0". The independent variables in the analysis are the following: gender (female versus male), years of schooling, age categories (in cohorts, with the youngest cohort as the comparison category), place of residence (rural versus urban region), and wealth quintiles (measure based on factor analysis of the quantity of specific items in the household).[4]



**Figure 2. Socioeconomic and Demographic Predictors of Acceptance of Spousal Violence against Women**

F = 42.796
N = 30625

95% Confidence Interval (Design-Effect Based)
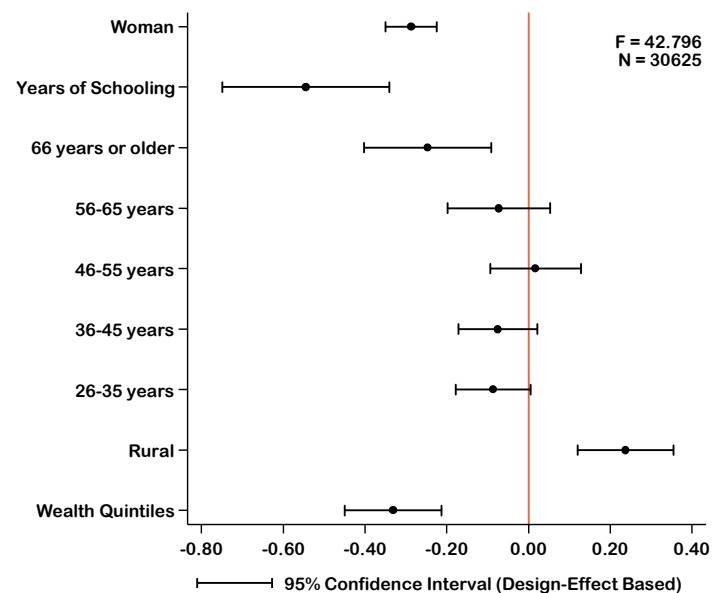
Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2014; v.M14_3.0

Coefficients (marked by the dots in the figure) that fall to the right of the vertical "0" line indicate variables that are predictive of greater approval of spousal violence, and the reverse is true for results to the left. The horizontal bar around each dot reflects the confidence interval around the estimated coefficient (dot). If the confidence bar crosses the vertical line at zero, the result is not statistically significant.

The results indicate that on average, for the region as a whole, women, those who are more educated, those who are older, those who live in

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[2] It is important to note that the survey in the U.S. is conducted via the Internet to a nationally representative population; the use of a web-based medium rather than face-to-face interviews, as are used in all Latin American and Caribbean countries in the AmericasBarometer, may lead to less self-censoring by those responding to the U.S. survey.

[3] The United States is not included in the regression analyses because the wealth variables used in the estimation are not collected in the United States.

[4] The gender variable takes the value 1 if the respondent is female. Age is measured as a series of dummy variables by

cohort, with respondents grouped into the following categories: 16-25, 26-35, 36-45, 56-65, and 65+. Rural is coded as 1 if the respondent lives in a rural region, and 0 if the respondent lives in an urban area. The wealth measure is a five-category variable that is generated using a series of items about household possessions; for more information about this measure, see Córdova 2009 (http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/I0806en.pdf) Wealth and years of education are rescaled to range from 0 to 1. Country fixed effects are estimated but not shown. Full model results are in the Appendix.

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urban areas, and those who are wealthier are less likely to accept (that is, either approve or understand) spousal violence when a wife neglects her household chores.

Table 1 presents the estimated average predicted probability of each variable at the specified value, controlling for all the covariates in the model.[5] On average, we predict that a woman has a 19 percent probability of expressing that she would tolerate violence against a wife neglecting chores. The average predicted probability for a man, in contrast, is 4 percentage points higher. As expected, women—the victims of the abuse in the question—are less likely to approve of spousal violence. While women in this study are less willing to express approval of domestic violence against females compared to men, the gap is not as large as one might expect. This may be a consequence of the internalization of abuse, normalization of violence, consideration of children, and/or poor regulative enforcement that can lead to passivity in the face of victimization (Subramaniam and Sivayogan 2001).

In terms of age, the analysis reveals that those in the oldest age group are most *dis*approving of this type of violence. Another noteworthy finding is that residence in a rural area predicts greater approval of spousal violence. This is consistent with the notion that urban areas are often associated with more cosmopolitan and liberal attitudes (Morley 1994).

Figure 2 and Table 1 further reveal that education matters: individuals with higher levels of education are less likely to approve of spousal violence in the case of a wife neglecting household chores. This is consistent with findings in studies that focus on this issue in other parts of the world (see, e.g., Rani et al. 2004). Morley (1994) argues that educated women are more likely to reject or challenge gender imbalances. However, this can elicit

**Table 1. Predicted Probabilities of Socioeconomic and Demographic Factors on Tolerance of Domestic Violence**

| Variables | Predicted Probabilities |
|---|---|
| **Sex** | |
| Female | 0.19 |
| Male | 0.23 |
| **Age** | |
| 16-25 years | 0.22 |
| 26-35 years | 0.21 |
| 36-45 years | 0.21 |
| 46-55 years | 0.22 |
| 56-65 years | 0.21 |
| 66 years or older | 0.18 |
| **Residence** | |
| Urban | 0.20 |
| Rural | 0.23 |
| **Education** | |
| None | 0.25 |
| 6 years | 0.23 |
| 12 years | 0.20 |
| 18 years | 0.17 |
| **Wealth** | |
| Lowest | 0.23 |
| Median | 0.21 |
| Highest | 0.18 |

more cases of spousal confrontation, leading to higher rates of escalated violent conflict (Morley 1994). It could also be that those who are more educated and wealthier are more likely to offer the "politically correct" answer in face-to-face interviews. In short, more research into the ways in which gender, education and wealth affect the expression and internalization of norms about domestic violence among women and men would be valuable.

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[5] Average predicted probabilities are calculated as average of each observation in the dataset evaluated at its observed values except for the variable of interest, which is held constant at the specified value for all observations.
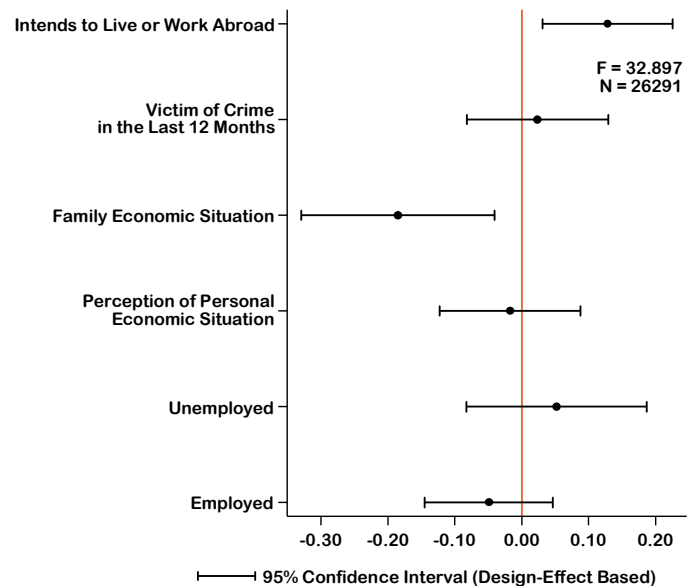
# Stress and Dislocation as Correlates of Approval of Spousal Violence

What other factors might affect norms regarding spousal violence? One possibility is that factors related to stability or, conversely, stress, dislocation, or hardship along social, economic or other lines matter. Figure 3 examines the extent to which an individual's intention to migrate, experience as the victim of a crime in the last 12 months, (positive) family economic situation, (positive) personal economic situation, and employment status predict the likelihood that a person expresses tolerance of domestic violence in the instance where a wife neglects her household responsibilities.[6]

The estimated average predicted probabilities in Table 2, and the coefficients in Figure 3 show that, on the one hand, crime victimization, perceptions of personal economic situation, and unemployment are not statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of acceptance of violence targeted at a wife neglecting household duties.[7]

On the other hand, one's household financial situation is a significant predictor: those whose households are comparatively better off are less likely to express acceptance of spousal violence in the case that a wife neglects chores. The probability of indicating tolerance toward spousal violence for those who respond that their household income is "not enough and [they] are having a hard time" (the lowest end of the scale) is 0.23. In contrast, the probability for those at the opposite end of the scale who say that their household income is "good enough and [they] can save money" is three percentage



**Figure 3. Other Predictors of Tolerance of Spousal Violence against Women**

F = 32.897
N = 26291

95% Confidence Interval (Design-Effect Based)

Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2014; v.M14_3.0

points lower. This result is consistent with research suggesting that household instability, including in the economic realm, increases tension in gender role imbalances and the consequent acceptance of power-based violence (Rao 1997; see also McAlpine, Henley, Mueller, and Vetter 2009).

There is a positive effect for the measure of intention to migrate ("to live or work abroad"). Specifically, the results indicate that individuals who intend to work or live abroad in the next three years are more accepting of spousal violence. This is consistent with the general frame connecting dislocation and violence. While those migrating out of or within Latin America and the Caribbean are a diverse group with varied motivations, it is the case that some who select to migrate are also facing significant

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[6] Personal economic situation (IDIO2) is coded from 0-1 going from worse to better. Intention to live or work abroad (Q14) is coded 0 for no and 1 for yes. Family economic situation (Q10D) is coded on a scale from 0 to 1 where lower numbers indicate greater financial hardship. Crime victimization (VIC1EXT) is coded 1 for yes and 0 for no. Occupation (OCUP4A) is recoded to create dummy variables indicating "employed", unemployed" and the baseline category of "not in the labor market" (students,

retirees, homemaker, etc.). Ecuador is not included in this model because the question about migration was not asked. All variables in the previous model (Figure 2) and country fixed effects are included in the estimation, but not shown. Full model results are in the Appendix.

[7] Average predicted probabilities are calculated as the average of each observation in the dataset evaluated at its observed values except for the variable of interest, which is held constant at the specified value for all observations.

stress and hardship and are thus seeking to leave behind economic, social, or other problems. In the case of the Northern Triangle countries, for example, experiences with crime and insecurity are a significant push factor (Hiskey et. al 2015). Generally speaking, the results presented here suggest that stress and instability, characterized by poor economic opportunity or intention to migrate, has the potential to increase public acceptance of domestic violence against women.

### Table 2. Average Predicted Probabilities of Economic Factors

| Variables | Predicted Probabilities |
|---|---|
| **Migration** | |
| Plans to Migrate | 0.23 |
| No Plans to Migrate | 0.19 |
| **Crime Victimization** | |
| Victim | 0.22 |
| Not a Victim | 0.22 |
| **Family Economic Situation** | |
| Having a Hard Time | 0.23 |
| Can Save Money | 0.20 |
| **Personal Economic Situation** | |
| Worse | 0.22 |
| Same | 0.22 |
| Better | 0.21 |
| **Employment** | |
| Employed | 0.21 |
| Unemployed | 0.23 |
| Not in Labor Market | 0.22 |

## Conclusion

The pervasiveness of partner violence (Bott et al. 2013, WHO 2014) in the Americas is arguably buttressed by norms that tolerate such abuse. This report illuminates the magnitude of tolerance of domestic violence against women

by assessing tendencies to condone (either approve or understand) spousal violence when a wife neglects to take care of household chores. The extent to which the public expresses either explicit (approve) or tacit (understand) approval of domestic violence varies significantly across the region. While the percentage who report tolerance of domestic violence when a woman neglects the household chores is 25% for the set of countries examined here, rates within countries range from a high of over 50% in Guatemala to a low of under 10% in Paraguay.

In terms of individual predictors, tolerance varies across women (versus men), older generations (versus middle age and younger generations), and urban (versus rural) places of residence. Those who are more educated and wealthier are less likely to express tolerance for spousal violence. Economic vulnerability matters: those in households experiencing more financial problems are more tolerant of spousal violence against wives. Finally, those who intend to migrate are more tolerant of domestic violence, suggesting that the links between economic, social, and other forms of hardship and dislocation may be quite robust and should be further examined to best understand this issue in the Americas.

Policies and programs that increase education, economic opportunities, and social stability are key to shifting norms with respect to tolerance for domestic violence. These broader efforts might be pursued alongside more targeted programs that seek to empower women while encouraging men to curb their comparatively higher degree of tolerance for domestic violence against women.

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# Appendix

| | Model 1: Socioeconomic & Demographic Predictors | | Model 2: Economic Predictors | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Coef | (t) | Coef | (t) |
| Wealth Quintiles | -0.331* | (-5.47) | -0.263* | (-4.08) |
| Rural | 0.238* | (3.97) | 0.249* | (3.99) |
| 26-35 years | -0.087 | (-1.86) | -0.107* | (-2.06) |
| 36-45 years | -0.074 | (-1.52) | -0.077 | (-1.38) |
| 46-55 years | 0.017 | (0.31) | 0.037 | (0.59) |
| 56-65 years | -0.073 | (-1.14) | -0.062 | (-0.86) |
| 66 years or older | -0.247* | (-3.12) | -0.277* | (-3.18) |
| Years of Schooling | -0.545* | (-5.24) | -0.519* | (-4.67) |
| Woman | -0.287* | (-8.95) | -0.296* | (-7.37) |
| Employed | | | -0.049 | (-1.00) |
| Unemployed | | | 0.052 | (0.76) |
| Perception of Personal Economic Situation | | | -0.017 | (-0.32) |
| Family Economic Situation | | | -0.185* | (-2.51) |
| Victim of Crime in the Last 12 Months | | | 0.024 | (0.44) |
| Intends to Live or Work Abroad | | | 0.129* | (2.59) |
| Guatemala | 1.833* | (12.33) | 1.800* | (12.18) |
| El Salvador | 0.669* | (5.18) | 0.627* | (4.85) |
| Nicaragua | -0.220 | (-1.37) | -0.232 | (-1.43) |
| Colombia | -0.398* | (-2.40) | -0.416* | (-2.55) |
| Ecuador | -0.137 | (-0.82) | | |
| Paraguay | -0.657* | (-4.40) | -0.640* | (-4.19) |
| Venezuela | -0.114 | (-0.58) | -0.093 | (-0.48) |
| Dominican Republic | 0.207 | (1.56) | 0.170 | (1.27) |
| Jamaica | 0.648* | (4.51) | 0.565* | (3.81) |
| Guyana | 0.851* | (5.05) | 0.857* | (5.03) |
| Trinidad and Tobago | -0.085 | (-0.50) | -0.053 | (-0.29) |
| Suriname | 1.476* | (11.51) | 1.544* | (11.68) |
| Bahamas | 0.627* | (4.52) | 0.584* | (4.10) |
| Barbados | 0.106 | (0.72) | 0.190 | (1.29) |
| Constant | -1.209* | (-9.28) | -1.158* | (-8.24) |
| N | 30625 | | 26291 | |