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Will Argentines Trust the Truth Commission?

By Prof. Mitchell Seligson, Vanderbilt University

In 1994, a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina was bombed, and 85 people were killed. For 19 years the case has gone unresolved. Argentine courts have pointed the finger at Iran, but the government of that country has refused to cooperate with the investigation. Now, Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner has announced that a five-person Truth Commission will be jointly established, involving two members nominated by Argentina, two by Iran and the fifth to be selected based on mutual consent. Both chambers of the Argentine legislature, as well as the legislature of Iran, must approve the memorandum for it to become operative.

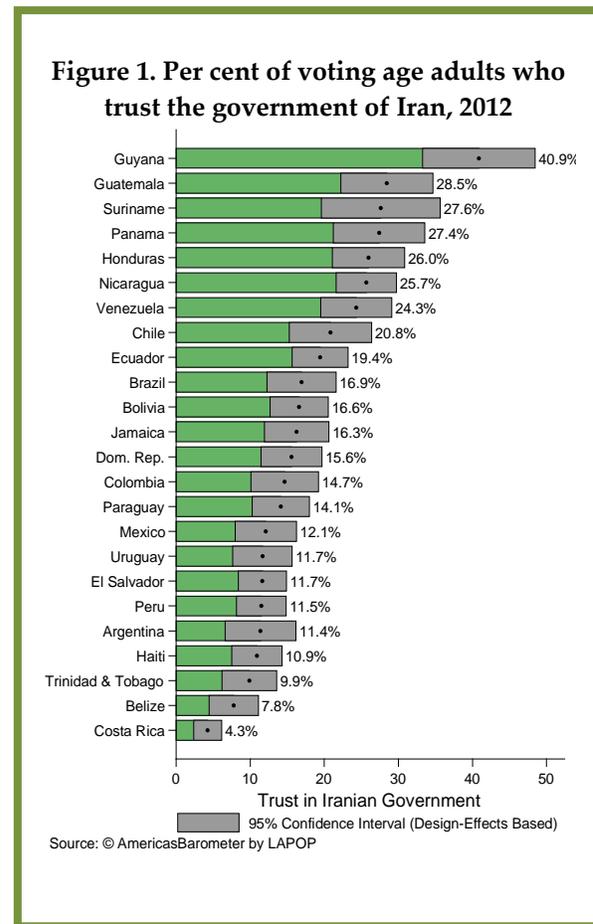
Assuming that the commission is approved in final form by both governments, and that it eventually releases its findings, how likely is it that Argentines will accept the results?

“Only 11% of Argentines trust the government of Iran.”

Not very, according to the AmericasBarometer survey carried out by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). In March-April, 2012, a nationally representative sample of some 1,500 Argentines were interviewed as part of a broader study conducted in 26 countries of the Americas. In 24 of those countries, every second respondent was asked

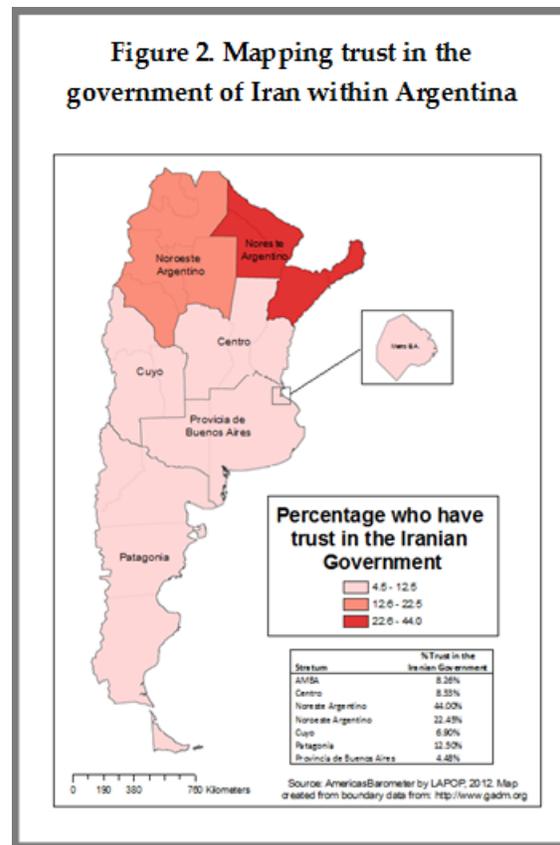
about how much they trust the government of Iran. The results are shown in Figure 1.

Only 11% of Argentines trust the government of Iran; Argentines, on average, express less trust in the government of Iran than all but four countries out of 24 in the Americas.



A statistical analysis of the Argentine data reveals that there are some bright spots for Iran in Argentina. Those who believe that the government of the incumbent president is performing well are significantly more likely to trust Iran. For example, 25% of those who give the government's performance a top rating ("very good") express trust in the government of Iran. This is higher than the national average, but still represents only one-quarter of the respondents. Geographically, Argentines who live in the Northern part of the country are more trusting of Iran than those who live in other regions (see Figure 2). The northern regions historically have been Peronist and President Fernández received a landslide victory in those provinces. But other factors, including socio-economic status, may play a role and need to be analyzed further.

If the results of the truth commission are to function like those of other truth commissions that have been established in the aftermath of national traumas, such as civil wars in Central America or Apartheid in South Africa, much work will need to be done to establish its credibility. An important first step in doing so will be the selection of its members.



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Full results of the 2012 AmericasBarometer - Argentina survey will be available on-line at www.LapopSurveys.org by downloading, "*Cultura política de la democracia en Argentina y en las Américas, 2012: Hacia la igualdad de oportunidades*" (forthcoming), authored by Dr. Germán Lodola of the Universidad Torcuato di Tella. The full data set is available for on-line analysis or download (in SPSS and Stata formats) at no cost.

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