

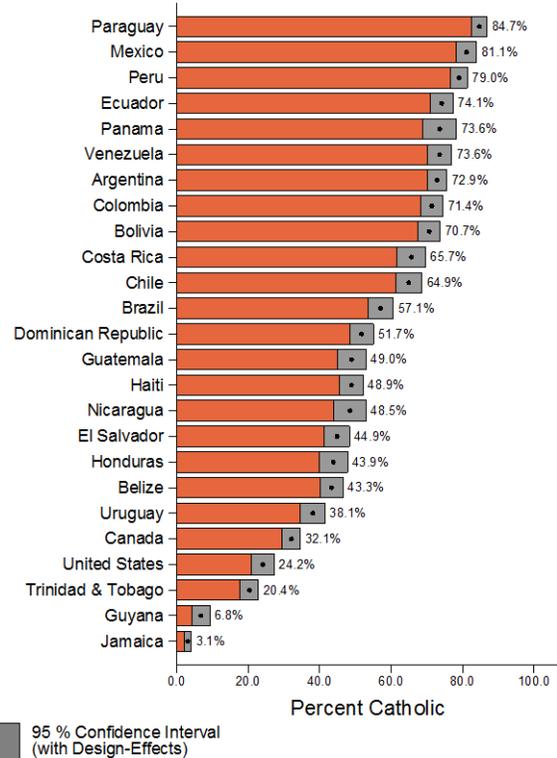
# AmericasBarometer: Topical Brief – July 7, 2015

## *Amid a Steady Decline in the Percentage of Self-Reported Catholics, Pope Francis Visits Ecuador, Bolivia, and Paraguay*

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Pope Francis is the first Pope from the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region in the approximately 2000 year history of the Catholic Church. He is seen as a transformative figure, commenting on controversial issues such as homosexuality and the role of women in the church.<sup>1</sup> This week, the Pope will make his second Papal visit to the LAC region, stopping in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Paraguay, the first time he has visited any of these respective countries since his election to the office. The Pope's itinerary, released last week,<sup>2</sup> reveals that his trip will be a mix of administrative, sacramental, and service oriented activities. With the immediate excitement expressed by the public over this trip and the residual excitement of having a Pope from the region, this *Topical Brief* looks at the

**Figure 1. Percent Catholic across the LAC Region, 2014**



trends of Catholicism in the region, with an emphasis on Ecuador, Bolivia, and Paraguay.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/pope-francis-talks-about-gay-clergy-role-of-women-on-flight-from-brazil-to-vatican/2013/07/29/0af5df0a-f857-11e2-b018-5b8251f0c56e\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/pope-francis-talks-about-gay-clergy-role-of-women-on-flight-from-brazil-to-vatican/2013/07/29/0af5df0a-f857-11e2-b018-5b8251f0c56e_story.html)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1502005.htm>

As seen in Figure 1, there is a massive range across the region with regard to the percentage of Catholics in each country in 2014. Paraguay has the most people identifying as Catholic with 84.7% whereas Jamaica has the least with 3.1%. In addition to Paraguay, the Pope will visit Ecuador with 74.1% of respondents identifying as Catholic and Bolivia with 70.7%. In a region that has been widely hailed as a Catholic stronghold for decades, percentages in the low 70's in countries like Ecuador and Bolivia could be surprising.

Between 2006 and 2014 the AmericasBarometer survey asked interviewees in a number of countries, including the three the Pope will visit this week:

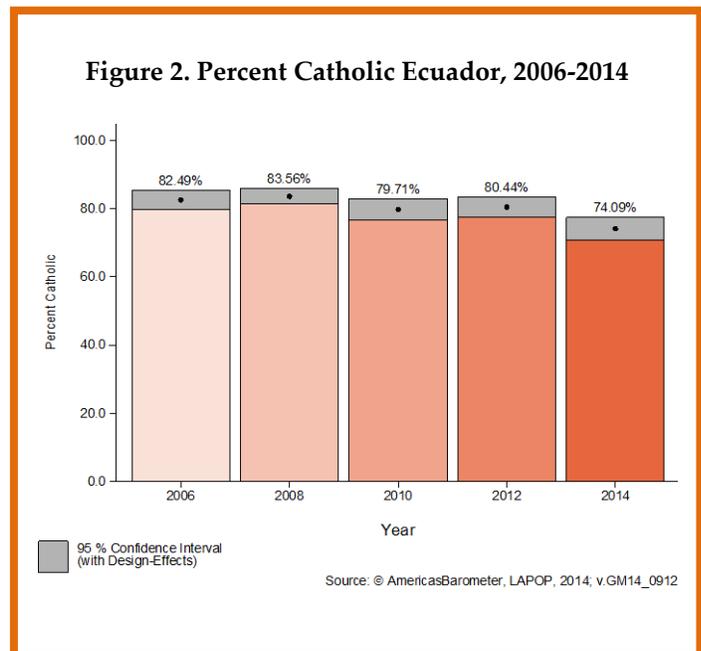
**Q3C. What is your religion, if any?**

The original response categories included Catholic, Non-Evangelical Protestant, Non-Christian Eastern Religions (such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, etc.), No Religion, Evangelical or Pentecostal,<sup>3</sup> Mormons, Traditional religions (such as Candomble, Rastafari, Voodoo, etc.), Jewish, Agnostic or Atheist, Jehovah Witness and Other. For the purpose of this study, we collapse all of the non-Catholics into a single category.

<sup>3</sup> Even though several of these categories are denominations of Protestantism, LAPOP separates them due to their salience in LAC.

Figures 2 through 4 show the cross-time results of this question in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Paraguay. *Each country sees at least a slight decline in the percentage of Catholics.* We find the steepest decline in Bolivia. Between 2008 and 2014, the percentage of self-reported Catholics dropped 11 percentage points, from 82% to 71%.

In Ecuador, the percentage of self-reported Catholics dropped 8.5 percent points between 2006 and 2014, from 82.5% to 74%.

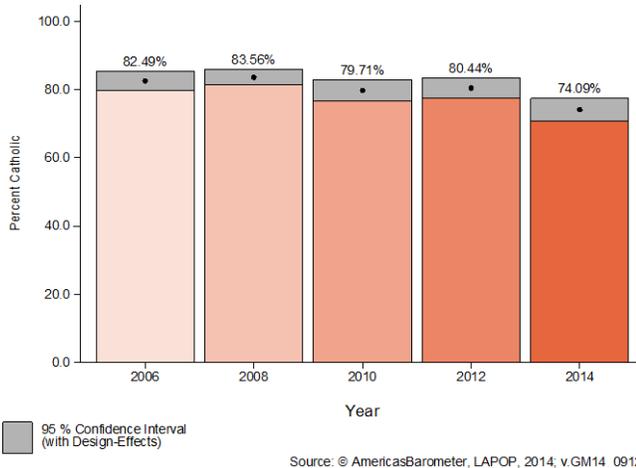


The most Catholic country among the three (and in the region as a whole), Paraguay, has seen the lowest decline. From 2008 (the year with the highest percentage of self-reported Catholics in the series) to 2014, only 4% less of the Paraguayan population reported being non-Catholic. The percentage of

Catholics dropped from 88.7% in 2008 to 84.6% in 2014.

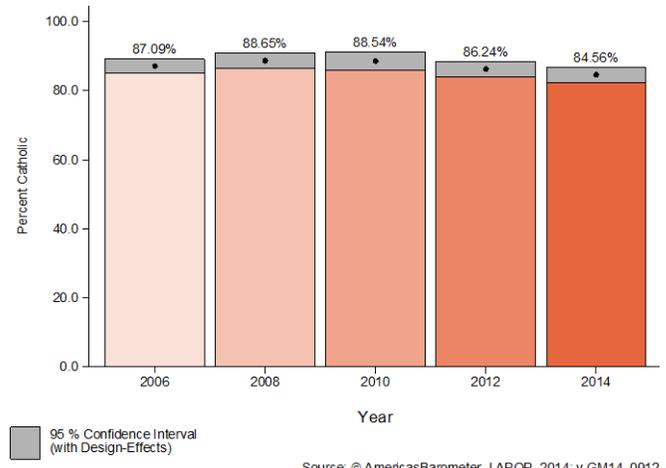
gender or the level of urbanization of the place or residence (urban/rural).

**Figure 3. Percent Catholic Bolivia, 2006-2014**



Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2014; v.GM14\_0912

**Figure 4. Percent Catholic Paraguay, 2006-2014**



Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2014; v.GM14\_0912

What are the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of self-identified Catholics in these 3 countries? To answer this question, we ran 3 separate logistic models, with 2014 data from the AmericasBarometer. Results are shown in the Appendix.

In Bolivia, age, education, and quintiles of wealth are positively associated with the likelihood that an individual reports being Catholic, as opposed to holding any other religious identification (or none at all). Holding all other factors constant, older individuals, those with more years of completed education and individuals with higher levels of material wealth are more likely to be Catholic. There are no statistical differences in terms of

In Paraguay and Ecuador, the statistical analyses suggest that those living in urban areas and older individuals are more likely to self-report as Catholics (compared to providing any other response to the religious identification question). We find no differences in terms of gender, education or material wealth.

In sum, the second time that Pope Francis will visit South America in his role as Pope coincides with a steady decline in the percentage of Catholics in the region. However, according to the 2014 AmericasBarometer data, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Paraguay (the three countries that Pope Francis will visit) remain overwhelmingly Catholic, with at least 7 out of 10 individuals identifying with this religion. That

being said, while 7 out of 10 is certainly more than most countries in the region, there has still been at least a slight decline over the years in those identifying as Catholic. It will be interesting to see in the coming years if those numbers level off or even rise given Pope Francis' affiliation with and increased attention to the region.

## References

Ehrenfreund, Max. "Pope Francis talks about gay clergy, role of women on flight from Brazil to Vatican." July 29, 2013.

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Full results of the 2014 AmericasBarometer and previous rounds can be consulted on-line at [www.LapopSurveys.org](http://www.LapopSurveys.org). The full data set is available for on-line analysis or download (in SPSS and Stata formats) at no cost.

## Appendix

**Table 1.** The socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of self-identified Catholics

	Paraguay	Ecuador	Bolivia
Woman	.1213856 (.1378511)	-.1810905 (.1342794)	-.0736024 (.1175331)
Wealth	.0030098 (.0740188)	-.025198 (.0513116)	.1117604** (.047157)
Urban	.460792** (.2013259)	.3698816** (.1723025)	.2703117 (.1877897)
Age	.138901** (.0614227)	1463035*** (.040641)	.1718778*** (.0333113)
Education	.0195139 (.0249226)	-.031838 (.0222452)	.0393362*** (.0125454)
Constant	.4257535 (.4239396)	.6794328 (.4150422)	-.6577836 (.357128)

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*p<0.01, \*\*p<.05, \*p<0.1