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Costa Rica tops list for women's rights in the Americas, but report warns of 'troubles' ahead

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Costa Rica leads its Latin American neighbors in women's and [civil rights](#) but trails in government responsiveness and civil society participation.



Alberto Font

A national protest in [San José](#) on June 25. Protesters criticized a range of issues, from the elimination of benefits for public workers to the Public Concessions Law. Others demanded the resignation of Environment Minister René Castro, as the man responsible for a failed project to build an oil refinery in the Caribbean province of Limón.

A new **report on social inclusion** in the Americas shows “troubling” developments in Costa Rica, according to Americas Quarterly, a publication focused on [public policy](#) in [Latin America](#).

Despite its concerns about the rising rates of violence and the growing presence of [drug trafficking](#) in the peaceful country, AQ rated Costa Rica as the 4th most socially inclusive country in the Americas, lead by Uruguay, Chile and the United States.

The publication noted that a lack of data on the United States in several categories could have contributed to its lower ranking.

The report called the case of Costa Rica “particularly troubling,” noting the country’s low scores for perceived government responsiveness and [civil society](#) participation, combined with rising violence and drug trafficking in the country without an army.

AQ observed a discrepancy between Costa Rica's relatively high social inclusion score (4th overall) and growing rates of violence. The same correlation was seen with Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador and Brazil.

While the **homicide rate** of Costa Rica's Central American neighbors dwarf its own, it has nevertheless steadily increased over the last decade, according to data compiled by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

The report used statistics from the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime 2010.

Costa Rica's [homicide rate](#) in 2010 was 11.3 out of 100,000. According to the same data set, Costa Rica's murder rate dropped to 10 in 2011.

Americas Quarterly measured social inclusion with 21 variables, including access to markets, social services, formal [jobs](#), popular attitudes toward the government and personal empowerment, and participation in civil society, by race/ethnicity and gender, as well as political, civil, women's and LGBT rights, according to the publication's website.

The country ranked second on the percentage of people living on more than \$4 day, behind Uruguay and above Chile. AQ opined that the \$4 mark was a better indicator, since that is the cut off for "moderate poverty," according to the World Bank. The international financial organization defines anything under \$2.50 as "**extreme poverty**."

From 2001 to 2010, Costa Rica enjoyed some of the strongest gross domestic product growth in the Americas, behind Panama and Peru, and felt inclined to share it, spending generously on its social [programs](#) as a percentage of GDP. Only Brazil and Uruguay spent more in the same way.

While Costa Rica ranked well on civil rights (4th) and especially well on women's rights — tied for first with the U.S. — the same could not be said for LGBT rights.

Costa Rica was tied for second to last (11th) along with Guatemala and Nicaragua for LGBT rights, placing it in the bottom third of countries [surveyed](#).

According to a 2012 LAPOP report, only 22.3 percent of Ticos support gay [marriage](#). Marco Castillo, president of the Diversity Movement, a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organization here, told The Tico Times previously that Costa Rica has a long way to go for **LGBT rights** to catch up with its reputation for human rights.

Despite this disadvantage in popular opinion, the country would almost certainly improve its ranking if the courts recognize the right to **same-sex domestic partnerships** here, following the approval of the reformed Young Person's Law.

Costa Rica came in dead last when asked about perceived government responsiveness and civil society participation.

AQ used data on this topic from the 2012 "**AmericasBarometer**," a publication from Vanderbilt University's **Latin American Public Opinion Project**. LAPOP attributed widespread disapproval of President Laura Chinchilla's administration to greatly contributing to **plummeting approval of democracy** and the current system of government, reported The Tico Times.

Costa Rica ranked second to last, above Uruguay for "civil society participation." Again based on data from "AmericasBarometer," AQ defined civil society participation as the average number of associations in which respondents participate.

Readers will need to come back next year when more information will be available, since Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Panama made their debut appearances in the 2013 index.