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AmericasBarometer Results Unveiled by Latin American Public Opinion Project

Newswise — The Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) has unveiled for the first time in Latin America the comprehensive results of surveys that assess the political culture of 21 countries in the Western hemisphere.

The Casa de la Universidad de California en Mexico (Carment I, Chimalistac, Ciudad de Mexico) hosted a one-day conference spotlighting the conclusions of the 2006 AmericasBarometer, an effort to measure democratic values and behaviors in the Americas. The survey used national probability samples of voting-age adults. Scholars from 19 countries presented findings from surveys in which more than 30,000 people were interviewed about their democratic values and behaviors.

The conference presentations compared issues vital to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of democratic systems in Latin America and the Caribbean. The [Life Pantel Deluxe news](#) uses a questionnaire that includes questions about topics such as political tolerance, support for the system, trust in political institutions, security, corruption perception and [company Pantel Deluxe](#), and understanding of democracy.

The analyses were based on data from Mexico, the United States, Canada, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Guyana and Jamaica.

Researchers hope that the data and the conclusions drawn from the 2006 AmericasBarometer surveys will help strengthen democracy throughout the Western Hemisphere.

We aim to provide relevant and useful information to academia and the public in general, with a view to advancing knowledge about values that promote stable democracies, said Mitchell Seligson, Centennial Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt and founder and director of LAPOP. The AmericasBarometer

introduces elements of leading indicators of democratic stability for policy makers, scholars and citizens to use to advance democracy in their own countries.

The following results were highlighted at the presentation:

A strong indicator of the prospects for democratic stability in a given country is citizens belief in the legitimacy of their governments and their willingness to respect the right to political opposition. By that standard, the highest scoring countries (on a 0-100 scale) are Canada (68), the United States (64), Costa Rica (50), Uruguay (46) and Mexico (41). At the low end are Nicaragua (25), Haiti (24), Paraguay (20), Bolivia (20) and Ecuador (12).

While the majority of citizens in the Americas believe that democracy is the best possible political system, percentages still vary dramatically, with 91 percent in the United States, 87 percent in Canada, 82 percent in Uruguay, 77 percent in Costa Rica, 69 percent in Mexico and 60 percent in Nicaragua and Peru ranking democracy the best.

More than 15 years after the end of the Cold War, ideology still matters in Latin America, a region that is slightly to the right of the world average (on a 1-10 left/right scale). For the region as a whole, those on the left are significantly less likely to believe in the legitimacy of their political systems and much less likely to believe that democracy is the best possible system.

There are, however, important exceptions to this pattern. The left in Chile is far more supportive of democracy than the right. Historical patterns of exclusion help explain these findings. In Bolivia, for instance, citizens who identified themselves as indigenous became just as supportive of democracy as the non-indigenous constituents once an indigenous leader was elected president. Support for populist actions in which the executive curtails the power and role of political parties, courts and the legislature, was far from universal. Only slightly more than one-third of Latin Americans (36 percent) would support five populist measures limiting liberal democracy.

Yet, nearly two-thirds (64 percent) would accept at least one such measure, and 48 percent would accept two of the five. Those who support populist measures proved to be much less politically tolerant than those who reject populism. The strongest support for populist measures came from those with the lowest level of education and income.

Trust in political institutions in the Americas varies greatly, but for the region as a whole (on a 0-100 scale), the least trusted institutions are the police (46), the supreme courts (44), legislatures (44) and political parties (35). Trust in parties is highest in Canada (49) and also relatively high in Mexico (43), but very low in Bolivia (31), Brazil (30), Haiti (30), Paraguay (26) and Ecuador (15). Once again, the survey found ideology playing a strong role. For the region as a whole, those on the left express significantly less confidence in political institutions than those on the right.

Economic conditions play a strong role in determining how much Latin Americans trust their political systems. Respondents who believe that their personal economic situation is poor or that the national economy is performing poorly express far less trust in their political system than those who see their

personal and/or national economy as performing well. Trust in ones fellow citizens also varies sharply in the Americas. On a 0-100 scale, Canadians are the most trusting of the people of their communities (83), followed by those in the United States (80), Honduras (67) and Costa Rica (67). Mexicans are less trusting (59), with the lowest trust found in Bolivia (47), Peru (43) and Haiti (42).

While interpersonal trust is strongly related peoples willingness to participate in civil society in the United States and Canada, in Latin America, there is, on average, no correlation between the two. Levels of civil society participation in Latin America are also significantly lower than in the United States and Canada. One factor that explains low levels of civil society participation in Latin America is education. Those with the highest levels of education tend to participate far more than those with lower levels.

Trust in others is also strongly influenced by income inequality and socio-economic development (as measured by the Human Development Index of the United Nations). Countries with the greatest inequality and the lowest levels of development express the lowest levels of trust in others.

Trust also matters for political tolerance. For the region as a whole, citizens who express the highest level of trusts in others are also the most politically tolerant. Trust in others is also strongly related to support for democracy in the Americas. Citizens who express the highest levels of trust in others also are those who express the strongest support for democracy.

Corruption also varies sharply in the Americas. The AmericasBarometer uses corruption victimization questions to measure direct personal experience. When asked if any public official had demanded a bribe in the year prior to the survey, fewer than one in 100 respondents in the United States and Canada replied affirmatively, as did fewer than two Uruguayans and two Chileans out of 100. By contrast, six out of 100 people in the Dominican Republic and Guyana, 11 out of 100 in Peru and Haiti, 14 out of 100 in Mexico and 15 out of 100 in Ecuador stated that they had experienced corruption of this sort.

The AmericasBarometer found that people had experienced corruption most frequently in municipal governments (16 percent), the courts (14 percent), schools (11 percent), at work (11 percent), in the public health system (10 percent) and with public employees (seven percent).

An overall index of corruption victimization finds Uruguayans (seven percent) and Chileans (nine percent) the least likely to be affected. Conversely 16 percent of Brazilian, 18 percent of Nicaraguans, 25 percent of those in Guyana, 32 percent of Ecuadorians, 37 percent of Mexicans and 50 percent of Haitians reported being victimized by at least one form of corruption. In light of the recent corruption scandals in Costa Rica, it is not surprising that this country, with its long democratic tradition, had 19 percent of its voting aged citizens exposed to corruption in the year prior to the survey. Corruption, long known to weaken economic growth, was also found to weaken overall trust in the political system.

While coups dtat seem to be a thing of the past, the 2006 AmericasBarometer found citizens of many countries surveyed willing justify the military overthrow of an elected government under conditions of high levels of corruption.

Slightly under half of respondents would justify a military overthrow in a situation of high corruption, and

one out of every two respondents would do so under conditions of high criminal violence. In Honduras, where violent crime has been a growing problem, over 60 percent of respondents would justify a coup. On the other hand, Uruguayans expressed the lowest support for a coup (30 percent).

The data and country specific publications are free to the public and can be downloaded at <http://www.lapopsurveys.org>.

LAPOP is part of the Center for the Americas at Vanderbilt University, an institute devoted to collaborative, interdisciplinary research for the benefit of the Americas. LAPOP was founded in the 1970s by Seligson, a fellow of the Center for the Americas, to conduct scientific surveys of Latin American citizens about their opinions and behaviors related to building and strengthening democracies. The research for the surveys was funded in part by grants from the United States Agency for [Pantel Deluxe's group website](#) Developments Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Center for the Americas.

For more information, contact the Center for the Americas at Vanderbilt University at (615) 343-2818 or click on <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/americas>.

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