

2020

Annual Report



VANDERBILT®

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LAPOP: 2020 in Review

Vanderbilt's LAPOP Lab is a center for excellence in the study of public opinion and democracy. The lab's mission is to:



Advance research innovations



Build capacity in survey methods and analysis



Collect high-quality public opinion data



Disseminate policy-relevant research

LAPOP's core project is the award-winning AmericasBarometer, a regular survey of citizens' experiences, evaluations, and expectations regarding democratic governance in the Western Hemisphere.

LAPOP's efforts are supported by major grants from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Inter-American Development Bank, the National Science Foundation, and others. In 2020, the lab's awarded, obligated, and pending extramural grant funding – supporting work that year and in future years – totaled \$4.5m.

Advancing Research Innovations

LAPOP adapted to the global pandemic by overhauling research protocols to support the collection of high-quality survey data via phone and internet modes. This effort included experiments to test mode and design effects, adapting questionnaire items to phone surveys, assessing best practices in sampling and weighting for phone surveys, studying approaches to sampling via internet panels, a new method for remote pretests, and tailoring our multi-item quality control program to these new modes.



From Face-to-Face to Phones

The transition to phone surveys was facilitated by a [Learning Summit LAPOP hosted at Vanderbilt in January 2020](#). The summit focused on Haitian public opinion and included scholars and practitioners in survey research and international development. On the agenda was the use of phone surveys as a substitute for face-to-face research in times of crisis.



New Questionnaire Modules

Throughout the spring and summer, the lab designed and tested new questionnaire items related to the [COVID-19 pandemic, democracy, elections, gender-based violence, and indigenous politics](#). Via a unique survey methods experiment, LAPOP discovered that [those concerned about the pandemic are less likely to end the interview prematurely](#) if the survey begins with questions about the pandemic.



New Workshop Series

The lab launched a workshop series that brings together faculty, students, and other researchers to exchange ideas about topics in survey research. [The series is trans-institutional, engaging scholarship from multiple disciplines](#). In 2020, the series addressed these topics:

- Registering and reporting response rates in face-to-face cross-national surveys
- A comparative study of online sampling approaches
- Using surveys to understand when individuals acknowledge abusive behaviors as human rights violations
- Designing and using panel surveys to understand the dynamics of partisanship and presidential approval

Building Capacity

The transition to phone and internet surveys provided opportunities for LAPOP to design and implement new capacity-building programs for junior scholars, fieldwork teams, and host-country communities to transfer knowledge of best and innovative practices in survey research. Our efforts included an overhaul of training protocols for local fieldwork teams, VU student involvement as lab research assistants, and various workshops.



Fieldwork Team Training

The lab designed **new virtual training protocols** to ensure local fieldwork teams in Haiti, Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador gained the needed knowledge and skills to conduct high-quality phone interviews. LAPOP research **staff trained 128 interviewers** from firms and partners across these four countries, totaling 54 hours of hands-on capacity building with local firms and partners.



VU Student Involvement

LAPOP trains undergraduate and graduate students by involving them in every aspect of the lab's research activities. A total of **23 undergraduate and 10 graduate research assistants** worked alongside LAPOP in the design and analysis of public opinion studies.



Workshops for Junior Scholars and Researchers

Lab research staff conducted workshops with **175 students and junior scholars** from across the Americas on topics related to **survey methodology**, including response rates and online sampling, and instruction on **how to access and use AmericasBarometer data**. The lab also facilitated workshops on survey methodology and fieldwork quality control with **10 researchers** in the United States and Honduras.



Peru Democracy Roundtable

LAPOP Lab hosted a roundtable with **15 research, policy, and civil society experts in Peru**. This provided an opportunity to both share research findings with stakeholder communities linked to the study and strengthening of democracy in Peru, as well as expand the lab's understanding of the sociopolitical context with which to interpret results and design new studies. This roundtable represents **a novel approach for LAPOP in its efforts to engage with impact communities** where it conducts research.

Collecting Data

In its transition from conducting face-to-face surveys to phone and internet studies, LAPOP redesigned and tested all research protocols (questionnaire design, pretesting, programming, sampling, training, quality control, and data processing) for the planned use of computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) as the mode for the 2021 AmericasBarometer.



Phone Surveys as a New Mode

The lab implemented **new CATI protocols** and completed **8,549 phone interviews** in national surveys in Haiti, Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador. These studies pretested the 2021 AmericasBarometer core questionnaire and served to test and refine interview protocols. The lab also **developed and tested new survey modules** on COVID-19, gender-based violence, indigenous populations, and attitudes toward democracy.



Expanding Internet Survey Efforts

LAPOP expanded its internet-based research efforts by conducting **4,129 online interviews** in Mexico and Peru. These studies provided an additional survey mode to test modules on COVID-19, gender-based violence, indigenous populations, and attitudes toward democracy.



New Insights about Democratic Attitudes

Findings from LAPOP's phone and internet surveys showed a **widespread lack of faith in institutions** in charge of upholding the law, including the courts and institutions tasked with combatting gender-based violence. Moreover, public health crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic, can make **citizens more willing to embrace non-democratic alternatives** than situations of high corruption or violence.



Novel Findings about Survey Methodology

Experimental evidence showed that phone interviews are more likely to be completed successfully if they **lead with questions about salient issues** that keep respondents engaged. Findings from question-wording experiments also provided vital insights for improving the **clarity and efficiency of the 2021 AmericasBarometer** questionnaire.

Disseminating Research

LAPOP used a multi-faceted approach to make data publicly accessible to key stakeholders at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), policy and research audiences in Latin America and the Caribbean, other U.S. government institutions, journalists, and the general public. Noteworthy events include LAPOP's 2nd annual research conference held virtually with partners in Peru, a briefing with the U.S. ambassador to Haiti, a Wilson Center public presentation of the 2018/19 Mexico AmericasBarometer results, and the launch of the lab's online Data Playground.

LAPOP staff, research affiliates, and students also received prestigious recognition, including:

- Mitch Seligson's World Association for Public Opinion Research's (WAPOR) Helen Dinerman Award. Dr. Seligson is LAPOP's founder and current senior advisor.
- Maita Schade's Association of Academic Survey Research Organization's (AASRO) John Tarnai Memorial Scholarship. Dr. Schade is a former LAPOP research staffer.
- Stella Sechopoulos' Avery Leiserson Award by Vanderbilt's Political Science Department for the best undergraduate paper in political science, & WAPOR's Janet Harkness Award. Ms. Sechopoulos is a former LAPOP undergraduate research fellow.



Dissemination Events Across the Americas

LAPOP hosted **24 events in 11 countries, involving at least 34 partner institutions** across the Americas. These events included: LAPOP's annual research conference, a USAID-DC briefing and 5 USAID Mission country briefings on the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer and 2020 national phone surveys, 8 in-country, public presentations of the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer results, 17 invited presentations, and presence at AASRO, Big Surv20, American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), and WAPOR conferences. More than 1,600 individuals participated in LAPOP-hosted events.

LAPOP's 2nd annual The Public and Democracy in the Americas conference, hosted virtually in partnership with the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos and Pontificia Universidad Católica del Peru, blended presentations of LAPOP research findings with scholarship using AmericasBarometer data to generate important insights into public opinion and democracy, facilitated dialogue over the project, research, and democracy in the region, and built capacity for how to access and use AmericasBarometer data. The event featured research presentations by a diverse group of researchers, from graduate students to full professors, representing **23 institutions across 8 countries. Over 380 individuals from more than 20 countries registered** to attend the virtual conference.

Disseminating Research



Research Impact

LAPOP produced **7 reports using AmericasBarometer data** and **6 reports using phone and internet survey data**. Publications included country reports, study topline reports, and Insights.

LAPOP expanded the accessibility and use of its AmericasBarometer data with the launch of its **Data Playground, a free online, interactive data analysis tool**. The Data Playground allows users to access AmericasBarometer data for every country in which the lab conducted surveys between 2004 and 2019. This includes access to **128 variables** on topics including the economy, political participation, citizen security, corruption, political tolerance, and democracy. The Data Playground is particularly useful for those who do not have the training to use advanced statistical software programs. It allows users to tabulate frequencies for a single variable, visualize cross-country comparisons on a map, and conduct crosstabulations.

The Seligson Political Culture Survey Archive was made public for free download. This special database consists of 82 surveys, conducted by LAPOP's founder Dr. Mitchell A. Seligson, in 17 countries between 1975 and 2005.

LAPOP makes all its data and reports publicly available on its website. In 2020 the website was **visited nearly 23,000 times and our reports were downloaded over 42,000 times**.

Over 60 articles using lab data were published in peer-reviewed journals and in reports from international policy and research organizations, including the Interamerican Development Bank's flagship report on infrastructure and services.



Media Impact

LAPOP data and findings were **referenced nearly 200 times in the media**, including news publications from dozens of countries across. The lab's **social media presence grew** significantly in 2020.



On Twitter, LAPOP has 2,820 followers. In 2020, the lab had at least 420,000 impressions, nearly 10,000 profile visits, over 700 mentions, and more than 800 new followers.



On Facebook, LAPOP has over 1,600 followers. In 2020, the lab had more than 30,000 impressions, nearly 2,000 page views, and more than 270 new page likes.

LAPOP

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LAPOP's broader consortium includes Founder and Senior Advisor, Dr. Mitchell A. Seligson, as well as an extensive set of country and topic experts across the Americas