

LAPOP's 2021 AmericasBarometer takes the

Pulse of Democracy

Support for
Democracy and
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Trust in Elections and
Electoral Integrity

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Rule of Law:
Corruption, Crime,
and Justice for
Gender-Based Violence

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USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



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Our Mission

LAPOP Lab is a center for excellence in international survey research. Located at Vanderbilt University, our mission is to:

- Produce high-quality public opinion data
- Develop and implement cutting-edge methods
- Build capacity in survey research and analysis
- Generate and disseminate policy-relevant research

The lab is led by scholars with expertise in survey methodology and innovative approaches to the study of public opinion, a dedication to pedagogy, and a commitment to providing high-quality input into evidence-based decisions about programs and policy.



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A Letter from USAID

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is a proud supporter of the AmericasBarometer, an award-winning project that captures the voice of the people of the Americas. In numerous ways, the AmericasBarometer informs discussions over the quality and strength of democracy in the region.

USAID relies on the AmericasBarometer to inform strategy development, guide program design, and evaluate the contexts in which we work. The AmericasBarometer alerts policymakers and international assistance agencies to key challenges. Importantly, the project provides citizens with information about democratic values and experiences in their country, over time and in comparison to other countries.

While the AmericasBarometer is coordinated by LAPOP Lab at Vanderbilt University, it is a collaborative international project. LAPOP consults with researchers across the Americas, local survey teams, USAID, and other project supporters at each stage. These rich discussions increase the relevance and validity of questionnaires; improve sample designs; build and maintain state-of-the-art quality control protocols; and support the development and dissemination of data and reports. As a collaborative project, the AmericasBarometer also builds capacity in public opinion research via knowledge transfers to local teams, student participation in the project, and frequent workshops.

USAID has been the largest supporter of the surveys that form the core of the AmericasBarometer. In addition, each round of the project is supported by numerous other individuals and institutions. USAID is grateful to that network of supporters, the LAPOP team, their outstanding former and current students, the many expert individuals and institutions across the region that contribute to and engage with the project, the local fieldwork teams, and all those who took the time to respond to the survey.

Stephanie Molina

Democracy and Human Rights Team
Office of Regional Sustainable Development
Bureau for Latin America & the Caribbean
U.S. Agency for International Development

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Photo by Gabriela Ore Menendez,
Vanderbilt University CLACX Latin
American Images Photography
Competition 2016

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UNDERSTANDING THE FIGURES IN THIS REPORT

AmericasBarometer data are based on national samples of respondents drawn from each country; naturally, all samples produce results that contain a margin of error. It is important for the reader to understand that each data point (for example, a country's proportion of citizens who support democracy) has a confidence interval, expressed in terms of a range surrounding that point. Many graphs in this study show a 95% confidence interval that takes into account this sampling variability. When two estimated points have confidence intervals that overlap to a large degree, the difference between the two values is typically not statistically significant; conversely, where two confidence intervals do not overlap, the reader can be confident that those differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Estimates for the 2021 AmericasBarometer are based on weighted data. Weights are calculated by estimating baseline probabilities adjusted for eligibility and non-response. Then we calibrate the weights to 2018/19 AmericasBarometer country samples on gender, education, age, and region to obtain overall weights. Cross-time and cross-country weights are standardized so that each country/year has the same effective sample size. Data for this report are based on a preliminary dataset; analysts may find small differences in point estimates when using later fully processed datasets released by LAPOP.

ABOUT THE COVER

Ecuador, 2021: A woman from the indigenous parish of Cancaghua receives her ballot to vote in the Ecuadorian presidential election (Juan Diego Montenegro/Sipa via AP Images)

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The Pulse of Democracy in 2021

Noam Lupu and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister

The 2021 assessment of the pulse of democracy in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region yields a mixed report. The COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020 presented institutions with a severe and prolonged stress test. Research generated by LAPOP Lab in the first year of the pandemic revealed its potential to buoy support for the executive office without contributing to a further decline in support for democracy.¹ Data from the 2021 AmericasBarometer affirm this tendency: support for democracy remained steady in the LAC region, while tolerance for centralizing power in the executive increased.

Support for democracy is low but holding steady. Citizens want politics to reflect their views, fair elections, and politicians who act with integrity. Improving the health of democracy will require concerted efforts around dialogue, inclusion, equity, and good governance

The pandemic increased the public's need for government services while simultaneously stretching and diminishing the state's capacity to provide them. The fact that support for democracy remained stable in the midst of this crisis is an impressive sign of resilience. In fact, satisfaction with democracy increased marginally in 2021—a sign that the public does not blame democracy for its collective suffering.

Yet, skepticism regarding electoral democracy persists. Large numbers of citizens disagree that democracy is the best available political system. What does the public want instead? One answer provided by the 2021 AmericasBarometer is *voice*. When asked to choose between freedom of speech or guaranteed access to basic income and services, the vast majority of LAC residents opt for freedom of speech. In contrast, when asked to choose between a guaranteed basic standard of living or elections, fewer than half choose the

latter. This disregard for elections—a key mechanism by which electoral democracies translate the people's voice into politics—is grounded in views that elections, and elected representatives, are flawed and untrustworthy.

What channels for political voice are more attractive than elected representatives? The public appears to see two options: direct democracy and/or strong executives. When asked to choose, large numbers of individuals prefer direct democracy over representative democracy, and many also say they would tolerate strong executives who work around legislatures and judiciaries.

These attitudes reveal a critical challenge to the health of democracy in the region: to the degree that citizens feel their voices are not being heard through elections, they may accept deviations from democratic practices. El Salvador is an exemplar of this problem. The 2021

AmericasBarometer survey reveals that a large majority of the public has closed ranks behind President Nayib Bukele, who has maintained public support despite ordering security forces to physically intimidate the legislature and centralizing power within the executive office. El Salvador's Freedom House ranking has decreased under Bukele. However, the public's enthusiasm for his style of politics has bolstered support for and satisfaction with democracy and what it is delivering.

What would it take to increase confidence in electoral democracy? The AmericasBarometer provides an answer: *clean governance*. More than three in five citizens in the average LAC country believe that corruption is widespread among elected officials—a rate that has held fairly steady since the question was introduced in 2016. These perceptions are kept aloft by recurring high-level scandals, most recently involving vaccine access and offshore financial accounts. Meanwhile, corruption victimization experiences in dealings with public officials have increased across the region—possibly the result of people's increased contact with public officials during the pandemic, or because bureaucrats themselves faced greater financial insecurity.

The 2021 AmericasBarometer also reveals significant performance challenges for democratic governance, from sharp increases in food insecurity to persistent

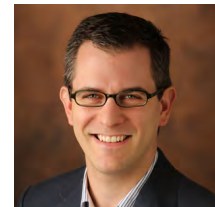
challenges with crime and insecurity. Food insecurity is a critical factor in the increased intentions to emigrate captured in this year's survey. Crime victimization and perceptions of insecurity fell between the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer and this year's survey. But if that decline was a product of temporary lockdown measures in response to the pandemic, it will be difficult to sustain in the long term.

The public's commitment to democracy in the LAC region remains fragile. A positive result in this year's AmericasBarometer survey is resilience in support for democracy in the abstract and marginal gains in satisfaction with democracy—despite recession conditions and the tremendous strain the pandemic placed on public service delivery.

The public strongly asserts its desire to have a voice in politics. Yet, people are skeptical of electoral democracy's capacity to deliver. Many distrust elections and elected representatives. Doubts regarding democracy's capacity to operate fairly and effectively likely account for why average levels of support for and satisfaction with democracy remain comparatively lower than they were a decade ago. For the pulse of democracy to gain strength, citizens in the LAC region will need to see good performance and clean politics from their governments.



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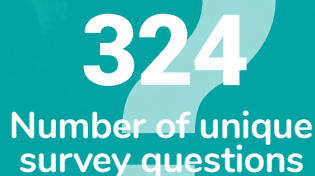
¹ Lupu, Noam, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister. 2021. "The early COVID-19 pandemic and democratic attitudes." PLOS ONE 16(6): e0253485. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0253485>

By the Numbers

2021 AmericasBarometer



First time the AmericasBarometer is conducted via phone surveys



Interviewer Training



The AmericasBarometer Survey

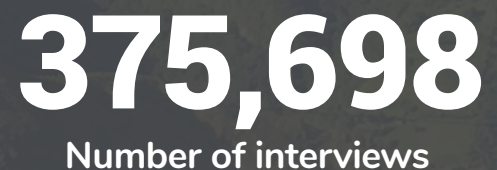


Photo by Georgia Fletcher, Vanderbilt University CLACX Latin American Images Photography Competition 2018

Capacity Building in Survey Research



53

Number of
capacity building
events

370

Number of capacity
building hours

1,298

Number of attendees at
capacity building events



9 waves
of surveys



Number of unique
survey questions

5,509

Total number
of countries

34

Support for Democracy and Its Alternatives

Colombia, 2021:
Protesters march
during a national strike
against President Ivan
Duque's government
(Sebastián Barrios/
VWPics via AP Images)

Oscar Castorena and Adriana Rosario



The robustness of a democracy depends on the degree to which its citizens' commit to democratic principles of government. According to data from previous rounds of the AmericasBarometer, the Latin America and Caribbean region has experienced a decline in public support for democracy as the best form of government and in satisfaction with what democracies are delivering. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed stress on this comparatively weakened commitment to democracy. This chapter examines current regional trends in citizens' attitudes toward democracy, their commitment to its key principles, and their preferences for alternative political systems.

Main Findings

- **Support for democracy has not recovered to levels recorded a decade ago**
- **While citizens are less likely to tolerate a military takeover than they were a decade ago**, they are considerably more likely to tolerate an executive who rules without the legislature in times of crisis
- **Satisfaction with democracy rose slightly, but remains lower than a decade ago**
- **Citizens across the region are willing to sacrifice elections for a system that guarantees income and basic services**, but they are less willing to sacrifice freedom of expression
- **Large majorities across the region prefer direct democracy over electing representatives**
- **Individuals who express a preference for elections, freedom of expression, and elected representatives are more likely to support democracy in the abstract**
- **These preferences are associated with commitment to democracy**, with those preferring elections and rule by elected representatives more likely to support democracy

Research measuring global trends shows that democracy is under threat from a wave of autocratization across the world.¹ And this threat may be compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which provides would-be autocrats with an opportunity to extend their powers in the name of addressing the public health emergency. In this context, it is especially important to understand the public's commitment to democracy. Longstanding theories of democracy and recent empirical research emphasize the link between the public's support for democracy and the durability of democratic government. If the public's commitment to democracy is waning, it is also important to examine what citizens want instead.

The AmericasBarometer asks respondents in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region about

their support for democracy versus alternative forms of government, their tolerance for military coups, and their satisfaction with democracy. These core questions have been included in the questionnaire since 2004, providing a consistent measure of the public's commitment to democracy for over a decade and a half. The data provide insight not only into the effect of recent events such as the pandemic, but also long-term changes in attitudes toward democracy. Supplementing this rich time-series, the 2021 AmericasBarometer survey included several new questions that probe citizens' attitudes about democracy. These include preferences between direct democracy, election of representatives, freedom of expression, guaranteed basic income and services, and rule by experts.

Chile, 2019:
Anti-government
protesters march
during a general
strike that demanded
improvements in
education, health care,
and wages (Rodrigo
Abd/AP Photo)



Majorities Support Democracy, but Support Remains Comparatively Low

How strong or weak is citizen support for democracy across the LAC region? Has this support fluctuated over the previous decade? Since its initial 2004 wave, the AmericasBarometer has asked citizens about their commitment to democratic government with the following question:

Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Responses range from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree). For this analysis, we code answers on the agreement end of the scale (values ranging from five to seven) as support for democracy. As seen in **Figure 1.1**, the proportion of adults in each country who express support for democracy ranges from a low of 46% in Haiti to a high of 80% in Uruguay. In all but four countries (Haiti, Honduras, Peru, and Paraguay), majorities express support for democracy in the abstract.

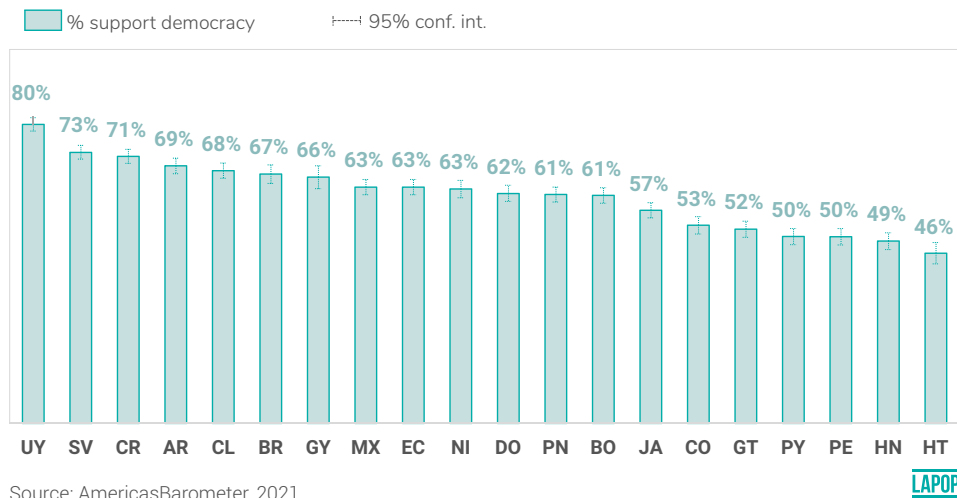
El Salvador stands out as having the second highest percentage of citizens who support democracy. In the 2018/19 round, El Salvador was firmly in the middle of the distribution, with 59% supporting democracy. This indicates a substantial increase in Salvadoran's commitment to democracy, no doubt a result of the 2019 election of Nayib Bukele, a popular politician who is not affiliated with the country's traditional but unpopular political parties. Meanwhile, Argentina, Costa Rica, and Uruguay have consistently appeared among the top countries in support for democracy.

62%

On average in the Latin America and Caribbean region, about two-thirds agree that democracy is preferable to any other form of government

Figure 1.1

In most LAC countries, majorities express support for democracy



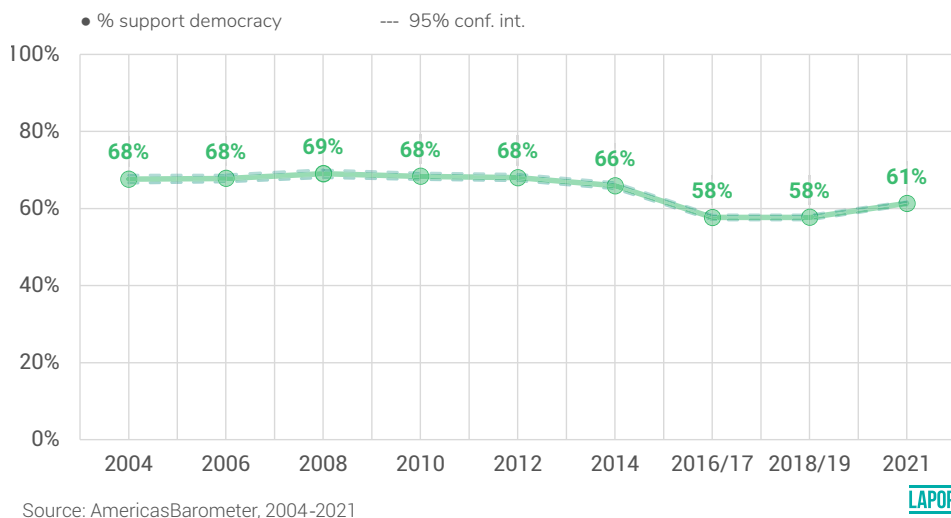
Are public attitudes about democracy in the LAC region following global trends of decline?

Figure 1.2 shows that, on average, 61% agree that democracy is preferable to any other form of government, a slight increase from 2018/19.² But these levels

of support do not reach the highs recorded prior to 2016. Each of these previous waves register statistically significant higher levels of support for democracy. Support for democracy may be rebounding, but it has yet to reach the levels recorded a decade ago.

Figure 1.2

Support for democracy in the LAC region remains lower than a decade ago



In order to dig deeper into democratic attitudes, the AmericasBarometer asked respondents about alternatives to democratic government under particular scenarios. One of these is a military takeover, clearly an autocratic alternative to government by elected representatives. To assess the conditions under which citizens in the region may tolerate a military coup, the 2021 survey asked the following questions:

Some people say that under some circumstances it would be justified for the military of this country to take power by a coup d'état (military coup). In your opinion, would a military coup be justified under the following circumstances?

When there is a lot of corruption.
(1) It would be justified (2) No, it would not be justified

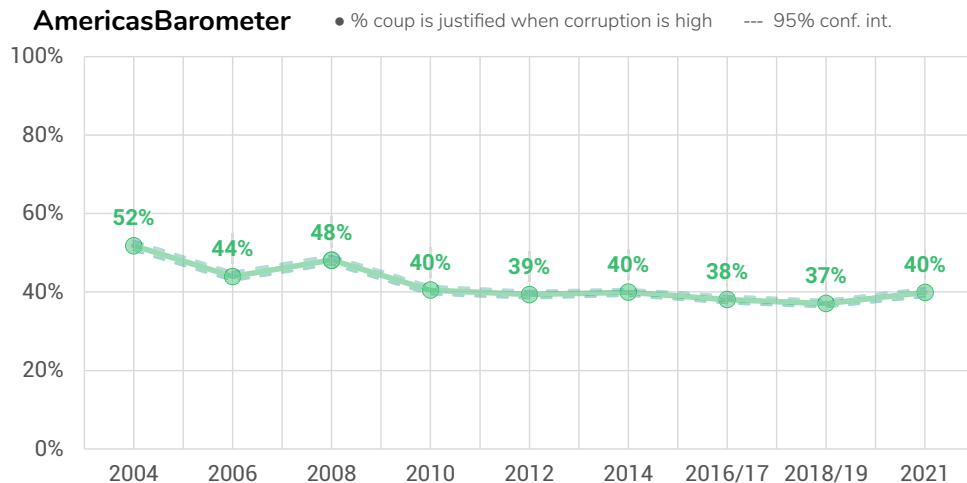
When there is a public health emergency like the coronavirus.

(1) It would be justified (2) No, it would not be justified

Respondents answer in either the affirmative, “a military take-over of the state would be justified” or the negative, “a military take-over of the state would not be justified.” **Figure 1.3** shows that the proportion of respondents who say they would tolerate a military coup under conditions of high corruption rose slightly between 2018/19 and 2021. At 40%, this proportion is substantial, but it remains lower than it was just over a decade ago, in the first rounds of the AmericasBarometer.³ In contrast to the cross-time analysis of support for democracy in the abstract, citizens’ commitment to this particular tenet of democracy—not tolerating military coups—has remained relatively stable over the last decade and a half.

Figure 1.3

Tolerance for military coups remains lower than in early rounds of the AmericasBarometer



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2004-2021

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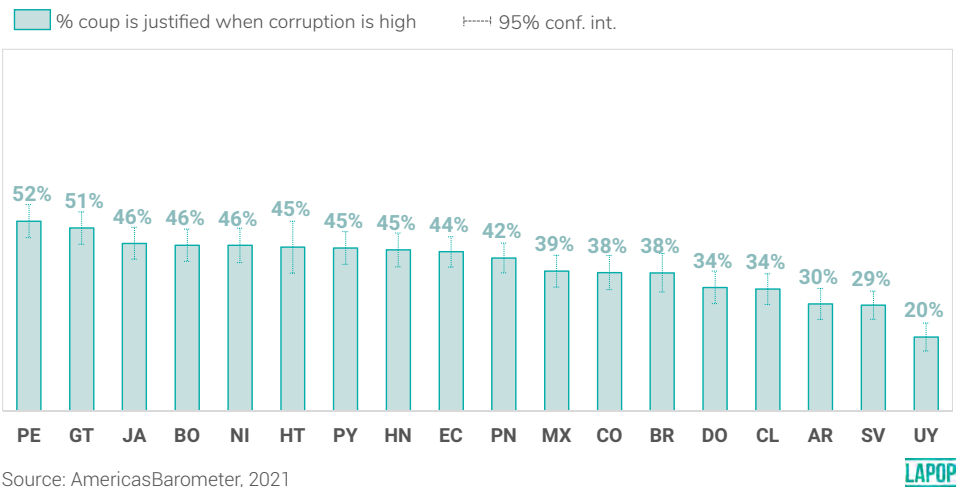


The public is less likely to justify a coup in a public health emergency compared to when there is high corruption

We see similar overall stability in this attitude at the level of individual countries. **Figure 1.4** shows the proportion that say they would tolerate a military coup under conditions of high corruption in each country. Here the proportions range from 20% (Uruguay) to 52% (Peru). While majorities say

they would tolerate a coup under these conditions in only two countries (Guatemala and Peru), the proportions are still substantial in every country. Overall, the ordering of countries across the LAC region remains very similar to what we observed in the 2018/19 round.

Figure 1.4
In most countries of the LAC region, one-third or more would tolerate a military coup under high corruption

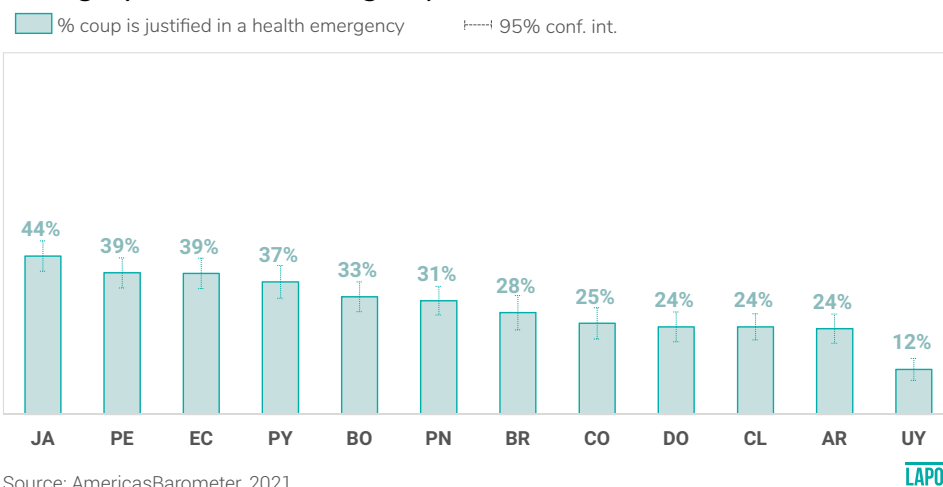


In some countries, the 2021 AmericasBarometer introduced the alternative scenario of a public health emergency to evaluate whether the context of the pandemic affects citizens' views on autocratic alternatives like a military takeover. **Figure 1.5** shows the proportion of respondents in each country where the question was asked who said they would tolerate such a takeover under conditions of a public health emergency. In every country that

included both scenarios, we see that the public is less likely to justify a coup in a public health emergency compared to when there is high corruption. There is no country in which a majority say they would tolerate a coup in a health emergency. As with military coups under high corruption, Uruguay has smallest share of respondents who say they would tolerate a coup under this scenario (12%).

Figure 1.5

One-quarter to one-third across the LAC region would tolerate a coup during a public health emergency



Over the long term, the public in the LAC region has grown less tolerant of the most flagrant form of authoritarianism, military rule. This attitudinal shift is consistent with the fact that actual military takeovers have become a less prominent threat to democracies in the region. Instead, democracies are increasingly under threat from elected leaders who seek to expand their authority beyond constitutional constraints. This is especially problematic for a region like Latin America, where presidential systems can lead to inter-branch conflict between an executive with a popular mandate and other branches of government. The 2021 AmericasBarometer survey included the following question tapping into executive overreach:

Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the president of the country to close the Congress/Parliament and govern without Congress/Parliament?

Respondents could answer “yes” or “no.” **Figure 1.6** shows that the public in the LAC region has become steadily more tolerant of executive coups since the question was first asked in 2010. In fact, the proportion of individuals tolerating executive coups doubled between 2010 and 2021. This is a sharp contrast to levels of tolerance for military coups, which have been steadier.

Figure 1.6

Tolerance for executive coups continues to rise in the LAC region

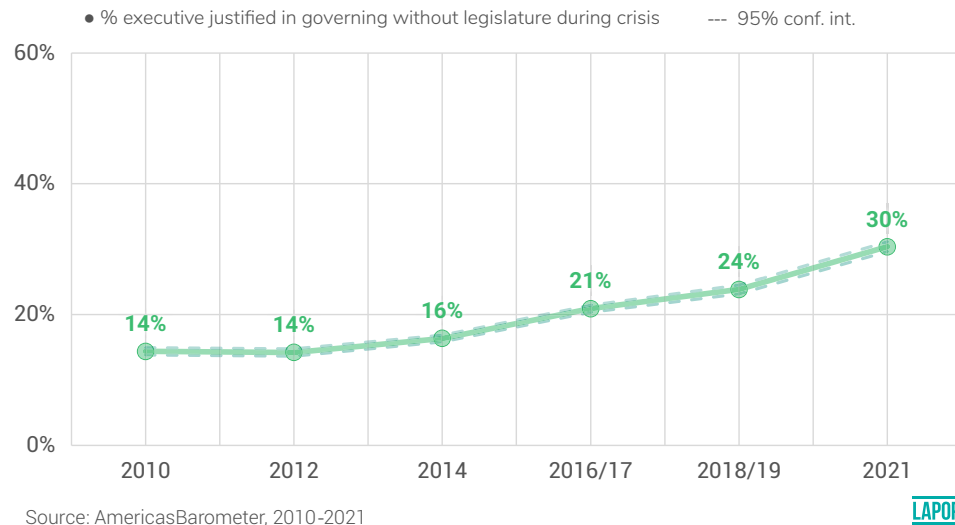
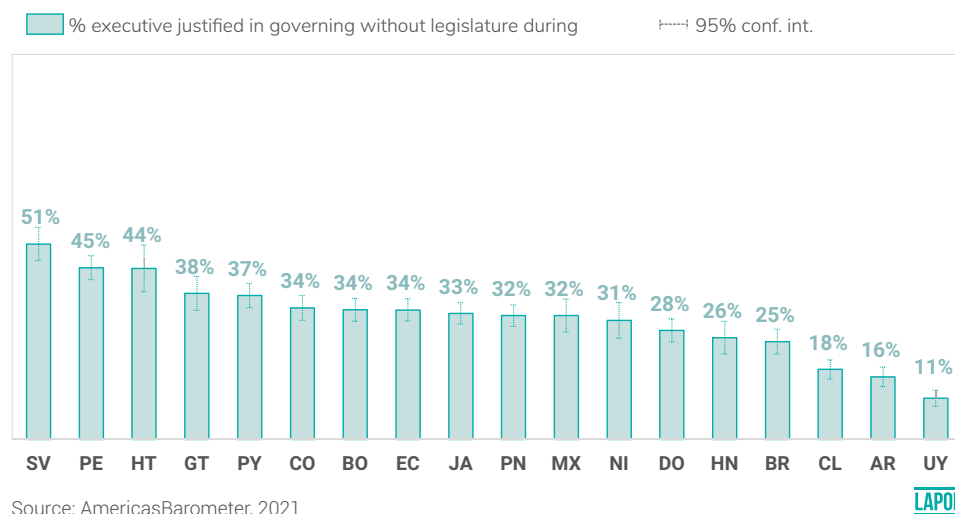


Figure 1.7 shows these results for each country, demonstrating much more heterogeneity across countries than tolerance for military takeovers. In terms of tolerance for executive coups, there is a 40-percentage point difference between the most

coup-tolerant country (El Salvador) and the least coup-tolerant (Uruguay). In contrast, the difference between the highest and lowest ranked countries for the military coup under a scenario of high corruption is 32 percentage points.

Figure 1.7

In most countries, a third or less would tolerate an executive coup



El Salvador is again notable. While support for democracy surged in El Salvador between 2018/19 and 2021, so did Salvadorans' willingness to tolerate an executive coup—an undemocratic move. Generally, countries with the highest tolerance for executive coups are also those with the highest tolerance for military coups. But here El Salvador is an exception: it is the third least tolerant of military coups (at 29%) and the most tolerant of executive coups (at 51%). This may be partly explained by the enormous popularity of its president. According to the survey, 61% of Salvadorans believe he is doing a very good job. Recent research has indeed found that popular executives can potentially undermine citizens' opposition to anti-democratic executive actions while, at the same time, bolstering satisfaction with democracy.⁴

To further assess attitudes about centralizing power in the executive, the 2021 AmericasBarometer

included a new question measuring citizens' preferences for a strong leader who may bend the rules:

Having a strong leader in the government, even if the leader bends the rules to get things done. Would you say that it is very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad, or very bad as a form of government for our country?

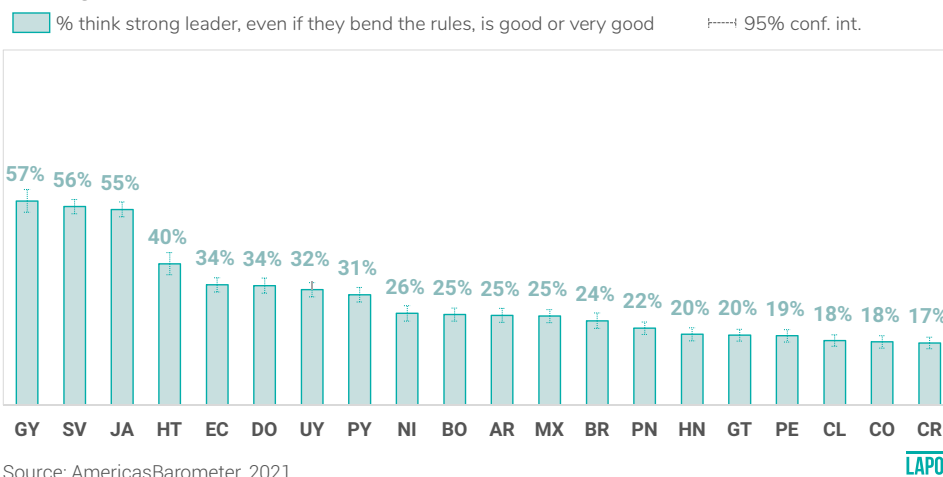
Figure 1.8 shows the proportion that answered “very good” or “good” in each country. Guyana, which was not among the countries asked the military and executive coup questions, has the highest levels of support for a strong leader, but El Salvador is a close second—consistent with the responses about executive coups. Interestingly, Uruguay, whose public is consistently the least tolerant of military and executive coups, is towards the middle of the distribution when it comes to preferring a strong leader who bends the rules to get things done.



Popular executives can potentially undermine citizens' opposition to anti-democratic executive actions while at the same time bolstering satisfaction with democracy

Figure 1.8

In all but three countries in the LAC region, less than half support a strong leader who bends the rules



Across Most of the Region, Citizens Remain Dissatisfied with Democracy

While individuals may be highly committed to democracy in the abstract, they may not necessarily think the government in their country is living up to democratic ideals. Over the long run, dissatisfaction with how democracy works in practice may erode support for democracy in the abstract. The AmericasBarometer directly asks respondents about their evaluation of democracy with the following question:

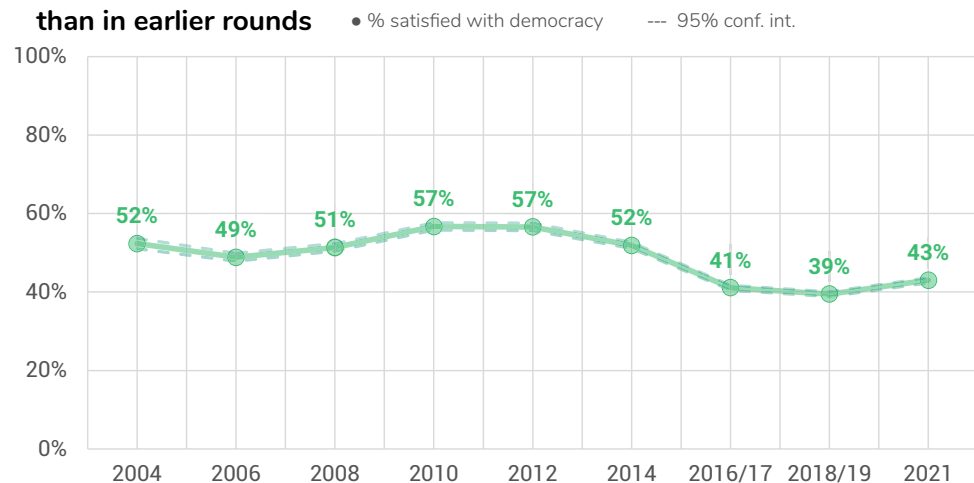
In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in [country]?

Figure 1.9 shows the proportion across the LAC region that said they were either “satisfied” or “very

satisfied” with democracy in each round of the AmericasBarometer. The 2021 round shows a slight increase in satisfaction since 2018/19, although the level of satisfaction is still lower than it was over a decade ago. These trends thus mirror over-time change in support for democracy in the abstract.

Figure 1.9

Despite a recent increase, satisfaction with democracy remains lower than in earlier rounds



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2004-2021

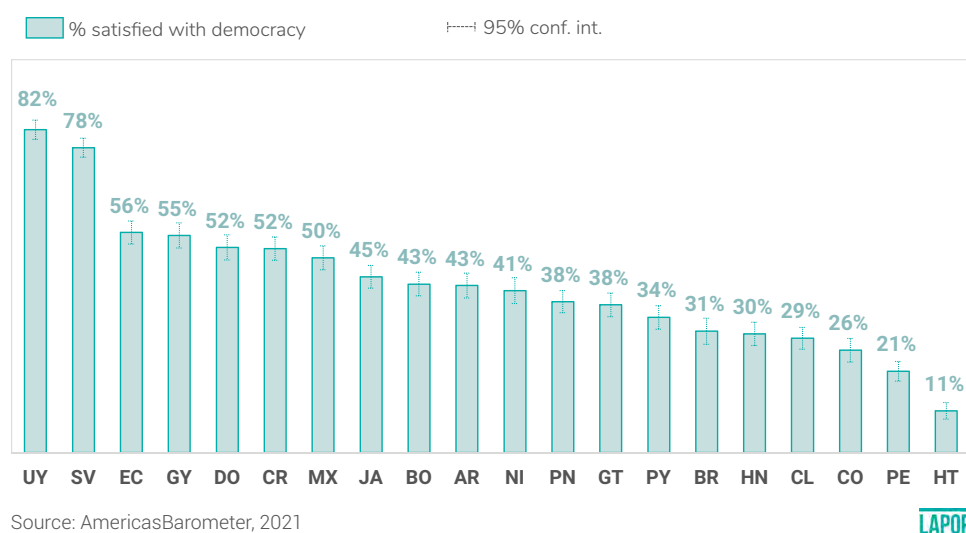
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Figure 1.10 shows how these levels of satisfaction vary across the countries in the LAC region in 2021. One of the most striking aspects of the figure is the range of variation between countries, going from a low of 11% in Haiti to a high of 82% in

Uruguay. Also notable is that levels of satisfaction are substantially higher in El Salvador and in Uruguay than in other countries. Only majorities in six countries in the region say that they are satisfied with how democracy works in their country.

Figure 1.10

In most countries, majorities are dissatisfied with democracy



Colombia, 2021:
Demonstrators at
the Plaza Bolívar in
Bogota protesting
during a national
strike against
national violence
and government
measures (Jc.roll99/
Shutterstock)

The Public is Only Weakly Committed to Elections and Representative Democracy

To the degree that democratic support and satisfaction remain relatively low across most of the LAC region, what systems of government would the public prefer?

To answer this question, the 2021 AmericasBarometer survey included a new module of questions:

Which political system seems best for [country]: a system that guarantees access to a basic income and services for all citizens, even if the authorities cannot be elected, or to be able to vote to elect the authorities, even if some people do not have access to a basic income and services?

Which political system seems best for [country]: a system that guarantees access to a basic income and services for all citizens, even if they cannot express their political opinions without fear or censorship, or a system in which everybody can express their

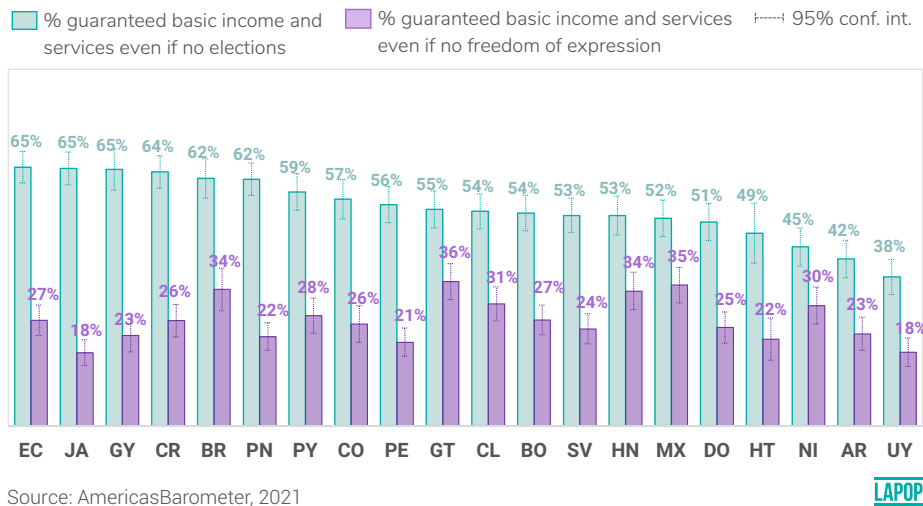
political opinions without fear or censorship, even if some people do not have access to a basic income and services?

These questions measure the extent to which respondents are willing to sacrifice elections and freedom of expression in exchange for a system that guarantees material wellbeing.

Figure 1.11 shows the proportion of individuals who said they preferred guaranteed income and services over those political rights. The striking finding in this figure is that *the public is far more willing to sacrifice elections than freedom of expression.*

Figure 1.11

In most countries, majorities prefer a system that guarantees basic income/services over elections but not over freedom of speech



The public is far more willing to sacrifice elections than freedom of expression

In all but four countries, majorities would be willing to give up holding elections in exchange for guaranteed income and services. In contrast, only a minority in each country is willing to give up freedom of expression for those same guarantees. Interestingly, Haiti appears toward the bottom in both measures. Compared to most other countries, Haitians appear less willing to sacrifice elections and freedom of expression for guaranteed basic income and services, even though they also express high levels of dissatisfaction with their democratic system.

Citizens in the LAC region seem willing to compromise on elections when considering alternative systems of government. This is troubling because a core component

of liberal democracies is the rule of elected representatives. What kinds of governments would citizens in the LAC region prefer if not electoral democracy? To provide further insight, the 2021 AmericasBarometer included two more new questions in a subset of countries:

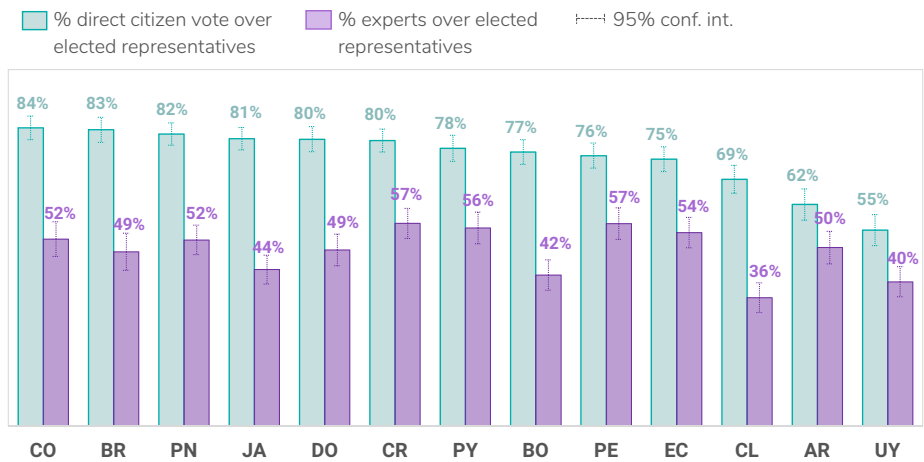
In deciding what laws to make, what do you think is best for [country]: should elected representatives of the people decide, or should citizens vote directly to decide each issue?

In deciding what laws to make, what do you think is best for [country]: should a group of experts decide, or representatives elected by the people decide?

Figure 1.12 shows the proportion of individuals who said they prefer either direct democracy or rule by experts over government by elected representatives. Most notable, large majorities in every country where these questions were asked prefer direct democracy, with citizens voting directly on each issue. There

is considerably lower support for rule by a group of experts instead of elected representatives. However, even in this scenario, in half of the countries where this question was asked, a majority of the public expressed a preference for an alternative to representative democracy.

Figure 1.12
Majorities across the LAC region prefer direct democracy, but not rule by experts



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

What do these responses tell us about the public's more general commitment to democracy? One way to find out is to ask whether those individuals who are less committed to elections, freedom of expression, and elected representatives also express lower levels of support for democracy in the abstract. Finding such a correlation would suggest that those who express lower support for democracy may do so because they

see less value in these features of a modern democratic system.

Figure 1.13 shows how overall support for democracy in the abstract relates to the four tradeoff questions. Those who prefer a system that guarantees basic income and services are less likely to support democracy than those who prefer a system that includes elections or protects freedom of expression. The differences are

statistically significant.⁵ For the mass public in the LAC region, there seems to be an association between the concept of democracy on one hand and elections and freedom of expression on the other. To the

extent that citizens value elections and protection from censorship, they are more likely to support democracy over alternative forms of government.

Figure 1.13

Those who prefer elections, freedom of expression, and elected representatives are more likely to support democracy

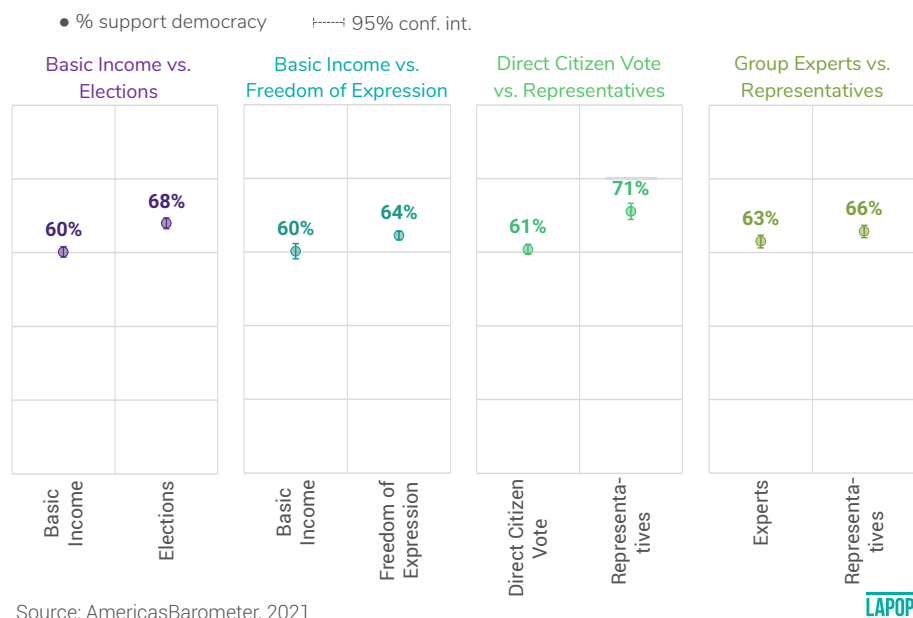


Figure 1.13 also shows that those who believe elected representatives should make the laws are more likely to support democracy in the abstract compared to those who believe laws should be made by direct citizen vote on each issue. This difference is statistically significant.⁶ Once again, there appears to be a strong association in the minds of LAC citizens between democracy and representation through elections.

On the other hand, we find no difference in levels of support for democracy in the abstract between citizens who prefer that experts make laws versus those who prefer elected representatives. In this case, the difference we observe is not statistically significant. It appears that attitudes about direct versus representative democracy are more consequential for support for democracy than attitudes about rule by experts versus representative democracy.

Conclusions: Implications for Citizen Commitment to Democracy

The results from the 2021 AmericasBarometer are not particularly good news for the state of public commitment to electoral democracy in the region. Despite recent gains at the margins, levels of support for and satisfaction with democracy remain lower than they were about a decade ago. And while citizens' tolerance for military coups has remained below the levels recorded a decade ago, their tolerance for executive coups has grown steadily.

The new questions introduced in the 2021 AmericasBarometer reveal that these patterns may stem from discontent with elections and elected representatives. In most countries where the question was asked, majorities are willing to sacrifice elections for a system that guarantees basic income and services. Large majorities in every country prefer that policy issues be decided by direct vote rather than by elected representatives. And those who prefer these alternatives to elections and elected representatives are less likely to say they support democracy over

any alternative form of government. Across the LAC region, people's commitment to democracy seems to be waning because they have become disillusioned with elections and with the legitimacy of their elected representatives.

Oscar Castorena holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Vanderbilt University and is a statistician at LAPOP Lab.

Adriana Rosario is a student at the University of Puerto Rico and was a LAPOP Research Fellow in the summer of 2021.

Notes

- 1 Lührmann and Lindberg. 2019.
- 2 We do not observe this increase if we instead plot the mean level of support for democracy. This reflects the fact that, either due to the change in mode (from face-to-face to telephone) or due to true polarization of beliefs, people were more likely to respond with extreme values on the scale (strongly disagree or strongly agree) in 2021.
- 3 The number of countries included in the AmericasBarometer has increased since the initial rounds. Our conclusions in over-time analyses do not change if we focus only on the countries surveyed consistently since 2004.
- 4 Cohen, Smith, Moseley, and Layton. Forthcoming.
- 5 These findings hold when controlling for socioeconomic characteristics.
- 6 These findings hold when controlling for socioeconomic characteristics.



Chile, 2020: Protesters at the Plaza Baquedano in Santiago during a demonstration against inequality (R.M. Nunes/ Shutterstock)



Spotlight on Intentions to Emigrate

By Alexander Tripp¹

Intentions to emigrate from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico rose in 2021.

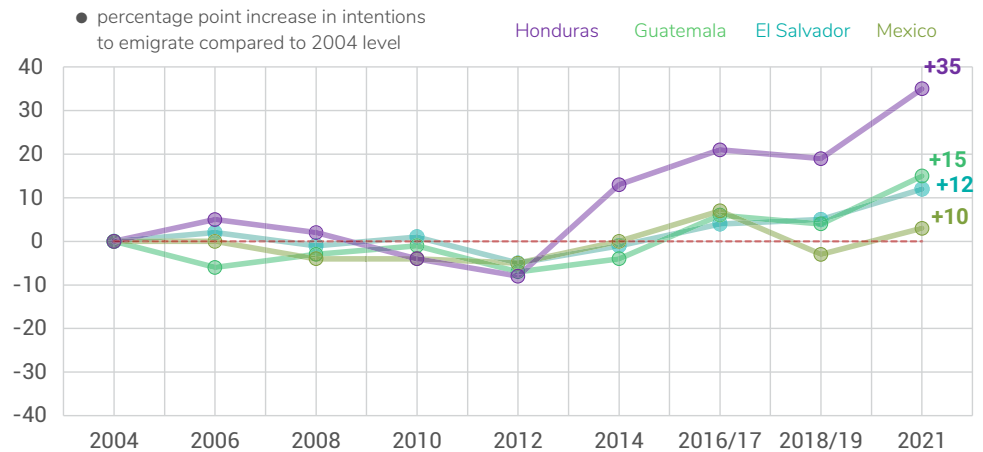
This increase follows a period between 2016 and 2019, in which AmericasBarometer data showed the tapering of an earlier positive trend in intentions to emigrate—that is, to live or work abroad.²

Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer has measured intentions to emigrate by asking the following question:

Do you have any intention of going to live or work in another country in the next three years? (1) Yes (2) No

In 2021 in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, the percentage of those intending to leave registered the largest increase in the history of the AmericasBarometer. In México, the uptick is more modest, not quite reaching the change detected in the 2016/17 round.

Compared to levels recorded in 2004, intentions to emigrate in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador increased by their largest magnitude in 2021



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2004-2021

LAPOP

Guatemalans and Hondurans registered the largest increases in intentions to emigrate since 2004–15 and 35 percentage points, respectively.³ Hondurans are most likely to report an intention to emigrate in 2021: 54% of Hondurans express a desire to move or work abroad. In Mexico and El Salvador, the rate of those reporting that they intend to live or work abroad increased between 10 and 12 percentage points, respectively, compared to levels recorded in 2004.⁴ Not all who express an intention to leave will actually embark on the

journey, yet increased intentions portend elevated migration levels.

Those who intend to emigrate are predominantly interested in the United States as their destination.

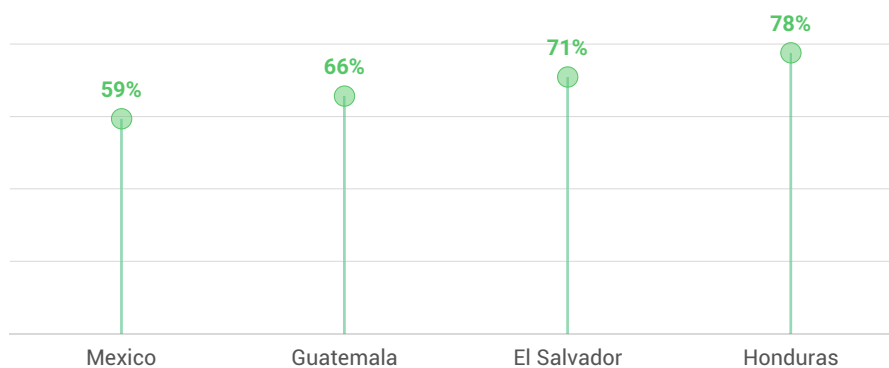
People who report having intentions to live or work abroad were asked *where* they hoped to go, and the United States is the clear choice for most. More than three-quarters of Hondurans with intentions to emigrate hope to arrive in the United States. That rate is 71% in El Salvador, 66% in Guatemala, and 59% in Mexico.



More than three-quarters of Hondurans with intentions to emigrate hope to arrive in the United States

Most who intend to emigrate from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, or Honduras say the United States is their preferred destination

● % with intentions to emigrate who say US is preferred destination



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

1 Alexander Tripp is a graduate student in the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University and a LAPOP-affiliated researcher.

2 Intentions to emigrate do not capture the actual rate of migration, which is lower, but they act as a good "barometer" of when those actual rates are likely to increase, stay the same, or decrease.

3 Guatemalans and Hondurans also registered the largest increases in intentions to emigrate between the 2018/19 and 2021 rounds—10 and 14 percentage points, respectively.

4 Between the 2018/19 and 2021 rounds, intentions to emigrate increased by 5 percentage points in El Salvador and 7 percentage points in Mexico.



Spotlight on Key Drivers of Emigration

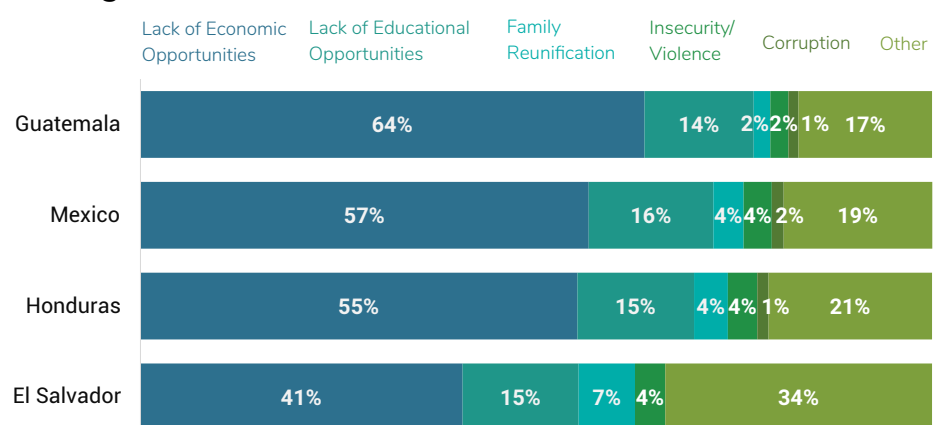
By Alexander Tripp¹

Emigration intentions in 2021 are largely driven by a lack of economic opportunities.

When asked about the most important reason people have for intending to emigrate, respondents in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico pointed to the lack of economic opportunities.² Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents in Guatemala say the lack of economic

opportunities was the key motivator in their intention to live or work abroad, while more than half in Honduras and Mexico agree. In El Salvador, about two in five also identify economic insecurity as a key driver of their intentions to emigrate.

The lack of economic opportunities is a key driver of intentions to emigrate in 2021



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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A rise in emigration intentions is likely connected to harsh economic conditions exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic



A rise in emigration intentions is likely connected to harsh economic conditions exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Food insecurity is a key factor in determining who is more likely to express intentions to emigrate in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.³ Moreover, these findings point to food insecurity as a stronger driver of emigration in 2021 than a more general deterioration of personal economic conditions. Only when we exclude food insecurity from our analyses, do we find that those who said their personal economic situation had worsened in the last year were more likely to intend to emigrate than those who said their conditions stayed the same or improved. This insight differs from what we found

in the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer round, when both food insecurity and factors related to personal economic conditions had similar impacts on emigration intentions.

The magnified impact of food insecurity on emigration intentions in 2021 is likely a reflection of how severely the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted food supply systems in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. These disruptions have resulted in rising food prices, which combined with increased unemployment rates that have also been a consequence of the pandemic, have left people across the LAC region increasingly unable to purchase enough food for their households.⁴

Food insecurity is a key factor in determining who is more likely to express intentions to emigrate in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras

Who is more likely to emigrate?

Individuals who:	Mexico	Guatemala	El Salvador	Honduras
Have low trust in their rights being protected	■			
Have low respect for country's political institutions		■		
Experience food insecurity	■	■	■	■
Experience worsening personal economic conditions				
Are asked for bribes from government employees	■	■		■
Are young (18-25)	■	■	■	■
Are men	■	■		■

- Statistically significant at $p < .05$
- Statistically significant at $p < .10$

Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021



1 Alexander Tripp is a graduate student in the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University and a LAPOP-affiliated researcher.

2 This was an open-ended question and responses were coded by the interviewer into pre-defined categories. The "Other" category in the figure combines responses coded as "other" that did not match any of the predefined categories, as well as responses coded into the following categories: hunger, drought, natural disasters, extortion, discrimination, and the political situation.

3 Findings are based on regression analyses. Those who are men and young (18-25) are also more likely to intend to live or work abroad compared to their women and older counterparts. In Mexico and Guatemala, experiences with corruption also seem to push people to want to emigrate. The analyses also control for level of education and wealth.

4 See <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/45726-preventing-covid-19-crisis-becoming-food-crisis-urgent-measures-against-hunger>



Spotlight on the Economic Impact of COVID-19

By Carlos López and Luke Plutowski¹



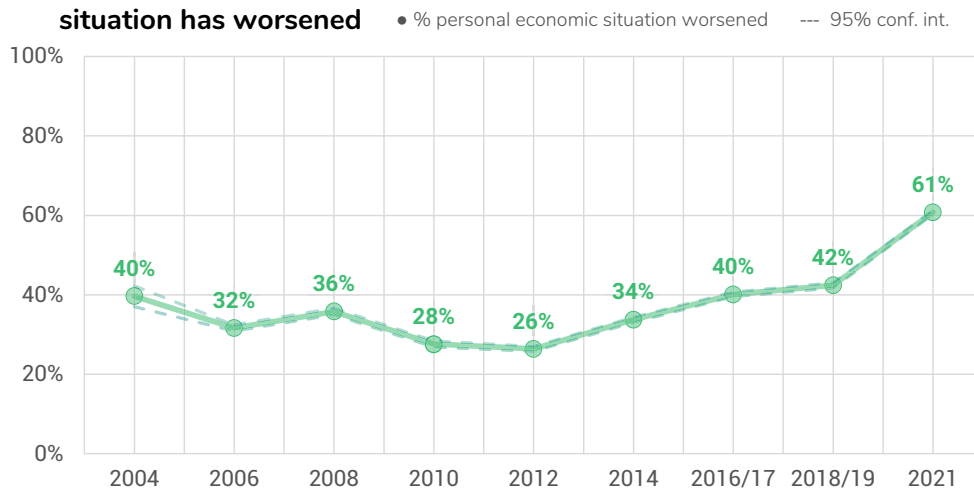
Peru, 2020: Army soldiers control traffic in Lima during early days of the COVID-19 outbreak (Myriam B./ Shutterstock)

For the first time in the history of the AmericasBarometer, a majority of people across the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region perceive that their economic situation has worsened.

According to data from the 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer, three in five people, on average in the region, report that their economic situation deteriorated in the 12 months preceding data

collection.² The percentage of people reporting such a decline has steadily increased since 2012, and jumped 19 percentage points between the 2018/19 and 2021 survey rounds.

Most people in the LAC region now say their personal economic situation has worsened



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2004-2021

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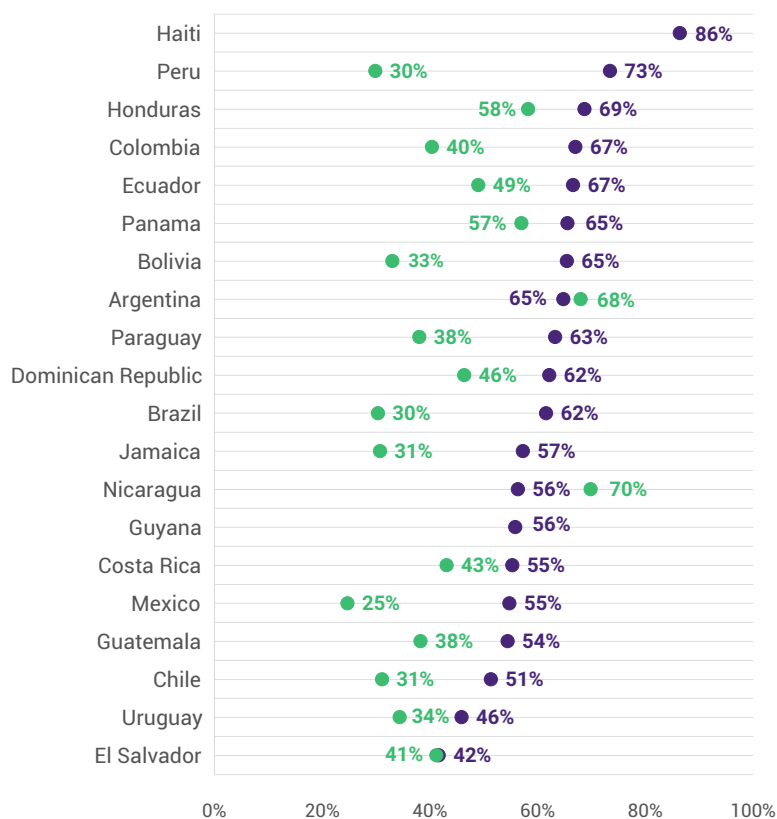


Peru, 2020:
Women practice
social distancing
while lining up in a
queue in Lima to buy
groceries (Myriam B./
Shutterstock)

The percentage of individuals who say their personal economic situation worsened in the last 12 months increased in most LAC countries. These negative evaluations of personal economic conditions

increased by the largest margin in Peru (43 percentage points). In 2021, Haiti has the largest percentage of people reporting deteriorating personal economic conditions (86%).³

Personal economic conditions worsened across the LAC region, with a few exceptions • % personal economic situation worsened 2018/19 2021



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2018/19-2021

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86%

Haiti has the largest
percentage of
people reporting
deteriorating personal
economic conditions



Most who report that their personal economic situation worsened over the previous year say this was due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Most who report that their personal economic situation worsened over the previous year say this was due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among those who said their economic conditions deteriorated, about three-quarters across the LAC region blame this on the coronavirus.⁴ Haiti is the only country in 2021 in which a minority of people blame the pandemic for worsening personal economic conditions. In all other countries surveyed in the 2021 AmericasBarometer, most people attribute deteriorating economic conditions to the coronavirus.

The strong link people in the region make between worsening economic conditions and the pandemic is unsurprising given the enormous health and economic costs the pandemic has levied across the Americas. By March 2020, public policies aimed at curbing the spread of the virus were established in almost all the countries of the region. The pandemic accelerated the deterioration of many economies in the region that were already on unsteady grounds.⁵ Macroeconomic indicators point to a significant economic slowdown across the

LAC region in 2020 and 2021. Organizations such as CEPAL⁶ and the World Bank⁷ forecasted a regional economic performance of -8%, with serious effects on job losses and business closures, especially small businesses. Indeed, foreign and local investments decreased due to pandemic uncertainty. Moreover, economic slowdowns in the United States and Europe limited the possibility of exports for the economies of Latin America, in the same way that contraction has limited internal markets, reducing consumption and demand for goods and services.

These findings have important implications for governance in the LAC region. The poor economic situation could produce doubts in the legitimacy of authorities in the absence of efficient responses.⁸ At the extreme, if citizens place blame on the authorities for failure to provide economic security during the pandemic, they may lose faith in the ability of democratically elected leaders to be held accountable on state responses to issues such as public health, employment, and the fight against poverty.

1 Carlos López is a graduate student in the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University and a LAPOP-affiliated researcher. Luke Plutowski is a statistician at the LAPOP Lab.

2 Question wording: Do you think that your current economic situation is better, the same or worse than it was twelve months ago?

3 This survey question was not asked in Haiti and Guyana in the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer.

4 Only those who said their personal economic situation was worse were asked a follow up question about whether this was due to the coronavirus pandemic or another reason.

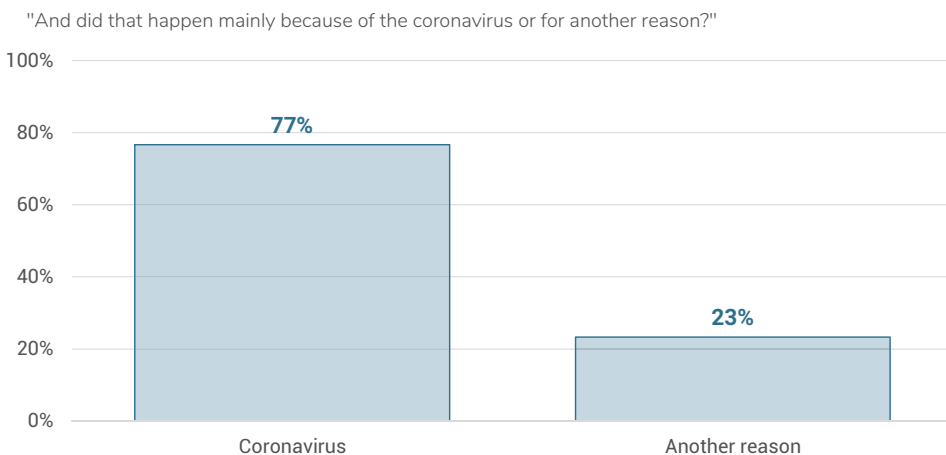
5 See <https://www.csis.org/analysis/effects-covid-19-latin-americas-economy>

6 See <https://www.cepal.org/es/temas/covid-19>

7 See <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/region/lac/overview>

8 See https://www.nupi.no/nupi_eng/Publications/CRISTin-Pub/COVID-19-in-Latin-America-Challenges-responses-and-consequences

Of those who reported worsening personal economic conditions, about three in four across the LAC region say it was because of the coronavirus pandemic



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021



Mexico, 2020: Avenida Francisco I. Madero in Mexico City, one of the city's most popular and busiest commercial centers, is seen totally empty amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Nizz/Shutterstock)

Guatemala, 2019: Women walk in a market in the town of Lake Atitlan (Lucy Brown/ Shutterstock)



Food Insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean

By Abhinav Krishnan and Mariana Rodríguez¹

Food insecurity is on the rise in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region.

According to data from the 2021 AmericasBarometer, food insecurity affects one in three households on average. This represents an increase

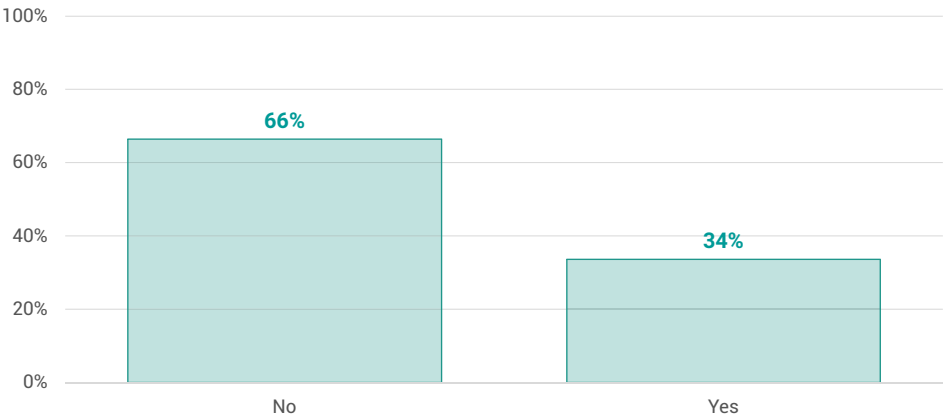
of 69% (or 14 percentage points) in food insecurity across the region since the question was first asked in the 2012 round.



On average in the LAC region, about three in four food insecure households attribute their lack of access to food to the pandemic

One in three across the LAC region has experienced food insecurity

"In the past three months, because of a lack of money or other resources, did your household ever run out of food?"

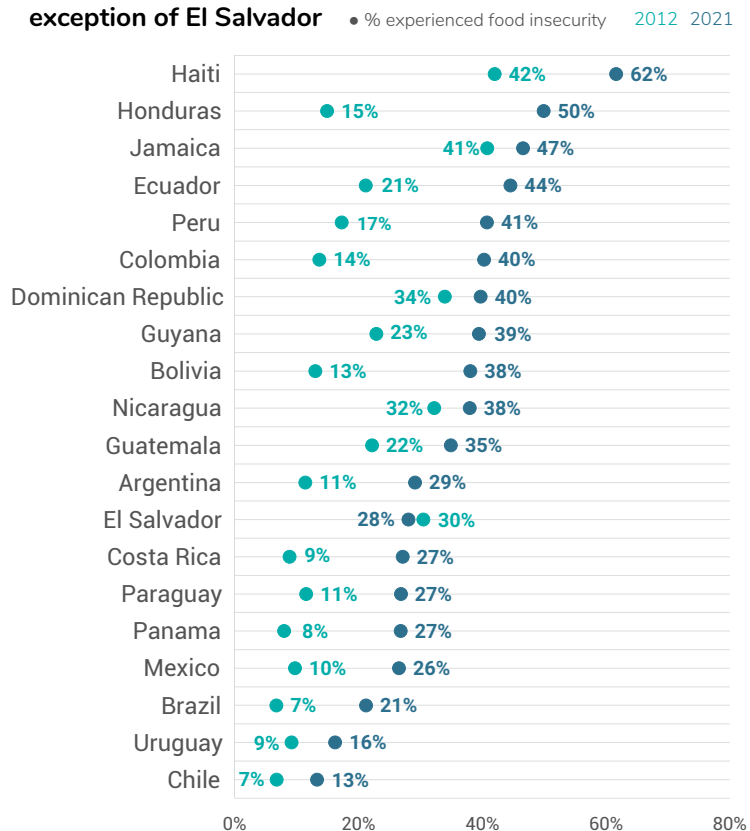


Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

The percentage of individuals who say their household ran out of food in the last three months increased by double-digit margins in most countries of the LAC region. Food insecurity increased the most between 2012 and 2021 in Honduras (35 percentage points). Haiti, however, displays the highest level of food insecurity for 2021, with about three in five saying their household is food insecure. Trends in reported experiences with food insecurity from the AmericasBarometer correspond with evidence from the United Nations of a steady, five-year increase in the number of people experiencing hunger in the LAC region.²

Food insecurity increased across the LAC region, with the exception of El Salvador



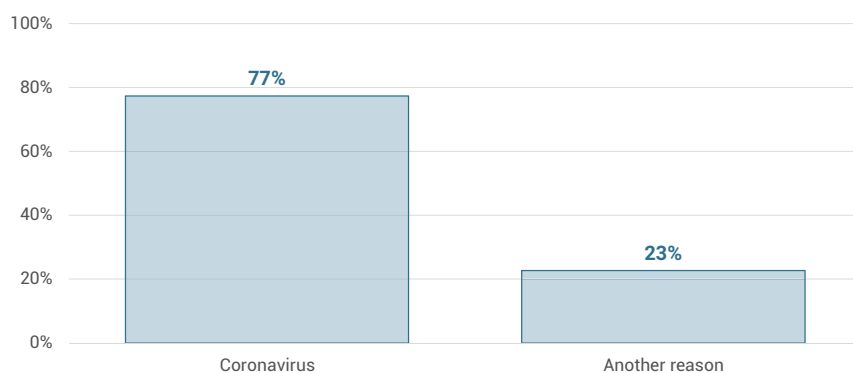
Source: AmericasBarometer, 2012-2021

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Most who have experienced food insecurity blame the COVID-19 pandemic for having run out of food. On average in the LAC region, about three in four food insecure households attribute their lack of access to food to the pandemic. This attribution of blame to the pandemic is unsurprising given the pandemic's outsized impact in disrupting food production and distribution in the region. Resulting surges in food prices, coupled with rising unemployment rates that are also a consequence of the pandemic's broader economic impact, have made people in the LAC region increasingly vulnerable to being food insecure. These harsh economic conditions have experts heeding the warning of a potential food crisis in the region if disruptions to food systems continue.

Of those who experienced food insecurity, about three in four across the LAC region say it was because of the coronavirus pandemic

"And did that happen mainly because of the coronavirus or for another reason?"



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

1 Abhinav Krishnan is a third-year undergraduate student at Vanderbilt University and a research assistant at the LAPOP Lab. Mariana Rodríguez is Director of Research and Engagement at the LAPOP Lab.

2 See <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb2242es>

Trust in Elections and Electoral Integrity

Ehab Alhosaini and Oscar Castorena

Dominican Republic, 2020: Rocks are used as weights to prevent ballots from flying away while officials count votes during the presidential election (Tatiana Fernandez/AP Photo)

Elections are central to democracy, and large-scale modern polities require government by elected representatives. But for elections to be an effective means of selecting governing representatives, citizens need to trust that electoral institutions are unbiased, elections are free and fair, and that the policies they pursue and the political system they uphold are legitimate. This chapter examines how much trust citizens of the Latin America and Caribbean region trust elections in their countries, as well as their perceptions of the integrity of elections.

Main Findings

- **Trust in elections recovered across the region from 38% in 2018/19 to 42% in 2021**, but most people continue to express low trust in their electoral systems
- **There is wide variation across countries in terms of beliefs about election integrity**: 75% of Uruguayans believe that votes are always counted correctly, but only 18% in Colombia, Guyana, and Jamaica agree
- **Across the region, half of the public believes foreign governments sometimes influence elections**
- **Beliefs about election integrity correlate with overall trust in elections and support for democracy**

The legitimacy of elections faces substantial threats in developing democracies like those in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. Irregularities and allegations of vote tampering are widespread, as in the high-profile cases of presidential elections in Bolivia in late 2019 and Peru in early 2021, where losing candidate Keiko Fujimori decried Pedro Castillo's victory as "fraudulent."¹ High levels of violence in the region also threaten the safety of elections in the region, as highlighted by Mexico's recent national elections, where political assassinations had increased by 33% over the prior election.²

The COVID-19 pandemic added additional stress to electoral systems already facing challenges. National elections were postponed in numerous LAC countries because of restrictions related to the pandemic. Often these postponements were criticized by opposition leaders as an undemocratic power grab by incumbent governments.³ Participation in these elections also

became far more challenging than normal. In countries with bans on public transportation due to public health concerns, rural voters found it more difficult to reach their polling places. In others, voters concerned about the pandemic preferred to avoid the crowds and lines typically associated with Election Day. In two of the more dramatic cases, turnout declined 16% in the Dominican Republic and a staggering 21% in Jamaica.⁴

The AmericasBarometer provides important insights into how the public in the LAC region views elections. Aside from providing a cross-national and over-time analysis of trust in elections, the 2021 survey includes novel questions that allow us to better understand citizen attitudes towards the conduct of elections in their country. What aspects of the conduct of elections are most consequential for their overall legitimacy? Can deficiencies in the integrity of elections undermine support for the political system more broadly?

Nicaragua, 2021: A polling official uses indelible ink to mark the thumb of a voter after he cast his ballot during the presidential election on November 7, 2021 (Jorge Torres/Shutterstock)



Trust in Elections Increased, but Levels Are Still Low

The AmericasBarometer measures citizens' trust in the electoral process with the following item:

To what extent do you trust elections in this country? Using any number on a scale from 1, "Not at all" to 7, "A lot"

Trust in elections is measured via a 1-7 scale. We recode responses into a binary indicator where responses 1-4 are coded as not trusting and 5-7 are coded as trusting elections.

Figure 2.1 shows the proportion of respondents who trust elections

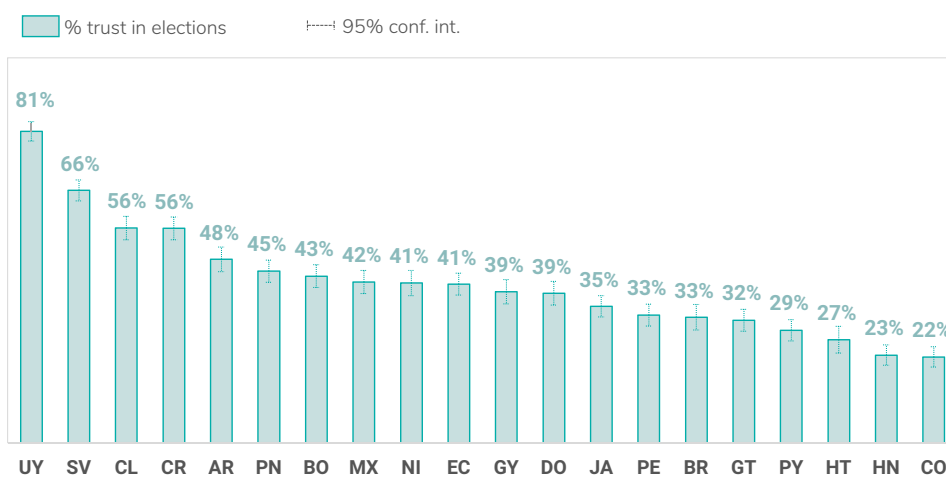
across the countries included in the 2021 round. The figure reveals considerable variation across countries, with a 59 percentage-point gap between the country with the highest level of trust (Uruguay at 81%) and the country with the lowest (Colombia at 22%). A majority of respondents express trust in elections in only 4 out of the 20 countries in the round.



A majority of respondents express trust in elections in only 4 out of the 20 countries in the round

Figure 2.1

Trust in elections highest in Uruguay and lowest in Colombia



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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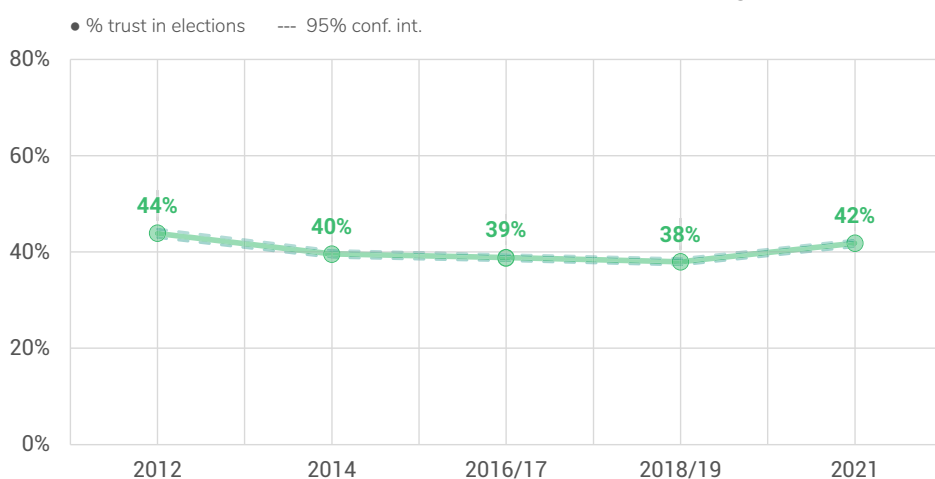
Older citizens
have more positive
assessments of their
electoral systems
than younger ones

The current levels of trust in elections reflect some change over previous rounds of the AmericasBarometer. **Figure 2.2** shows that while trust in elections was higher on average across the

LAC region in 2012, it declined subsequently and remained stable over multiple rounds. The findings in 2021 reflect something of a rebound in trust in elections from 38% in the 2018/19 round to 42% in 2021.

Figure 2.2

Trust in elections rebounds to over 40% across LAC region in 2021



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2012-2021

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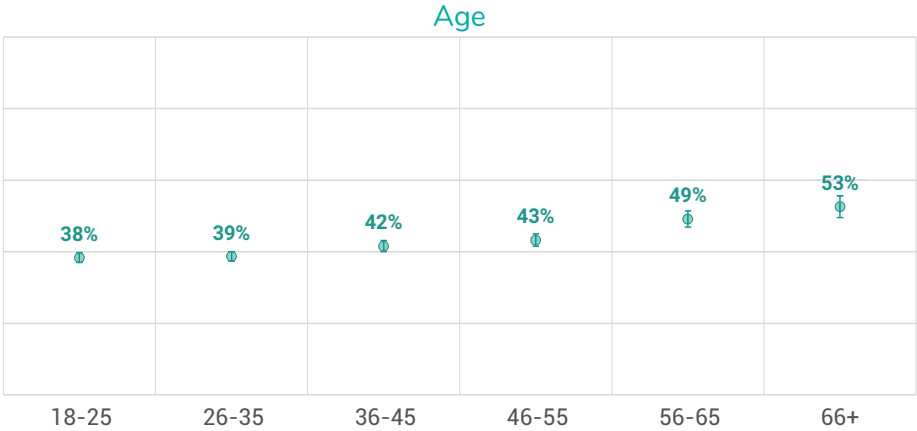
While trust in elections varies across countries, it also varies across individuals in the LAC region. In particular, **Figure 2.3** shows that age is an important predictor of trust in elections, with trust increasing as respondents get older. Across the region, only 38% of 18-25-year-olds express high levels of trust in

elections in their country, but this rises to 53% for respondents who are older than 66. Older citizens have more positive assessments of their electoral systems than younger ones, a finding that is consistent with trends we observed in the 2018/19 round.

Figure 2.3

Older citizens are more likely to express trust in elections

● % trust in elections ----- 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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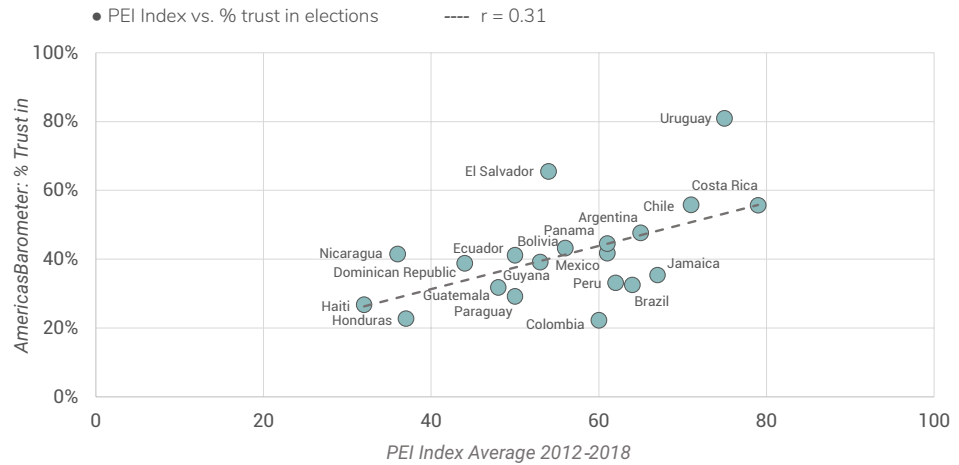
Along with age, we also analyzed the relationship that gender, education, and wealth have with trust in elections. For none of these demographic variables do we find a statistically significant linear relationship with trust in elections. Of the demographic characteristics in the AmericasBarometer, age appears to be the most relevant in predicting an individual's trust in elections.

How do these evaluations by the public compare to expert evaluations of electoral integrity? **Figure 2.4** answers this question by comparing the proportion of respondents who trust elections in each country of

the AmericasBarometer in 2021 and that country's mean score on the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Index between 2012 and 2018. The Electoral Integrity Project creates this index by fielding surveys of experts in electoral processes.⁵ Overall, we see that expert assessments correlate strongly with the views of the public, but there are some notable outliers. Whereas Colombians express extremely low levels of trust in their elections, expert assessments are substantially more positive. Conversely, Salvadorans express high levels of trust in their elections despite expert assessments that are less rosy.

Figure 2.4

The public's evaluations of elections correlate with expert assessments



Source: PEI, 2012-2018; AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

AmericasBarometer results show considerable variation across countries in trust in elections, with few cases in which most citizens express trust in elections. At the same time, levels of trust in elections across the LAC region have rebounded since the 2018/19

round. Consistent with previous findings, age stands out as significant predictor of trust in the elections, with younger respondents expressing more skepticism about the electoral process. Finally, the public's evaluations of elections track expert assessments.

Peru, 2020: Man looks over protest posters that depict messages against presidential candidate Keiko Fujimori (Joel Salvador/Shutterstock)



Views on Election Integrity Track Trust in Elections and Support for Democracy

The 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer included a new set of questions that give a more nuanced picture of the public's views of the electoral process.⁵ These questions are the following:

I will mention some things that can happen during elections and ask you to indicate if they happen in [country]...Votes are counted correctly and fairly. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?

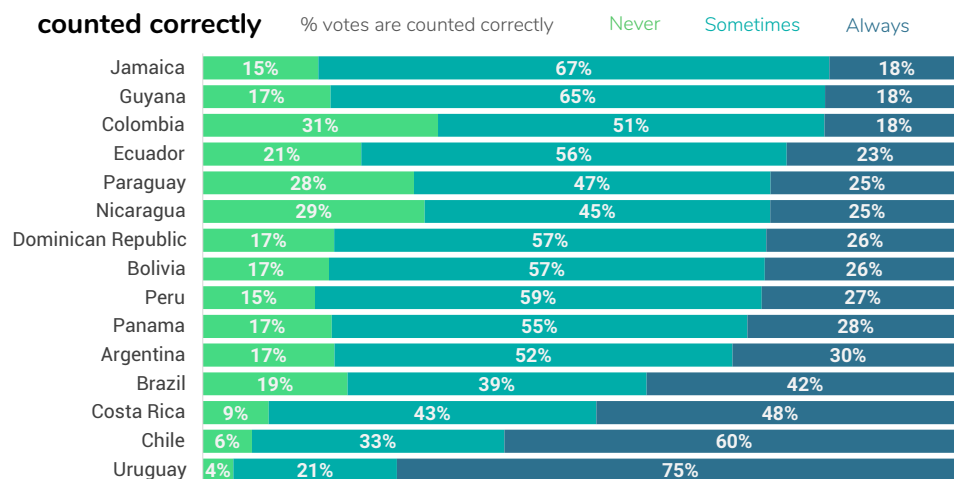
The rich buy the election results. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?

Politicians can find out who each person voted for. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?

Some foreign governments may influence the election results of [country]. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?

Figure 2.5

Only in Uruguay and Chile do majorities believe votes are always counted correctly



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

Figure 2.5 shows responses to the question about whether votes are counted correctly. Uruguay and Chile show widespread positive evaluations, with 75% and 60% respectively, saying that votes

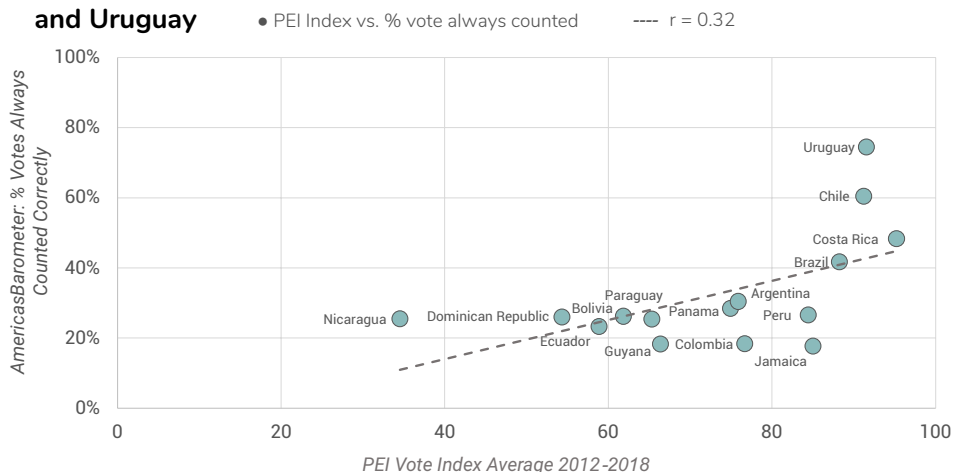
are always counted correctly. In contrast, only 18% of respondents in Guyana, Colombia, and Jamaica believe that votes are always counted correctly in their countries.

In order to provide greater context for the cross-national patterns we observe in **Figure 2.5**, we turn again to data provided by the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity project. Among the individual factors that make up the project's summary index of electoral integrity is an assessment of the vote count, which the PEI project constructs from expert

evaluations of ballot box security, whether results were announced without undue delay, whether votes are counted fairly, and whether international or domestic monitors were restricted. The resulting index ranges from 0 to 100, with higher values denoting higher integrity of the count.

Figure 2.6

Both the public and the experts assess the vote count highly in Chile and Uruguay



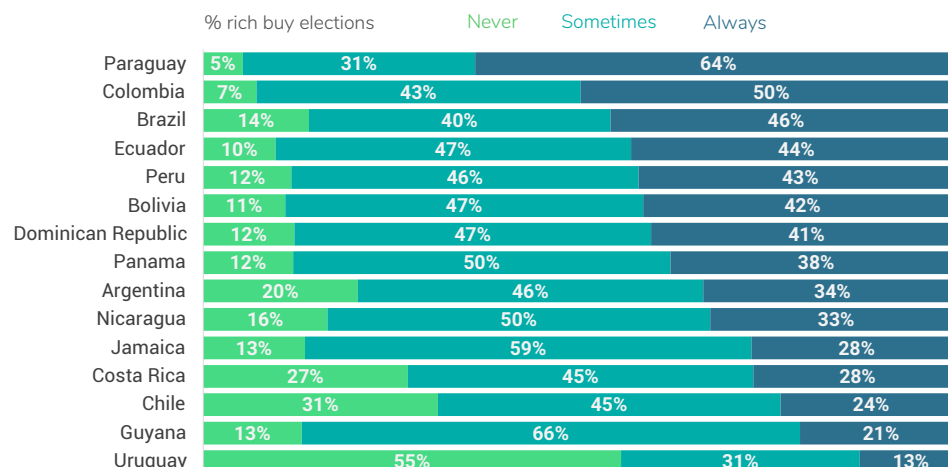
LAPOP

Figure 2.6 shows the relationship between these expert assessments and the public's evaluation of the counting of votes. Only among the high-performing cases is there agreement between the public and the experts. In Uruguay and Chile (and to a lesser extent, Costa Rica and Brazil) both the public and experts evaluate the counting process highly. These are the only

countries in the LAC region where more than a third of the population believes votes are always counted correctly. For the rest of the cases, there appears to be no correlation between the public's evaluations and expert assessments. In most of these cases, the public is far more skeptical than the experts about the degree to which votes are counted correctly.

Figure 2.7

Nearly two-thirds of Paraguayans believe the rich always buy elections



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

Our second question on election integrity asked respondents the extent to which they thought the rich are able to buy elections in their country. **Figure 2.7** shows that Paraguay stands out in the region, with nearly two-thirds of Paraguayans believing the rich always buy elections. In Colombia, this assessment reaches 50%. In no other country does a majority believe the rich always buy elections,

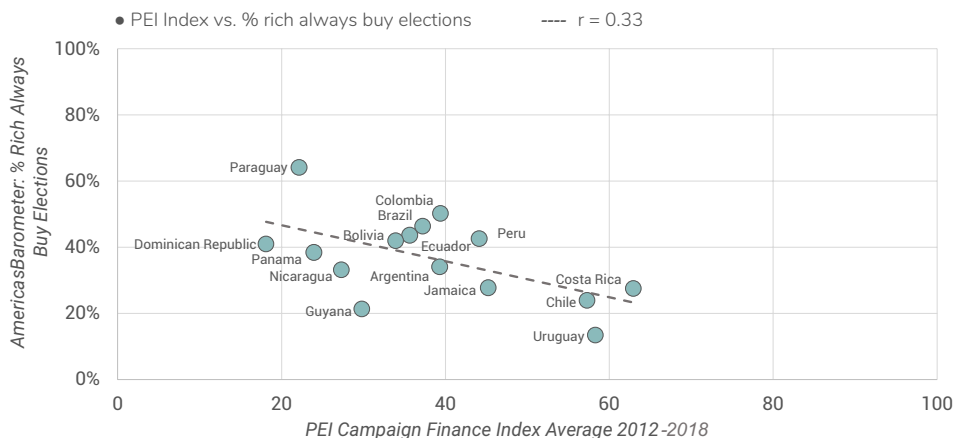
but majorities in every country but Uruguay believe the rich either sometimes or always buy elections. In only in two countries (Chile and Uruguay) is the share of those saying the rich never buy elections larger than the share that say they always do. Across the LAC region, the large swaths of the public believe that elections are tilted in favor of the rich.



Majorities in every country but Uruguay believe the rich either sometimes or always buy elections

Figure 2.8

Public beliefs about the influence of the rich correlate with expert assessments of the integrity of campaign finance



Source: PEI, 2012-2018; AmericasBarometer, 2021

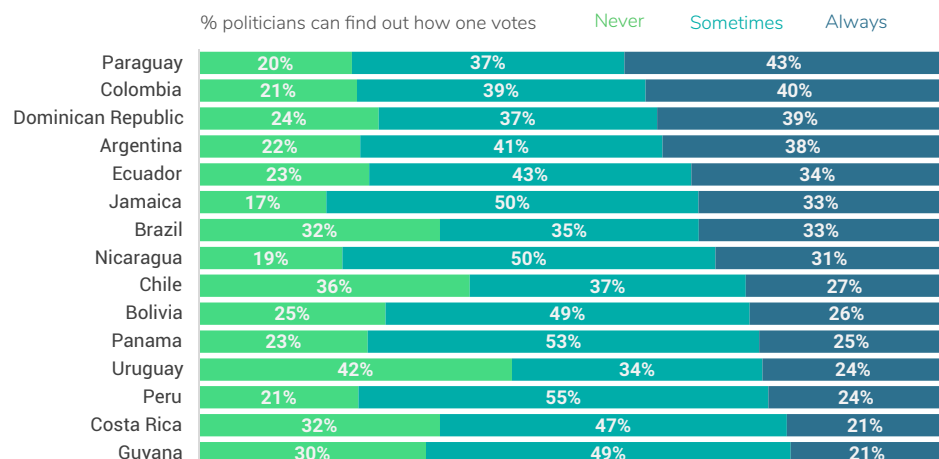
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Figure 2.8 again compares these results with the assessments of experts. Among the factors that make up the PEI project's summary index of electoral integrity is a set of measures of campaign finance, including expert evaluations of equitable access to public subsidies and political donations, the transparency of financial accounts, the influence of the wealthy in elections, and whether state resources are improperly used for campaigning. **Figure 2.8** shows a striking negative relationship

between the two measures. Countries such as Paraguay, where a high proportion of the public believe the rich always buy elections, also score very low on the index measuring the integrity of campaign finance. Conversely, countries where fewer people believe the rich always buy elections receive high ratings from experts for their campaign finance. These patterns suggest that the method in which campaigns are financed affects citizens' beliefs about election integrity.

Figure 2.9

Majorities across the LAC region express skepticism about ballot secrecy



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

The AmericasBarometer also asked respondents to assess the secrecy of the ballot in their country.

Figure 2.9 shows the cross-national variation on this question. Here, Paraguay and Colombia again show very negative assessments, with 43% and 40% of respondents, respectively, believing that politicians can always find out how an

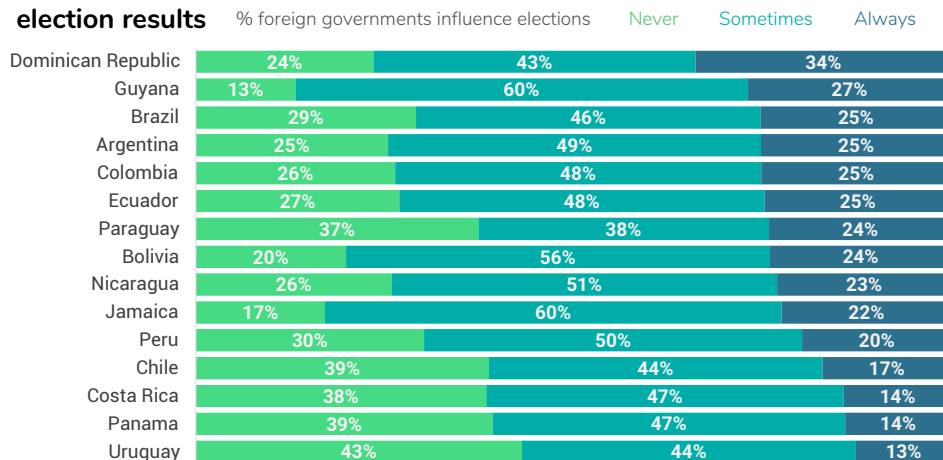
individual votes. In contrast, in Guyana and Costa Rica, only about one in five respondents expressed that sentiment. Strikingly, majorities in every country believe that politicians can at least sometimes find out how an individual votes, pointing to serious public concerns about ballot secrecy.



Strikingly, majorities in every country believe that politicians can at least sometimes find out how an individual votes, pointing to serious public concerns about ballot secrecy

Figure 2.10

Large majorities believe foreign governments at least sometimes influence election results



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

Finally, respondents were asked whether they think foreign governments influence elections in their country. **Figure 2.10** shows substantially less variation across countries on this score. A majority of respondents in the LAC region, sometimes large majorities,

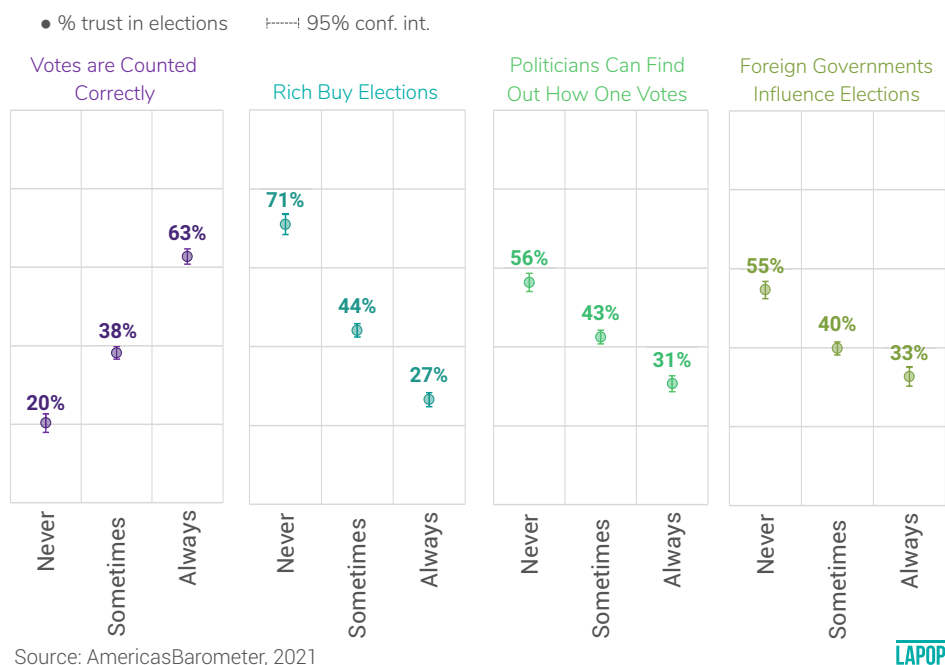
believe that foreign governments sometimes or always influence elections in their country. The rates of those who think this always happens are highest in the Dominican Republic, with 34%, and lowest in Costa Rica (14%), Panama (14%), and Uruguay (13%).

Ecuador, 2021: Presidential candidate Guillermo Lasso during a campaign event in Quito days before the election (Vincent Ricci/Shutterstock)



Figure 2.11

Assessments of election integrity predict overall trust in elections



Of these evaluations of election integrity, which is most important for overall trust in elections? **Figure 2.11** shows the proportion of respondents who trust elections based on how they answered each of our four electoral integrity questions. All four appear to be correlated with overall trust in elections: those who express more skepticism about the integrity of the vote count and ballot secrecy, those who think the rich buy elections, and those who think foreign governments influence elections more often all express substantially lower levels of overall trust in elections.⁶

Still, there are important differences in the magnitudes of the relationships between these responses. Those who think votes are never counted correctly are 68% less likely to express overall trust in elections

than those who say votes are always counted correctly (a difference of 43 percentage points). Similarly, those who say the rich always buy elections are 62% less likely to trust their elections than those who say the rich never buy elections (a difference of 44 percentage points). In contrast, those who think politicians can always find out an individual's vote or who say foreign governments always influence elections are 45% and 40% less likely to express trust in their elections, respectively, than those who say politicians can never find out how one voted or that foreign governments never influence elections (differences of 25 and 22 percentage points, respectively). Assessments about the vote count and the influence of the rich appear to be especially consequential for citizens' overall trust in their electoral processes.



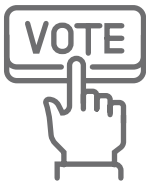
Assessments about the vote count and the influence of the rich appear to be especially consequential for citizens' overall trust in their electoral processes

How do these evaluations of election integrity relate to broader democratic attitudes? Are citizens who are skeptical about the integrity of their electoral process still committed to democratic institutions in principle? To answer this question, we study the relationship between assessment of election integrity and our measure of support for democracy based on the following question:

Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent

do you agree or disagree with this statement? With responses ranging from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 7 “Strongly agree”

We code responses on the agreement end of the scale (values ranging from five to seven) as support for democracy. **Figure 2.12** shows the proportion of respondents who support democracy based on how they answered each of our four electoral integrity questions.

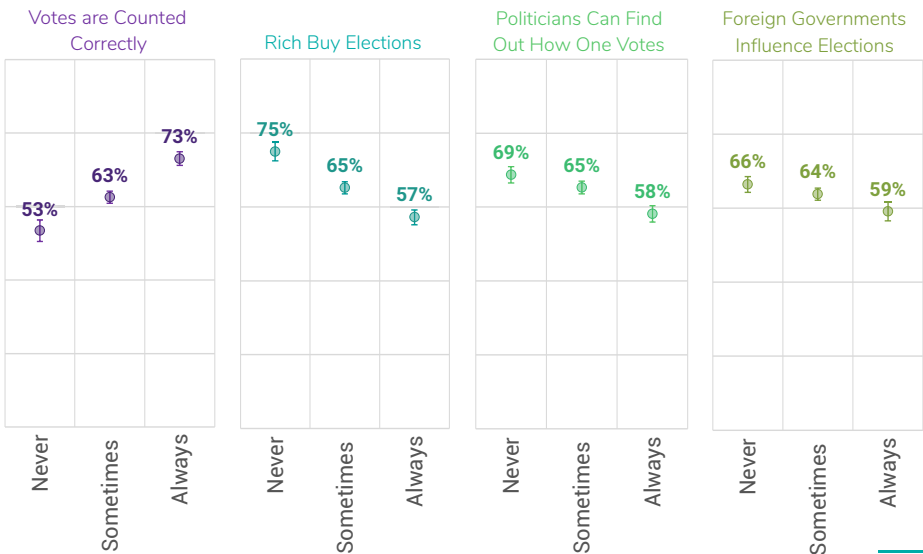


Beliefs about votes being counted correctly and whether the rich buy elections are more strongly associated with democratic support than the other measures of electoral integrity

Figure 2.12

Assessments of election integrity predict overall support for democracy

• % support for democracy - - - - - 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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The results in **Figure 2.12** mirror those with regard to trust in elections. In general, citizens in the LAC region who have more negative views of election integrity also express less support for democracy as a principle. Those who express more skepticism about the integrity of the vote count and ballot secrecy, who think the rich buy elections, and who think foreign governments

influence elections more often all express lower levels of support for democracy as a better form of government than the alternatives.⁷ As with overall trust in elections, beliefs about votes being counted correctly and whether the rich buy elections are more strongly associated with democratic support than the other measures of electoral integrity.

Conclusions: Implications for the Legitimacy of Elections

Data from the 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer show that while overall trust in elections has rebounded somewhat in the LAC region, large portions of the public remain skeptical about the integrity of the electoral processes in their country. Moreover, these attitudes about the integrity of elections, which include beliefs about the vote count, ballot secrecy, the influence of the rich, and foreign influence, are consequential for both the legitimacy of elections and support for democracy more generally. Given recent controversies and conflicts over election results across the region, these views of election integrity pose a potential threat for the health of democracy.

At the same time, our findings offer some basis for optimism. We find that beliefs about whether votes are counted correctly and the influence of the rich are most related to trust in elections and support for democracy. These particular

attitudes also correlate with expert assessments about the quality of these processes, showing that public perceptions do reflect tangible policy choices and outcomes in election administration. This is especially the case for the influence of the rich in elections, where we see a clear connection between the integrity of campaign finance and public perceptions. This suggests that concrete policy changes, like those that provide equitable access to campaign resources, may help improve citizens' beliefs about election integrity, their overall trust in elections, and their support for democracy.

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Oscar Castorena holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Vanderbilt University and is a statistician at LAPOP Lab.

Notes

- 1 See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/20/peru-elite-election-pedro-castillo-keiko-fujimori>
- 2 See <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/bloody-mexican-election-campaign-exposes-chronic-security-woes-2021-05-23/>
- 3 See <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bolivia-politics-election/bolivia-election-delayed-to-october-as-pandemic-bites-opposition-cries-foul-idUSKCN2402PY>
- 4 See <https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/en/home/presscenter/director-s-graph-for-thought/the-virus-and-the-votes--how-is-covid-19-changing-voter-turnout-.html>
- 5 Norris and Grömping 2019.
- 6 These findings hold when controlling for socioeconomic characteristics.
- 7 These findings hold when controlling for socioeconomic characteristics.



Spotlight on Trust in Elections in the Dominican Republic

By Carlos López and Luke Plutowski¹

The 2021 AmericasBarometer reveals that trust in elections rebounded in the Dominican Republic, though most still lack trust. About two in four Dominicans (39%) say they trust elections in their country, and another quarter (26%) say that votes are always counted fairly.



Most Dominicans do not trust elections and have doubts about the integrity and fairness of the vote-counting process

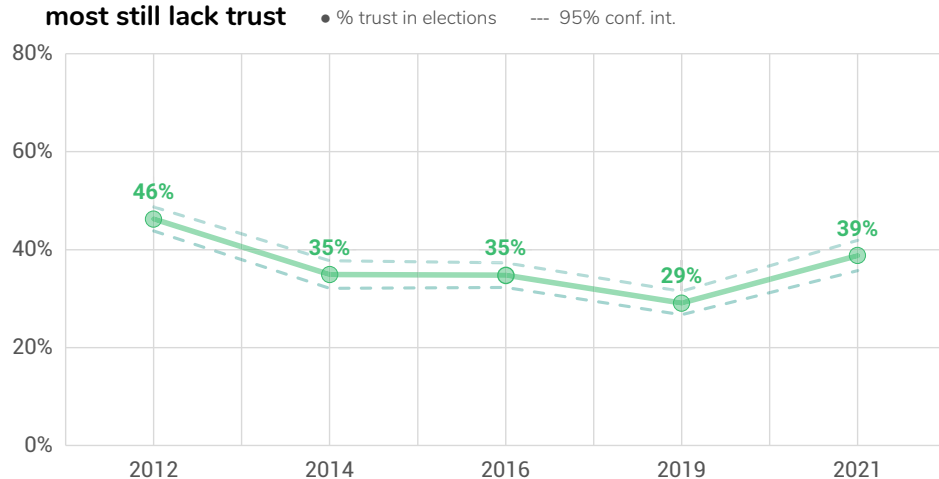
The Dominican Republic stands out as one of the countries with the highest economic growth in the Latin America and Caribbean region in the last decade, a main reason that the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) has remained in office for more than 14 years. But with recent issues like corruption and the COVID-19 pandemic, public support for the party has slipped considerably. Luis Abinader, of the opposition Modern Revolutionary Party (PRM), defeated a very unpopular PLD administration in the 2020 election.

This election was controversial. Voting was initially delayed due to COVID-19 health concerns, but the election eventually became the first one held in the region in the midst of the pandemic.² The outgoing administration, which had already been implicated in corruption scandals,³ was accused of attempting to commit fraud during the 2020 election.

Could election delays and fraud allegations have had a negative effect on Dominicans' evaluations of their country's elections? The AmericasBarometer provides some insight via two measures of trust in elections. The first, which has been included in every round of the AmericasBarometer since 2004, asks respondents their level of trust in elections on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (a lot). The second, new in the 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer, gauges whether respondents believe votes are counted correctly always, sometimes, or never.

The proportion of Dominicans who say they trust elections (responses 5 through 7) increased by 10 percentage points between 2018/19 and 2021. Mean levels of trust also increased significantly. Still, current levels of trust in elections remain low.

Trust in elections in the Dominican Republic recovered in 2021, though most still lack trust



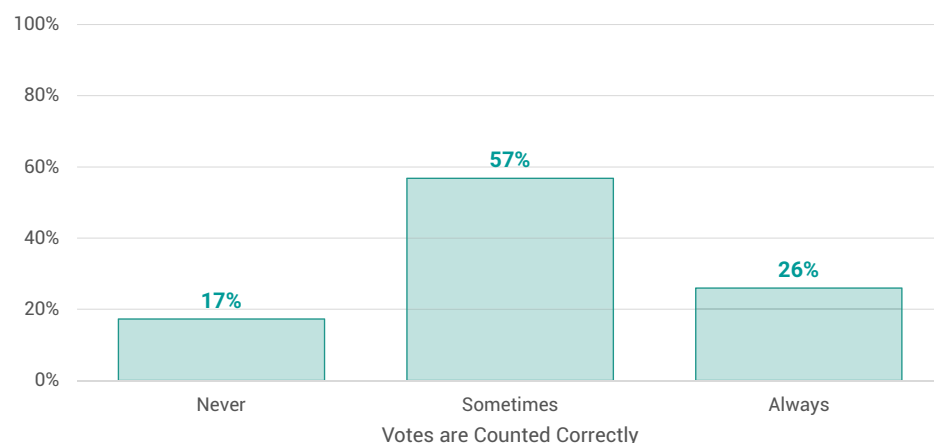
Source: AmericasBarometer, 2012-2021

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The data also show that Dominicans have doubts about the accuracy of election results. The largest proportion of respondents (57%) say that they only trust the vote

count "sometimes." About a quarter (26%) believe that votes are "always" counted correctly, and 17% say they are "never" counted correctly.

Most Dominicans express doubt in the integrity and fairness of the vote-counting process



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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Despite allegations of corruption and election fraud, as well as logistical difficulties administering the election during the pandemic, Dominicans' trust in elections rebounded in 2021. Still, most Dominicans do not trust elections and have doubts about the

integrity and fairness of the vote-counting process. These skeptical attitudes tend to correlate with lower political participation and weaker perceptions of the legitimacy of the political system.⁴

1 Carlos López is a graduate student in the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University and a LAPOP-affiliated researcher. Luke Plutowski is a statistician at the LAPOP Lab.

2 See <https://www.dw.com/es/rep%C3%ABlica-dominicana-celebra-elecciones-bajo-pandemia/a-54061571>

3 See <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-53303689>

4 Stoyan AT, Niedzwiecki S, Morgan J, Hartlyn J, Espinal R. Trust in government institutions: The effects of performance and participation in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. *International Political Science Review*. 2016;37(1):18-35.



Spotlight on Tolerance for Executive Coups in El Salvador

By Valerie Schweizer¹

Data from 2021 AmericasBarometer show that tolerance for an executive coup reached a record high in El Salvador after years of relatively low, stable levels. About half of Salvadorans would tolerate the president to close Congress during a crisis.

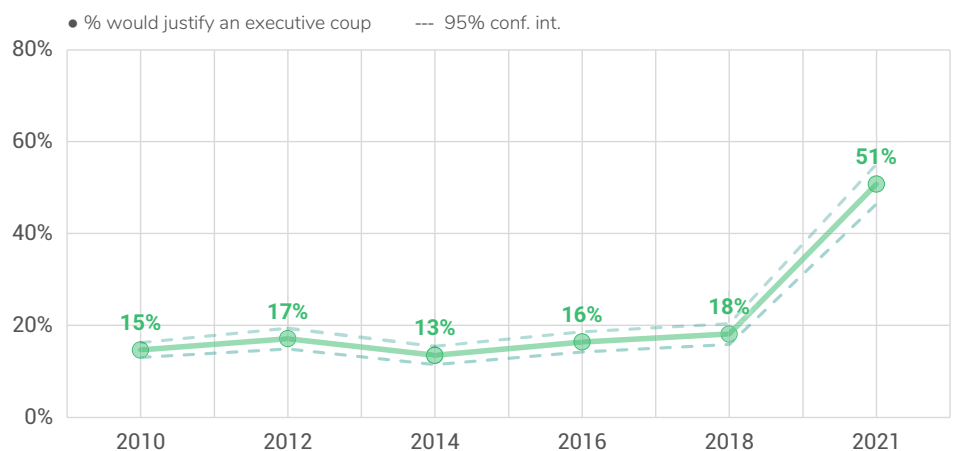


In 2021, El Salvador displays the highest degree of tolerance for an executive coup in the Latin America and Caribbean region

Despite the dangers that executive overreach can pose for democratic checks and balances, sizeable parts of the public accept the types of authoritarian actions that President Nayib Bukele has taken since taking office in 2019. In February 2020, Bukele sent armed military forces into the legislature, reportedly as an attempt to pressure the Legislative Assembly to approve a security budget proposal.² In May of 2021, the legislature, with support from Bukele,³ voted to dismiss every member of the Supreme Court's constitutional chamber, as well as the attorney general, and replaced them with Bukele supporters.^{4,5} These same judges ruled in September that presidents could now hold office for two consecutive terms,⁶ thus setting the stage for Bukele's potential run for president in 2024. Meanwhile, on social media, where Bukele maintains popularity,⁷ he has referred to himself as a "Dictator" and "Emperor" of El Salvador.⁸

Checks and balances across executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government are a key principle of modern democratic political systems. How much do Salvadorans adhere to the notion that maintaining independent branches of government is important? The AmericasBarometer provides insight into this question with data on Salvadorans' tolerance for "executive coups"—that is, maneuvers by the president to shutter another branch of government. Since 2010, each round of the survey has asked respondents if they would justify the closure of the legislature by the president when the country is facing difficult times. Data show that about one half (51%) of Salvadorans would justify an executive coup—an astonishing increase of 33 percentage points from the previous survey round in 2018. In 2021, El Salvador displays the highest degree of tolerance for an executive coup in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region.

The percentage of Salvadorans who would justify an executive coup increased almost threefold to more than one half



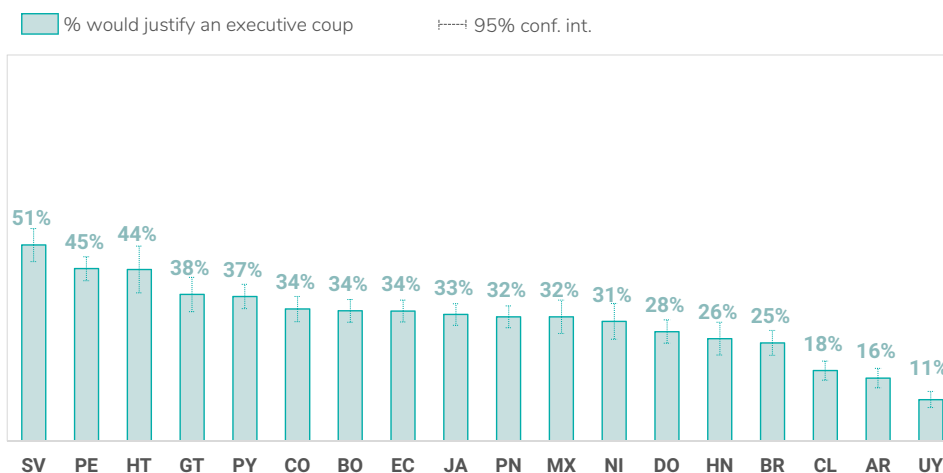
Source: AmericasBarometer, 2010-2021

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Despite high levels of concern on the global stage and from human rights organizations about the actions taken by President Bukele,¹⁰ many Salvadorans are not particularly opposed to his approach to governance. While thousands have recently protested Bukele's

administration,^{10,11} it seems that opposition to Bukele's attempt to concentrate power in the executive office exists mostly within a vocal minority. In contrast, an increasing section of the population would justify Bukele closing and governing without the legislature.

Salvadorans are the most tolerant of executive coups in the LAC region



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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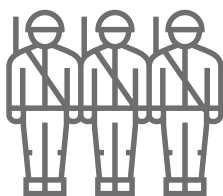
- 1 Valerie Schweizer is a statistician at LAPOP Lab.
- 2 See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-51439020>
- 3 See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/05/20/el-salvadors-president-launched-self-coup-watch-creeping-corruption-authoritarianism/>
- 4 See <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/2/crisis-brewing-as-el-salvador-congress-votes-out-top-judges>
- 5 See <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/05/americas/el-salvadors-political-crisis-intl-latam/index.html>
- 6 See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-58451370>
- 7 See <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-05-16/nayib-bukele-the-most-popular-president-in-the-world-is-a-man-with-one-ideology-power>
- 8 See <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/18/thousands-protest-in-el-salvador-against-bukele-government>
- 9 The wording for this question is as follows: Do you think that when the country faces very difficult times, it is justified that the president of the country closes the Legislative Assembly and governs without a Legislative Assembly?
- 10 See Constitutional crisis in El Salvador over Bukele's security plan | Latin America | Al Jazeera (archive.org)
- 11 See <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/18/thousands-protest-in-el-salvador-against-bukele-government>
- 12 See <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/thousands-protest-el-salvador-bukele-government-rcna3205>



Spotlight on Tolerance for Military Coups in Brazil

By Luke Plutowski¹

AmericasBarometer data reveal that most Brazilians do not believe that a military coup could be justified, and the number of people who believe so has not significantly increased or decreased since the beginning of the recent political crisis.



While the rise of *Bolsonarismo* may have led to political realignment, we do not find, at least in this case, that it caused any systematic change in attitudes toward involvement of the armed forces in politics, despite Bolsonaro's recent rhetoric

Despite saber-rattling on the part of President Jair Bolsonaro and his supporters, the large swaths of Bolsonaro supporters who recently took to the streets in support of military intervention appear to be a vocal minority.

After enjoying a significant bump in popularity in late 2020, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's approval ratings fell to all-time lows by mid-2021, amidst high inflation, rising unemployment, a host of scandals, and a public health crisis brought on by COVID-19.² Bolsonaro has responded by attempting to politicize the armed forces, railing against

political enemies, and embracing increasingly extreme anti-democratic rhetoric.³ Foreign observers, including a number of former world leaders and human rights groups, raised fears of a possible coup.⁴ Half of the Brazilian public now say that Bolsonaro could successfully stage a coup.⁵

AmericasBarometer data offers insight into the opinions of the Brazilian people about military coups. Every round of the survey going back to 2006 has included a question that gauges whether respondents believe that a military takeover of the state would be



Brazil, 2020: Riot police in São Paulo during demonstrations against President Jair Bolsonaro (Alf Ribeiro/Shutterstock)

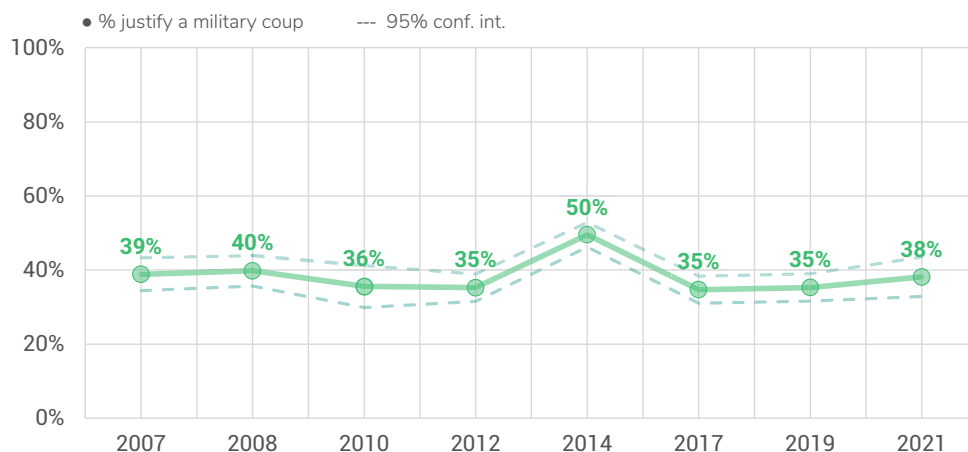
justified when there is widespread corruption.⁶ Data collection for the Brazil survey took place between May 25th and June 30th, 2021. The military crisis had begun by March, when Bolsonaro dismissed Defense Minister Fernando Azevedo e Silva for resisting Bolsonaro's pressure to become more involved in government affairs, leading to the resignation of several high-ranking military officials.⁷ Fears of a more politically-involved military and a potential power-grab by Bolsonaro continued to grow through the data collection period⁸ and into September 2021, the time of this writing.

Would the Brazilian citizenry accept a military takeover of the government? Data from 2021 show that a little more than a third (38%) of Brazilians say that such a power-grab could be justified when there

is a lot of corruption. Tolerance for coups is not significantly higher in 2021 than it was in the two previous rounds of the AmericasBarometer. This measure reached a peak of 50% in 2014, at the onset of the Operação Lava Jato corruption investigation. Also, military coup justification was higher in 2006 (39%) and 2007 (40%) than it was in 2021.

Academic literature suggests that Bolsonaro has achieved success by forging novel cleavages and attracting new bases of support within the Brazilian electorate.⁹ While the rise of *Bolsonarismo* may have led to political realignment, we do not find, at least in this case, that it caused any systematic change in attitudes toward involvement of the armed forces in politics, despite Bolsonaro's recent rhetoric.

The percentage of Brazilians who would justify a military coup under high corruption remains stable at just over one in three



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2007-2021

LAPOP

1 Luke Plutowski is a statistician at the LAPOP Lab.

2 See <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazils-bolsonaro-disapproval-rating-rises-all-time-high-poll-2021-07-08/>

3 See <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/9/22/bolsonaros-war-on-brazilian-democracy-is-not-over>

4 See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/06/brazil-warning-bolsonaro-may-be-planning-military-coup-amid-rallies>

5 See <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2021/09/datafolha-metade-dos-brasileiros-diz-acreditar-que-bolsonaro-pode-dar-golpe.shtml>

6 Full question wording: "Algumas pessoas dizem que em certas circunstâncias se justificaria que os militares tomassem o poder através de um golpe de estado. Na sua opinião, se justificaria um golpe militar...Diante de muita corrupção? (1) Seria justificado; (2) Não se justificaria".

7 See <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2021/03/politizacao-das-forcas-armadas-e-promiscuidade-com-governo-gestaram- crise-inedita-dizem-especialistas.shtml>

8 In June 2021, for example, former president Michel Temer said that Bolsonaro might be inclined to take power illegally by casting doubt on the legitimacy of the 2022 election and inciting mass mobilization on his behalf. See here: <https://noticias.uol.com.br/videos/2021/06/04/temer-ve-risco-de-golpe-de-bolsonaro-inspirado-em-trump-em-2022.htm>

9 See 1) Layton, Matthew L., Amy Erica Smith, Mason W. Moseley, and Mollie J. Cohen. "Demographic polarization and the rise of the far right: Brazil's 2018 presidential election." *Research & Politics* 8, no. 1 (2021): 2053168021990204, and 2) Rennó, Lucio R. "The Bolsonaro voter: Issue positions and vote choice in the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections." *Latin American Politics and Society* 62, no. 4 (2020): 1-23.

Rule of Law: Corruption, Crime, and Justice for Gender-Based Violence

Mariana V. Ramírez Bustamante,
Facundo Salles Kobilanski, and Adam D. Wolsky

Mexico, 2020:
Protesters march
against gender-based
violence in Mexico City
on International Day
for the Elimination
of Violence against
Women. Erika
Martínez, speaking
through a megaphone,
became an activist after
authorities refused to
investigate the sexual
abuse of her 7-year-old
daughter (Bénédicte
Desrus/Sipa via AP
Images)



Democracy thrives when the public experiences and perceives a robust rule of law. The AmericasBarometer permits a multi-dimensional assessment of the public's view on the rule of law. In this chapter, we focus on (1) experiences with corruption and crime, (2) perceptions of political corruption and neighborhood insecurity, and (3) expectations regarding police and judicial responses to gender-based violence (GBV). The assessment yields a mix of some positive and some concerning results regarding the state of the rule of law in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region.

Main Findings

- **More than three in five people in the average LAC country believe that most or all politicians are corrupt.** Those who are more educated are more likely to believe that there is widespread corruption among politicians
- **Corruption victimization by the police remains stable, but bribe solicitation by public officials has increased in 2021 compared to the 2018/19 round.** Women, younger individuals, those with more education, and those who are wealthier are more likely to be victims of bribe solicitation
- **Crime victimization decreased in 2021 compared to 2018/19.** Men, younger, more educated, and wealthier individuals are more likely to be victims of crime
- **Neighborhood insecurity decreased in 2021 compared to 2018/19.** Women are more likely to say they feel unsafe in their neighborhood, as compared to men
- **Perceptions of fair treatment and due process for gender-based violence (GBV) victims are gendered:** women are less likely to agree that GBV perpetrators will be punished. That difference in perceptions persists when accounting for age, education, and wealth
- **Deficiencies in the rule of law shape trust and support for democracy:** those who perceive and experience a failure of institutions are less trusting of those in their community and the national government and are less supportive of democracy

What is the Rule of Law?

A country with a strong rule of law exhibits laws that allow for accountability (for government and private actors), justice (laws are clear, applied evenly, and protect fundamental rights), transparency (processes are accessible and transparent), and equitable and impartial dispute resolution (justice is swift and ethical). According to the World Justice Project (WJP), these four principles jointly signal to citizens that all experience equal treatment with respect to the provision of law and order.

For decades, researchers have shown that the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region's rule of law tends to be informal and weak: there often exists a gap between the law as it is written and the law as it is abided and enforced. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a modern lens through which to perceive this

distinction, with constitutionally questionable enforcement of strict lockdown measures in some places and vaccine distribution scandals in others. Quite often citizens are left to march through a landscape in which justice is unevenly applied and in which public officials seem distant and unreliable. An inconsistent

Bolivia, 2020: Former interior minister, Carlos Romero, is escorted by police after a Supreme Court judge ordered he remain in custody. Romero, who served under former President Evo Morales, was arrested on corruption charges (Juan Karita/AP/Shutterstock)



adherence to rules is likely to shape citizens' views of who benefits from democratic governance and, when those views are negative, may erode satisfaction with and – potentially – support for democracy itself.

When assessing the rule of law from the perspective of citizens' views and experiences, a key question is the extent to which both citizens and public officials abide by formal rules guaranteeing security and justice. Experts on the rule of law advocate for multi-dimensional assessments that are anchored by measures of corruption, security, and justice. The World Justice Project (WJP) takes such an approach¹ and finds considerable variability in the strength of rule of law in the region.²

Pre-pandemic change tracked by the WJP found that most countries saw modest improvements in the rule of law score between 2017-2018 and 2020, with the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, and El Salvador making relatively big gains.³ In the latter case, El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele, elected in 2019, has been controversial in his leadership style but oversaw a reduction in crime, which boosted the country's WJP score. On the other hand, Nicaragua saw a major drop in its score on the rule of law.

A more recent perspective is provided by V-Dem's Pandemic Backsliding Project (PanDem), which tracked violations of rights and executive overreach from March 2020 to June



Peru, 2020: Supporter of ousted President Martín Vizcarra confronts riot police in Lima as officers block protesters from reaching Congress while lawmakers swear in Manuel Merino as interim president (Rodrigo Abd/AP/Shutterstock)



People who experience a failure of political institutions are less trusting of the government and less supportive of democracy

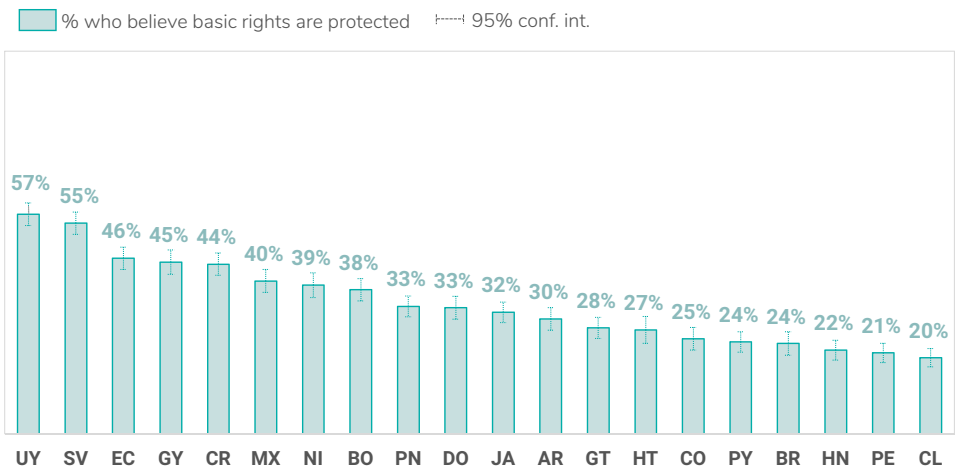
2021. Both high-scoring countries on the WJP index, such as Chile and Argentina, and low-scoring countries, such as Ecuador and Honduras, registered at least moderate violations of civil rights by security agents. El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico have recently experienced executive overreach. For example, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, Bukele ordered armed forces in El Salvador to occupy the legislature as a forceful demonstration of support for legislation that would provide millions of dollars to security forces.⁴ In Guatemala, Alejandro Giammattei and his legislative allies have purged and/or blocked independent figures in the judiciary.⁵

How does the public *perceive* the extent to which basic rights are protected in the region in 2021? The AmericasBarometer offers unique insight into the mass public's views

of the application of the rule of law during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer has asked how well individuals feel that their basic rights are protected.

Figure 3.1 shows the proportion reporting that basic rights are protected across countries in the 2021 AmericasBarometer. There are only two countries in which more than 50% said their basic rights are protected—Uruguay and El Salvador. It is notable that in Chile, a country that ranks quite high in the WJP index, only about one in five say their basic rights are protected, a result that is on par with Peru and Honduras. This discrepancy—between how experts rank the rule of law and citizens' perceptions of how extensively basic rights are protected—underscores the importance of an opinion-based assessment of the rule of law.

Figure 3.1
In half of the LAC region, less than 33% report basic rights are protected



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021



In this chapter, we offer a multi-dimensional assessment of the public's view on the rule of law, with a focus on three core dimensions: corruption, crime, and justice. Specifically, we focus on (1) perceptions of and experience with corruption, (2) perceptions of insecurity and crime victimization, and (3) the enforcement and punishment of GBV. Our investigation reveals who in the LAC mass public experiences a rule of law that is more (or less) effective. From a normative perspective, deficiencies in the rule of law are problematic and have

consequences. In that regard, we assess the relationship between citizen reports on corruption, crime, and gender-based violence, on the one hand, and their levels of interpersonal trust, trust in the government to do what is right, and support for democracy, on the other. We find that those who perceive and experience a failure of institutions are less trusting of those in their community, trust the government less, and are less supportive of democracy over other forms of government.

Corruption

Corruption is pervasive across the LAC region. Many residents have experienced being asked for bribes by public officials in the education sector, in the courts, and by the police.⁶ In recent years, high-level corruption scandals have plagued the region, with little heed to level of development: scandals have emerged in relatively poor countries like Guatemala and Haiti and in the more developed Chile and Costa Rica.

This is highlighted by the fallout from 2014 to present day of the “Lava Jato” (Car Wash in English) investigations in Brazil, which uncovered a massive corruption scheme involving the Brazilian construction conglomerate Odebrecht and high-profile politicians in many countries in the LAC region. Equally troubling is the recent shut down of internationally backed corruption commissions across Central America.⁷ In addition, in 2020-2021, the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it new opportunities for graft, unfair access to resources (e.g., vaccines), and disregard for official rules (e.g., COVID-19 protocols) by political elites.⁸

Corruption violates the norm of democratic political equality by excluding average citizens from public services of which they are entitled.⁹ As such, corruption not only has deleterious economic impacts,¹⁰ but it also holds the potential to reduce trust in the government and institutions.¹¹ This can create a vicious cycle: as perceptions of corruption reduces trust in political institutions, people become more tolerant of corruption.¹² Direct experience with corruption can weaken both citizens' trust in institutions and their levels of interpersonal trust.^z

Most Citizens in LAC Region Believe Political Corruption is Widespread

To what extent does the public perceive corruption among the political class? To answer this, the AmericasBarometer asks the following:



About one in four say that all politicians in their country are involved in corruption

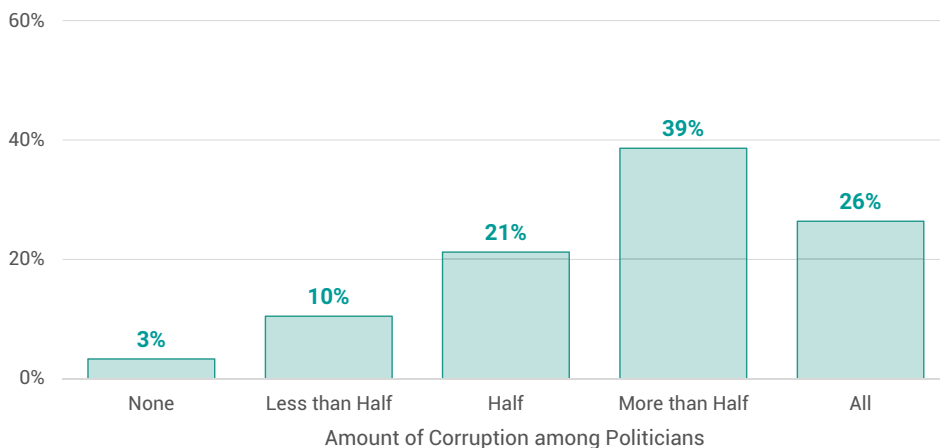
Thinking of politicians in [country], how many do you believe are involved in corruption?
(1) None (2) Less than half of them (3) Half of them (4) More than half of them (5) All

Figure 3.2 shows the region-average distribution of perceived political corruption. The results are striking: nearly two-thirds of citizens in the LAC region believe that more than half or all politicians are

corrupt. About one in four say that *all* politicians in their country are involved in corruption. Conversely, only 13% say fewer than half or no politicians in their country are corrupt. These levels of perceived corruption have been relatively stable over time. Since the question was first asked in the 2016/17 round, more than three in five citizens in the average country have said that more than half their politicians are corrupt.

Figure 3.2

Nearly two-thirds in the LAC region believe that most politicians are corrupt in 2021



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

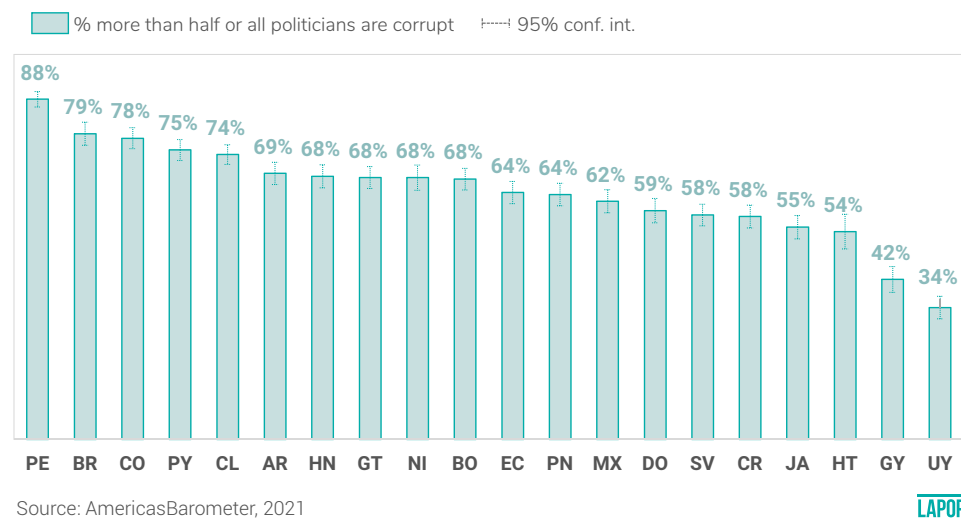
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Perceptions of political corruption vary across countries. **Figure 3.3** reports the percentage of those in each country who said more than half or all politicians are corrupt. Peru and Brazil top the list with over four in five saying that more than half or all politicians in their country are corrupt. Both Peru and Brazil have experienced corruption scandals

involving recent ex-presidents and other major political figures, with new cases emerging near or during the 2021 fieldwork for the AmericasBarometer. On the other end of the spectrum is Uruguay, where only just over one in three say that more than half of politicians are corrupt.¹⁴

Figure 3.3

Corruption perceptions are highest in Peru and lowest in Uruguay



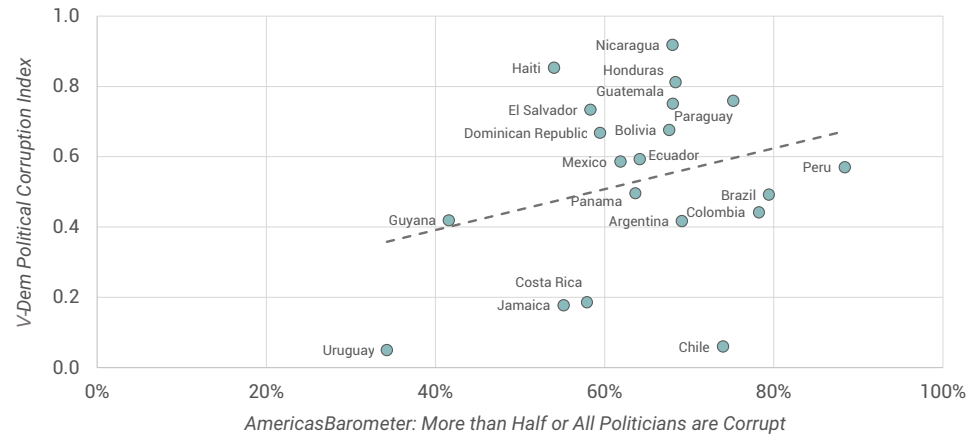
To what extent do perceptions of corruption among the public line up with assessments by experts? The V-Dem project calculates a corruption score for each country based on a survey of experts. **Figure 3.4** shows the relationship between V-Dem's 0-1 score and the percentage of those who believe that more than half or all

politicians in their country are corrupt. Although the correlation is positive, it is relatively weak: in particular, experts assess political corruption to be far lower than citizens report in Chile, Jamaica, and Costa Rica and higher than citizens report in countries such as Nicaragua and, especially, Haiti.

Figure 3.4

The public does not always agree with expert views on political corruption

● % more than half or all politicians are corrupt vs. V-Dem score --- $r = 0.08$



Source: V-Dem, 2020; AmericasBarometer, 2021

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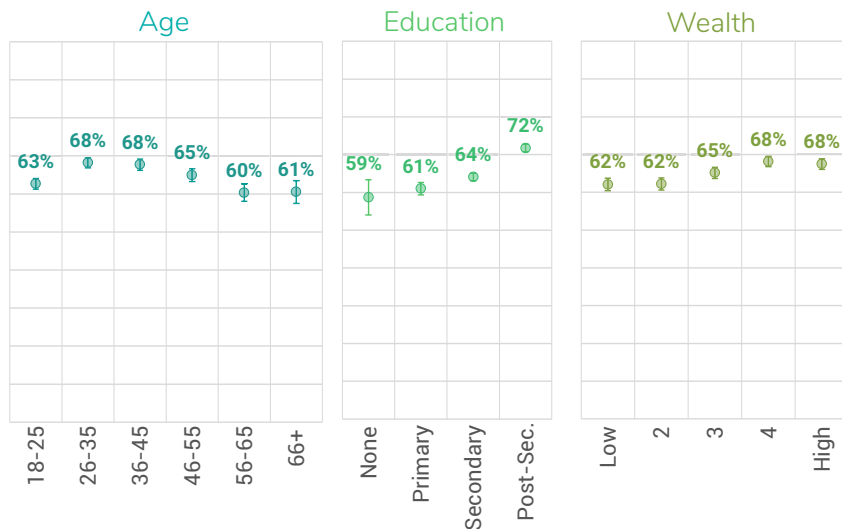
Who perceives high levels of corruption among politicians in the region? While there are no differences between men and women in the percentages that believe more than half or all politicians are corrupt, there are significant patterns by education, age, and wealth. **Figure 3.5** shows that the youngest cohort and those who are 56 and older have lower perceptions of political corruption when compared to those who are 26-55. Those who have more

education—who tend to be wealthier and have a higher income—have higher perceptions of corruption among politicians. There is an over 13-percentage point difference between those with at least a post-secondary education as compared to those who have no formal education. The wealthiest respondents are about five percentage points more likely to say more than half or all politicians are corrupt as compared to the least wealthy.¹⁶

Figure 3.5

The less educated, least wealthy, youngest, and oldest have lower perceptions of corruption

● % more than half or all politicians are corrupt - - - - 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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Spain, 2020: People from various Latin American countries hold flags as they protest the violation of the rights of indigenous people (Yana Demenko/Shutterstock)

For the First Time in the AmericasBarometer, the Rate of Experiences with Corruption Victimization by Government Employees Matches that by the Police

Day-to-day, or street-level “petty corruption,” is another deviation from strict adherence to the rule of law. As we have seen in the history of the AmericasBarometer, it is common to hear about instances in which the police or government employees take advantage of their position by soliciting a bribe from a citizen for services to which all are entitled. To measure this form of corruption victimization, the 2021 AmericasBarometer asked respondents if they had been solicited a bribe by the police or by public officials.

Has a police officer asked you for a bribe in the last twelve months?
(0) No (1) Yes

In the last twelve months, did any government employee ask you for a bribe? (0) No (1) Yes

Figure 3.6 displays the percentage of the public that is solicited for a bribe by police (right panel) and/or public officials (left panel).

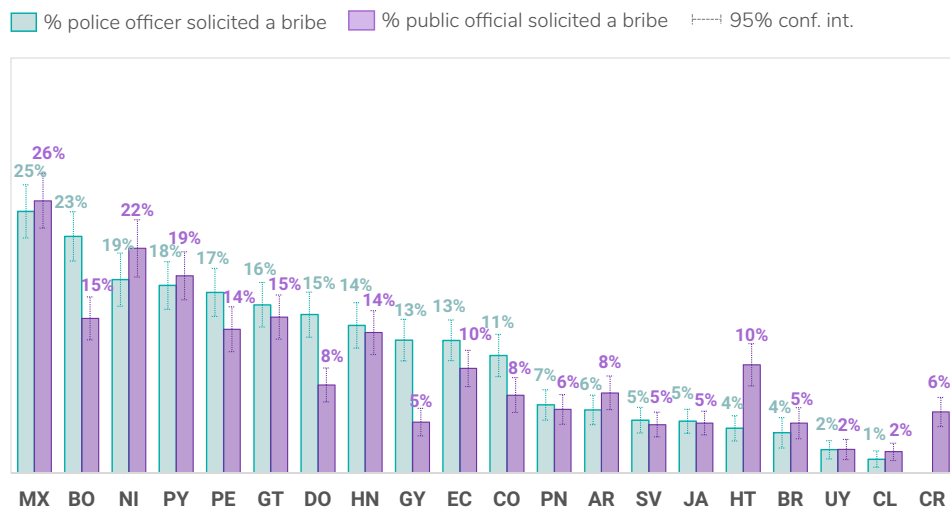
Across both measures, Mexico has the highest levels of experiences with bribe solicitation while Chile, Uruguay and Brazil have the lowest. In general, corruption victimization by the police is more common than by public officials, although some populations—e.g., those in Mexico, Paraguay, and Guatemala—are about equally likely to be solicited for both types of bribes.¹⁷

Mexico, 2021:
Mexican Federal
Police patrol the
streets in the city
of Ciudad Juarez
(Frontpage/
Shutterstock)



Figure 3.6

Bribe solicitation in 2021 is highest in Mexico and lowest in Chile



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

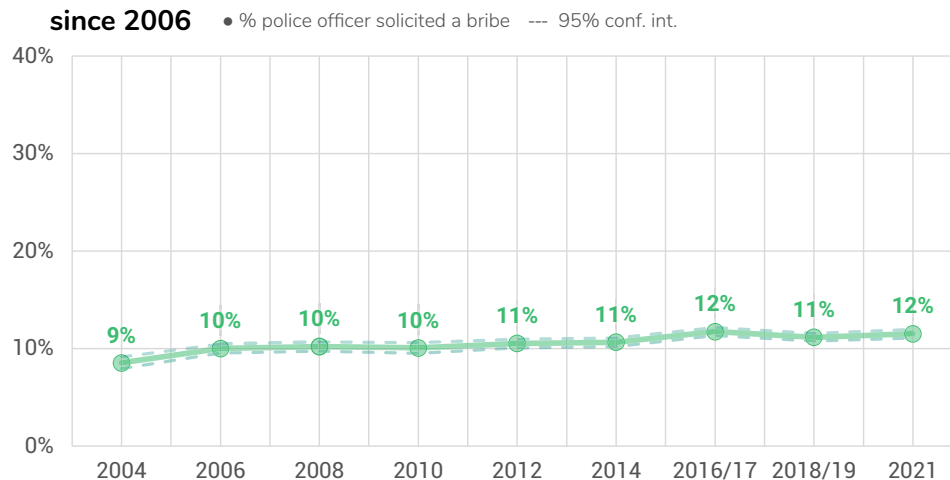
LAPOP

Figure 3.7 shows that levels of bribe solicitation by police officers have nudged upwards a small amount but generally remained relatively

constant: since 2006, between 10 to 12 percent of LAC residents report being solicited for a bribe from police.

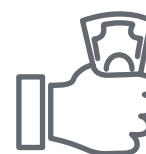
Figure 3.7

Bribe solicitation by police in the LAC region has remained steady since 2006



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2004-2021

LAPOP



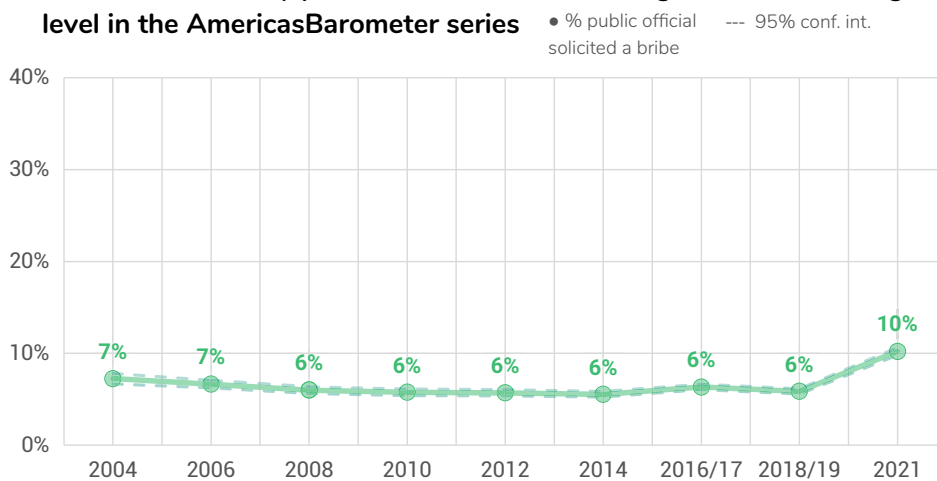
Since 2006, between 10 and 12 percent of LAC residents report being solicited for a bribe from police

Figure 3.8 shows that rates of experience with bribe solicitation by public officials have significantly increased in the last two years or so: from 6% to 10%. Between 2004 and 2019 about 5-7% of LAC residents—on average—had suffered bribe victimization by public officials. This number increased to over 10% in 2021. Between the 2018/19 and the 2021 AmericasBarometer, bribe victimization either remained the same or increased in all LAC countries surveyed in both rounds.

The increase was particularly stark in Nicaragua (18 percentage points), Mexico (12 percentage points), and Paraguay (11 percentage points). What accounts for this big rise? The pandemic may provide some answers. For example, Transparency International has highlighted how corruption has infiltrated into the public health domain, with some of those in charge of resources soliciting bribes for COVID-19 tests, treatment, and other health services.¹⁸

Figure 3.8

Bribe solicitation by public officials in the LAC region reached its highest level in the AmericasBarometer series



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2004-2021

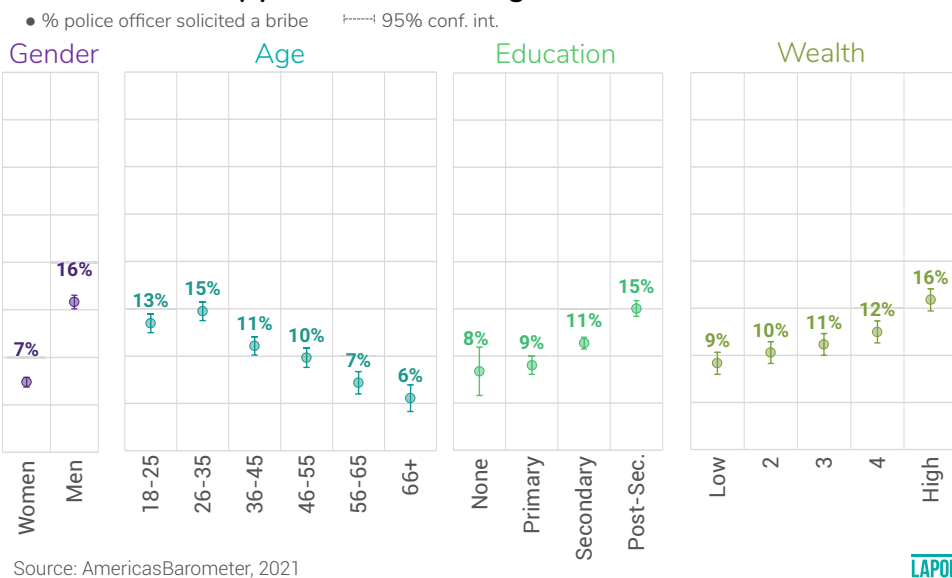
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Who is most likely to be solicited for a bribe by the police or a public official? Because the patterns are quite similar for corruption victimization by police and by public officials, **Figure 3.9** plots the demographic and socioeconomic correlates of police bribe solicitation.¹⁹ The figure shows that men, younger age cohorts, better educated individuals, and those who are wealthier are more likely to have been asked for a bribe as compared to their counterparts in those subgroups. The gender gap

is substantial: men are more than twice as likely to be asked for a bribe from the police when compared to women (16% versus 7%).²⁰ In addition, while around 13-15% of the youngest cohorts were asked for a bribe, only about 6% of those over 65 were. Finally, there is a 7-percentage point gap between those with higher education compared to those with no formal education and a similar difference between the least and most wealthy.

Figure 3.9

Men, younger, better educated, and wealthier individuals are most likely to be victimized by police in the LAC region



Are those who have been victimized by corruption more likely to perceive high levels of corruption among politicians in their country? On the one hand, one might expect that “all bad things go together,” such that a system that is corrupt in one realm is similarly corrupt in others. But, on the other hand, these instruments capture distinct concepts: perceptions of high-level political corruption and experiences with street-level bribes. In analyses of the AmericasBarometer 2021 data, we find that—at the aggregate level—there is not much of a correlation. At the individual level, however, there is a non-trivial relationship worthy of more exploration: e.g., victims of police bribery are 14 percentage points more likely to say more than half of politicians are corrupt than those who have not been solicited bribes by police.

The implications for the rule of law for these findings on corruption are mixed. It is encouraging that, compared to the 2018/19 round, there has not been an increase in the percentage of the public that feels that most or all politicians are involved in corruption. Yet, on average, nearly two-thirds continue to see widespread corruption among politicians. Experiences with bribe solicitation by police and public officials continue to mar the rule of law in the region. The jump in bribe solicitation among public officials, to its highest level in the series, is concerning. It is important to know that the most educated are more likely to perceive high levels of corruption and be subjected to bribe solicitation: these dynamics may fuel frustration within this subgroup over a lack of accountability among political elites along with resentment at having to pay bribes in dealings with both police and public officials.

Some of the most
unsafe countries
in the world are
located in the
Latin America and
Caribbean region

Crime

The rule of law encompasses the principal of protecting fundamental rights, such as the security of citizens. Hence, we analyze crime victimization and perceptions of insecurity in the LAC region to assess the extent to which the state provides security for its citizens. Increases in crime and violence have been a defining characteristic of the region since the 1980s, and, as a result, fear of crime is high in many countries.²¹ In fact, these days, some of the most unsafe countries in the world are located in the LAC region.²² Crime and violence have direct consequences for quality of life: they take a psychological toll on individuals, they lead to changes in consumer, social, and political behavior, and they reduce average life spans.²³

At the beginning of the pandemic and lockdowns in 2020, various violent and non-violent crimes appeared to decrease.²⁴ Lockdowns themselves appeared to contribute to a decrease of crime and violence.²⁵ However, the drop in violence was neither lasting nor uniform across the region. Further, after an initial decrease in crime, organized criminal factions strengthened in the face of weakened

state capacity.^{26,27} Such dynamics would imply that impunity has become more common during the pandemic. The individual level data in the AmericasBarometer provides insights into the current security situation in the LAC region, and also elucidates how things have evolved over time and who is most likely to experience crime or perceive a lack of security.



On Average Across the LAC Region, One in Five Reports Having Been the Victim of a Crime

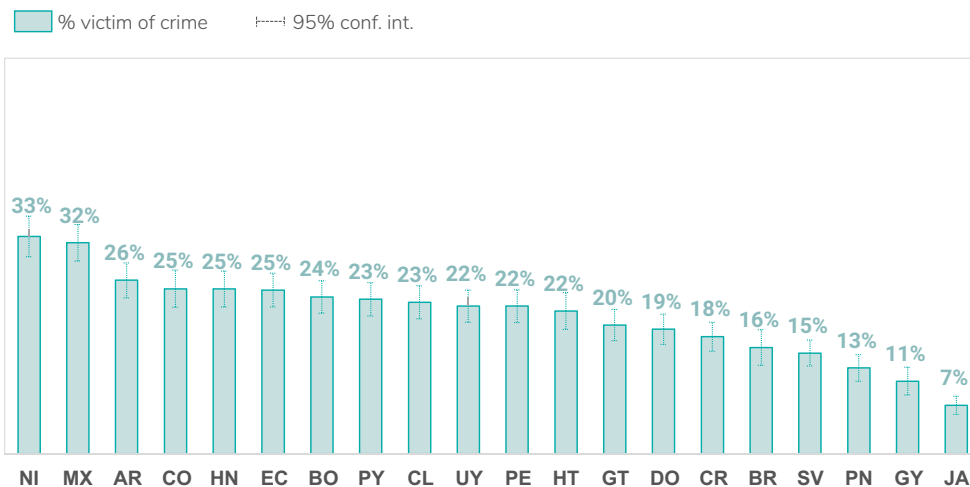
To what extent have individuals in the LAC region been victims of crime? Each round, the AmericasBarometer provides an answer; since 2010, the project has used the following question to assess experiences with crime victimization:

Now, changing subject, have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, have you been a victim of a robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats or any other type of crime in the past 12 months? (1) Yes (2) No

Figure 3.10 displays the percentage of crime victims for each country in 2021. In more than half of the countries, more than 20% of the public is a crime victim. Crime victimization ranges from a low of 7% in Jamaica to a high of 33% in Nicaragua. The percentage of crime victims is the lowest in Jamaica and Guyana and highest in Mexico and Nicaragua.

Figure 3.10

In more than half the LAC region, more than 20% are crime victims



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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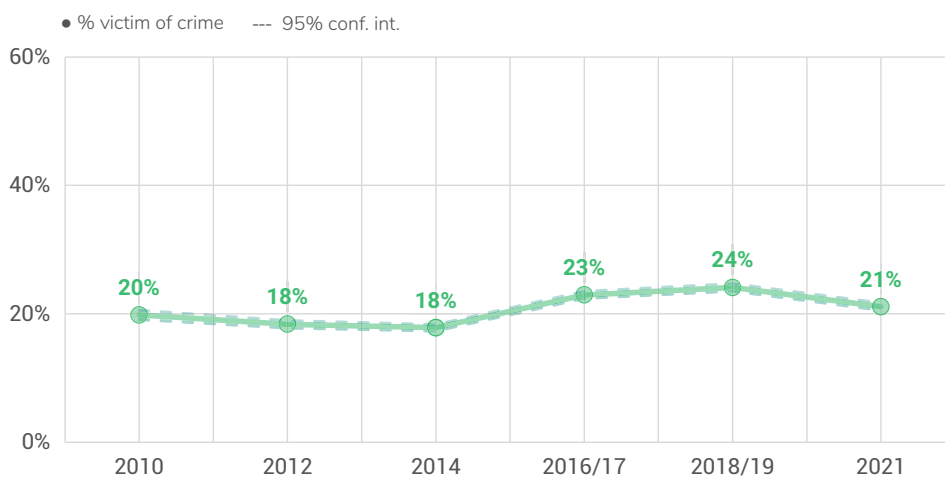
Crime victimization
remains a persistent
challenge in the
LAC region

How do rates of experience with crime victimization in 2021 compare to past years? According to **Figure 3.11**, on average across the LAC region, 21% of citizens have been victims of crime in 2021. This represents a statistically significant 3-percentage point decrease in crime victimization

from the 2018/19 survey round. However, the proportion of crime victimization is not lower than the one in 2014 and prior years, which means that crime victimization remains a persistent challenge in the LAC region.

Figure 3.11

Crime victimization in the LAC region decreased slightly in 2021



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2010-2021

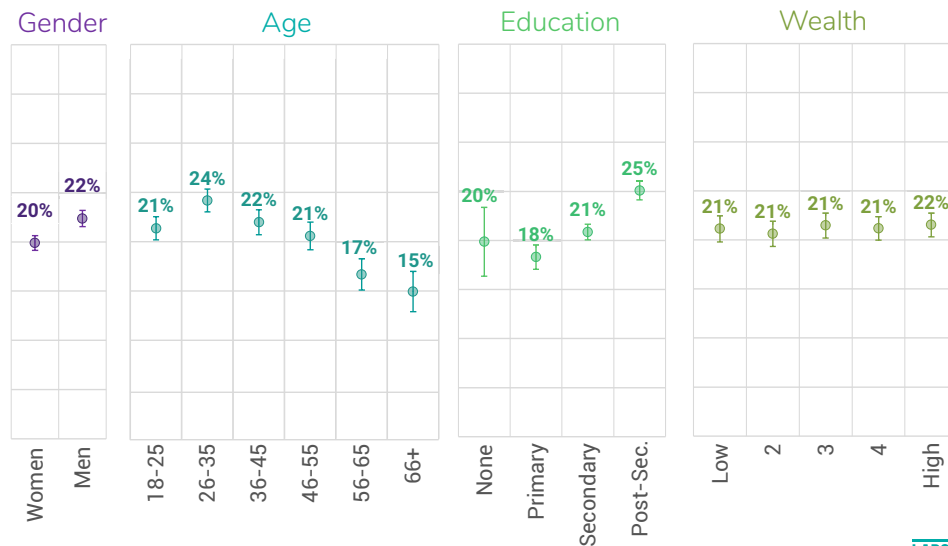
LAPOP

Who is most likely to be a victim of crime? **Figure 3.12** shows that the most educated are more likely to report having been victims of crime than less educated individuals. Men are slightly more likely to express being a victims of crime

than are women. Generally, younger individuals are also more likely to report being victims of crime than are older citizens. Those who are wealthier are marginally more likely to indicate being victims of crime than those who are least wealthy.²⁸

Figure 3.12

More educated, men, and younger individuals in the LAC region are the most likely to be crime victims • % victim of a crime — 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

To what extent do individuals in the LAC region feel safe in their neighborhood in 2021? Since its inception, the AmericasBarometer project has used the following question to assess this type of insecurity:

Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being assaulted or robbed, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?

Figure 3.13. shows the percentage in each country that expresses feeling somewhat or very unsafe in their neighborhood in 2021. Over half feel somewhat or very unsafe in 8 of 18 countries, with about 66% of Haitians saying they feel unsafe in their neighborhood. Two of Haiti's Caribbean neighbors—Guyana and Jamaica—have the lowest levels of perceptions of insecurity in their neighborhood: fewer than one in five Jamaicans and fewer than three in ten Guyanese report feeling unsafe.

Figure 3.13
In most LAC countries, at least two in five say they feel somewhat or very unsafe

% neighborhood is somewhat or very unsafe 95% conf. int.

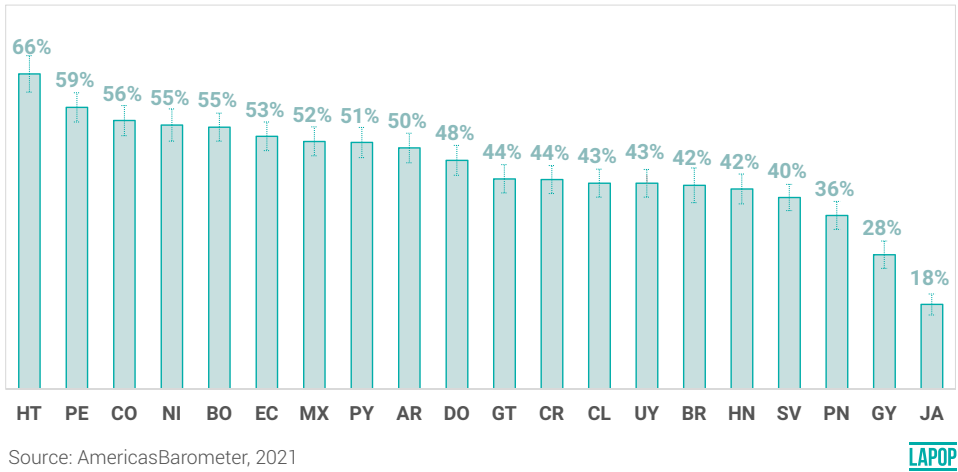


Figure 3.14 documents changes over time in level of neighborhood insecurity. On average across the LAC region, 46% feel insecure in their neighborhood in 2021. That value for 2021 represents a slight decrease in insecurity from the 2018/19 survey

round; though small, the difference is statically significant. Nevertheless, neighborhood insecurity remains much higher than its nadir in 2012 when fewer than one in three reported they felt unsafe in their neighborhood.

Figure 3.14
Despite a decrease in feelings of insecurity in 2021, nearly half in the LAC region still say they feel insecure in their neighborhood

% neighborhood is somewhat or very unsafe 95% conf. int.

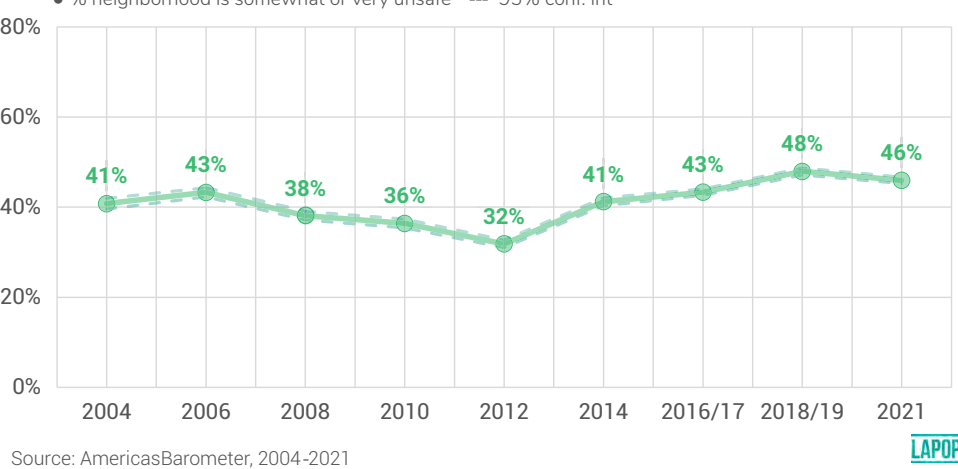
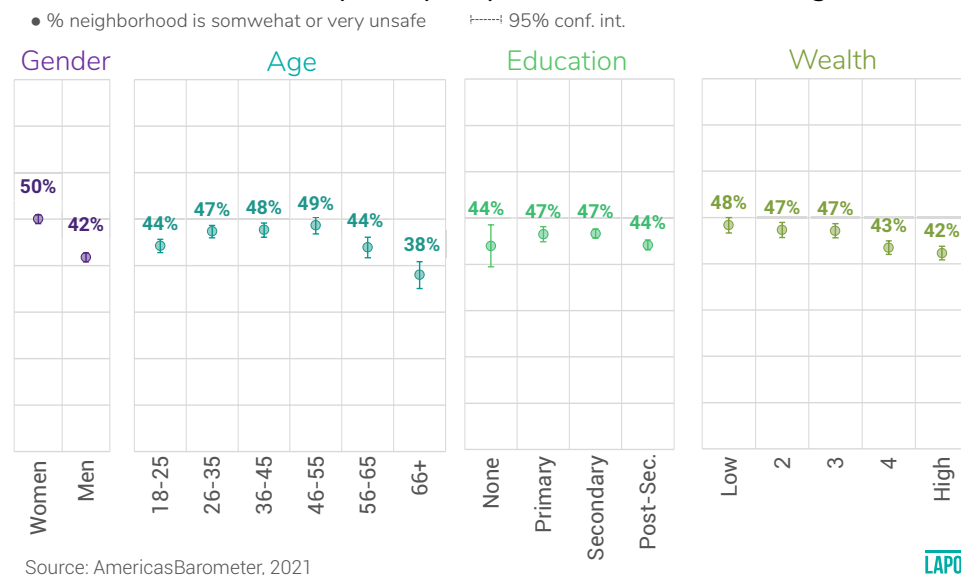


Figure 3.15 shows that those with post-secondary education and those with no formal education are slightly less likely than those with primary and secondary education to feel insecure in their neighborhood.²⁹ Further, women report feeling more insecure in their neighborhood compared to men; the gender gap is

8 percentage points. In addition, the least wealthy individuals are almost 6 points more likely to feel unsafe than the wealthiest in the LAC region. Individuals between 26 and 55 years old are slightly more likely to report feeling insecure in their neighborhood than those who are younger or older.

Figure 3.15

Those with low levels of education, women, younger, and less wealthy individuals are most likely to say they feel insecure in their neighborhood



To what extent does crime victimization and neighborhood insecurity relate to trust in institutions? **Figure 3.16** shows how these factors predict trust in a key institution relevant to maintaining

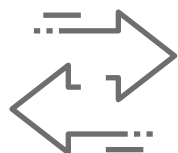
the rule of law—the National Police. The figure shows that both crime victimization and insecurity are associated with lower levels of trust in the police.³⁰

Figure 3.16

Victims of crime and those who feel insecure in the LAC region have lower trust in the police • % trust in the police — 95% conf. int.



Justice for GBV Victims



There remains a gap between what has been aspirational and what has been realized in authorities' commitment to end gender-based violence

The third pillar in our multi-dimensional assessment of the public's view on the rule of law is justice. Specifically, we look here at beliefs regarding impunity for gender-based violence (GBV) in the LAC region. In this regard, we take an admittedly narrow look at the notion of justice, yet we do so in order to put a focus on a critical issue in the region. Scholars have traced the roots of tolerance for GBV and an underwhelming record of state-led anti-GBV measures to colonial times and authoritarian legacies.³¹

But, moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic—and its associated stressors including economic strain and lockdowns—increased the vulnerability of individuals, especially women, to gender-based violence,³² making this an important topic to address now.

In recent decades, and spurred on by key efforts in civil society, governments across the region have started to make stronger efforts to combat GBV impunity.³³ Progress has been made, yet there remains a gap between what has been aspirational in terms of goals and what has been realized in authorities' everyday commitment to end GBV.³⁴

Majorities Across the LAC Region Believe the Police and the Justice System Respond Justly to Incidents of Gender-Based Violence

A new battery in the 2021 AmericasBarometer examines perceptions of GBV impunity. In the 2021 round, enumerators presented respondents with the following vignette: "Suppose a woman in your neighborhood was beaten by their partner." Next, the enumerators read two follow-up questions to gauge respondents' level of agreement that 1) the police would take the victim's report seriously and 2) that the judiciary would convict the perpetrator.³⁵ It merits noting that these questions have not been asked in previous rounds. We therefore focus on cross-country and cross-subgroup comparisons. The wording of these two questions is as follows:

If the incident was reported, how likely would it be that the police would take it seriously?

(1) Very likely (2) Somewhat likely
(3) A little likely (4) Not at all likely

If the case were brought to justice, how likely would the judicial system be to punish the culprit?

(1) Very likely (2) Somewhat likely
(3) A little likely (4) Not at all likely



Mexico, 2021:
Protesters in Mexico
City march against
gender-based violence,
demanding greater
safety and living
conditions for women
(Eve Orea/Shutterstock)

Figure 3.17 displays the share of the public in each country that agrees that the police would treat the GBV victim seriously. Assessments of confidence in the police treating the GBV victim seriously range from 58% of Mexicans to 77% of Salvadorans.

Figure 3.17
Expectations of police addressing GBV impunity are lowest in Peru and Mexico
■ % likely that police will take incident seriously ▬ 95% con. Int.

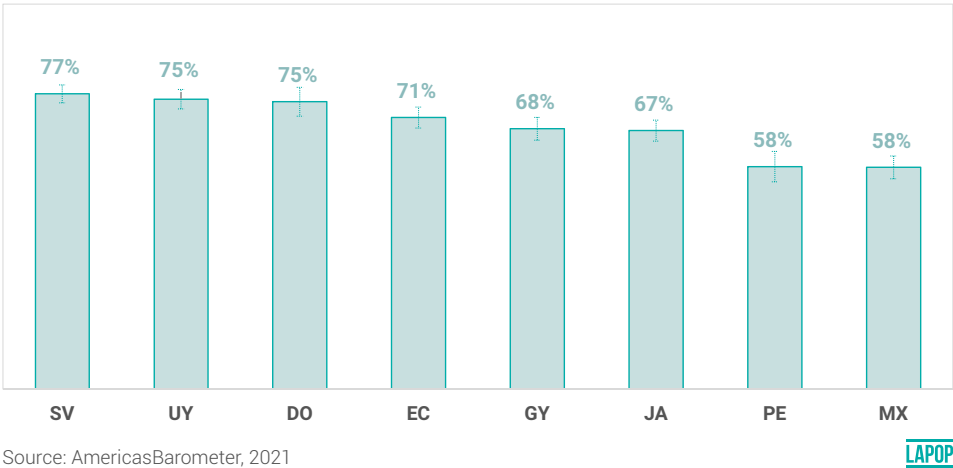
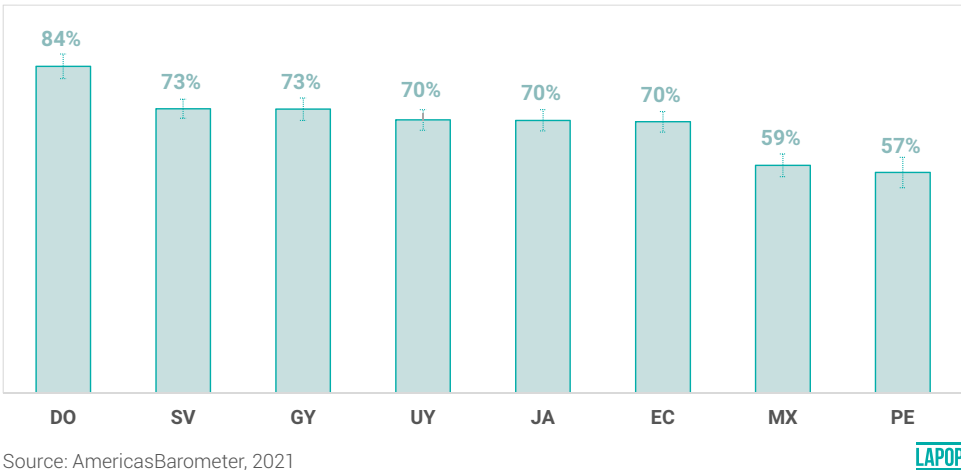


Figure 3.18 presents the share that agrees a judicial court will punish the person charged with a GBV crime—that is, that justice will be served. Assessments of confidence in the judiciary treating the GBV victim fairly range from 57% of Peruvians to 84% of Dominicans.

Figure 3.18
Expectations of the judicial system addressing GBV impunity are lowest in Peru and Mexico
■ % likely that judicial system will punish culprit ▬ 95% conf. int.



Both **Figures 3.17** and **3.18** showcase that expectations of justice for GBV victims are fairly high: in every surveyed LAC country, responses on average surpass 50 percentage points. El Salvador's position in both **Figures 3.17** and **3.18** is noteworthy. El Salvador's commitment to GBV has become more salient in recent years due to the implementation of the *Ciudad Mujer* Program (CM), which has been emulated by the Honduran and Paraguayan governments. Therefore, one hypothesis is that Salvadorans' responses reflect the change that CM centers represent in justice for GBV victims, which are intended to provide a comprehensive attention to GBV victims in close cooperation with the police and the judiciary.³⁶

There is considerable variation, however, across and within countries between views of the police and the judicial system with regards to GBV impunity. Dominicans harbor, on average, more confidence in their judiciary than in their police force, potentially reflecting a disconnect between the government's effort

in strengthening the judicial response compared to the police's first-response attention to the GBV victims.³⁷ In contrast, for Uruguayans it is exactly the opposite; in that country, access to justice for GBV victims is still limited and leniency towards putative GBV aggressors is widespread, especially in Uruguay's hinterland.³⁸

Across both **Figures 3.17** and **3.18**, Mexico and Peru consistently rank at the bottom. There appears to be room for comprehensive improvement in how Mexicans and Peruvians perceive their police and judiciary's handling of GBV victims. In Peru, skyrocketing reports of intimate-partner violence during the pandemic suggest that the government ought to review its efforts in counter-GBV measures to foster confidence in the public.³⁹ In Mexico, President Andrés López Obrador has acknowledged shortcomings in reducing the prevalence of GBV, as the number of femicides rose sharply within the past five years.⁴⁰



Expectations of justice for gender-based violence victims in Latin America and the Caribbean are fairly high



Argentina, 2020:
Woman joins a protest
in Buenos Aires against
the government's justice
reform efforts (Mariana
Gaspar/Shutterstock)

Expectations about Justice for GBV Victims are Gendered and Vary by Age and Education

Who is more (or less) likely to perceive a fair and serious treatment for the GBV victim by police and courts? **Figure 3.19** places gender as a key predictor of expectations around the state's handling of a GBV report.

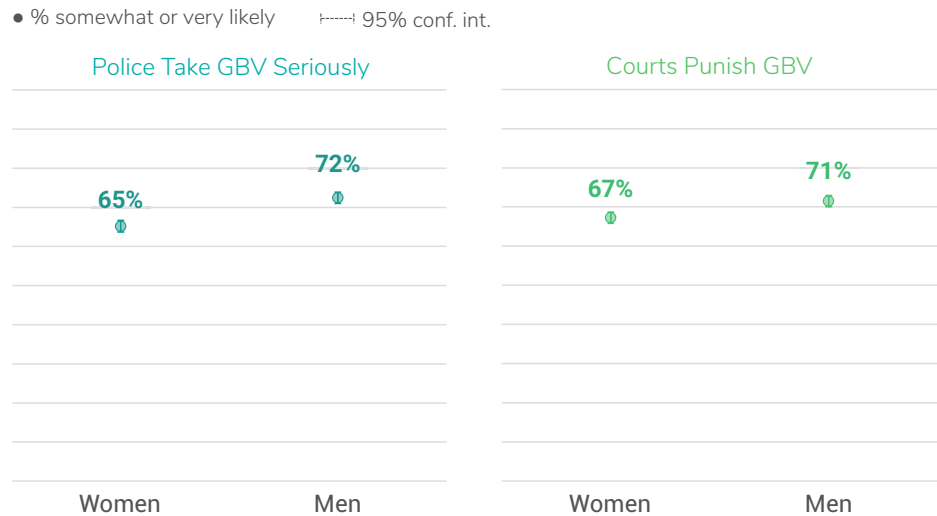
With men as the baseline, the figure shows that women are significantly less likely to expect the GBV victim will be fairly treated by the police (-7 percentage points) and that the courts will bring about due process

by convicting the perpetrator (-4 percentage points). In other words, women in the average LAC country are less likely to agree that the rule of law applies in the realm of justice for GBV victims.⁴¹

Figure 3.19
Women in the LAC region expect more GBV impunity than men



Women are less confident than men that the rule of law is strictly adhered to in cases of gender-based violence



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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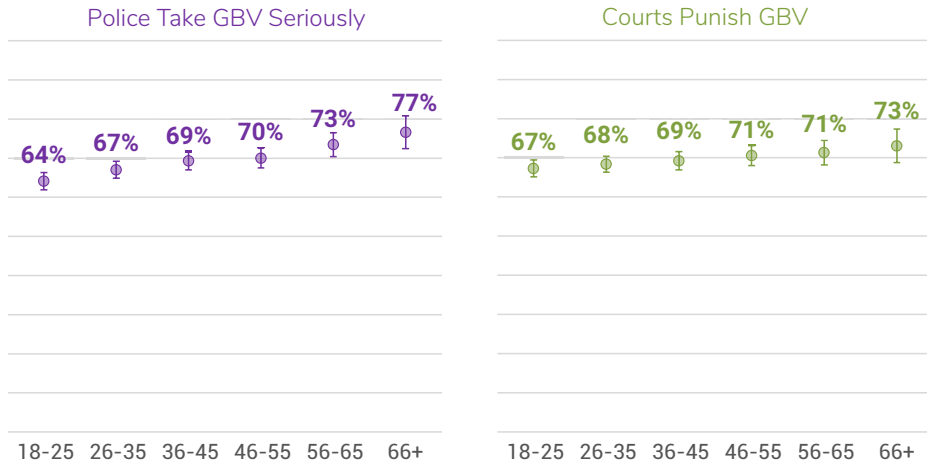
Figure 3.20 highlights age-based variation in expectations of law-enforcement and due process. The older the age bracket, the more the cohort tends to report that a GBV report will be handled seriously by the state. There are two relevant age gaps. On the one hand, younger

cohorts (18-35) are less likely to agree GBV victims are taken seriously by the police.⁴² When it comes to agreeing whether courts will punish the GBV perpetrator, on the other hand, the gap is less pronounced but significantly different between the 46 and older group and their younger counterparts.

Figure 3.20

Younger age cohorts expect more GBV impunity

● % somewhat or very likely +-----+ 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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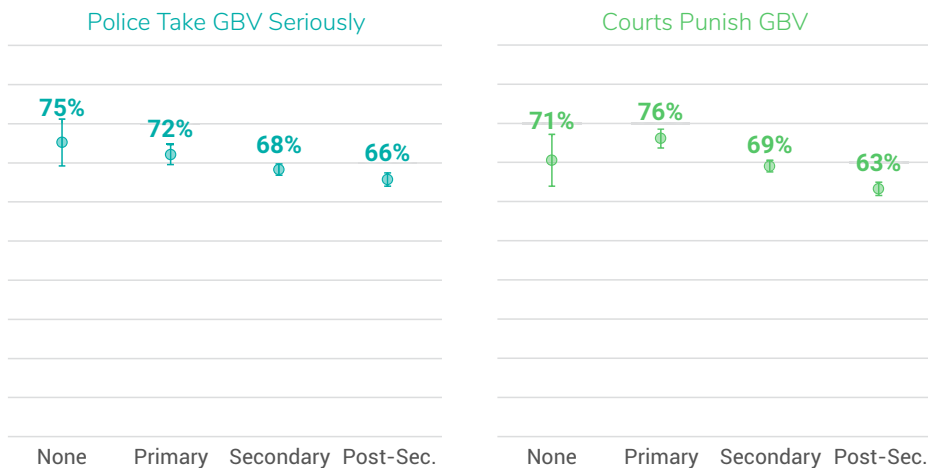
Across levels of educational attainment, **Figure 3.21** shows that the more educated individuals are, the less prone they are to expect that

a GBV victim's case will be handled seriously by the police and punished by the courts.

Figure 3.21

More educated individuals expect higher GBV impunity

● % somewhat or very likely +-----+ 95% conf. int.



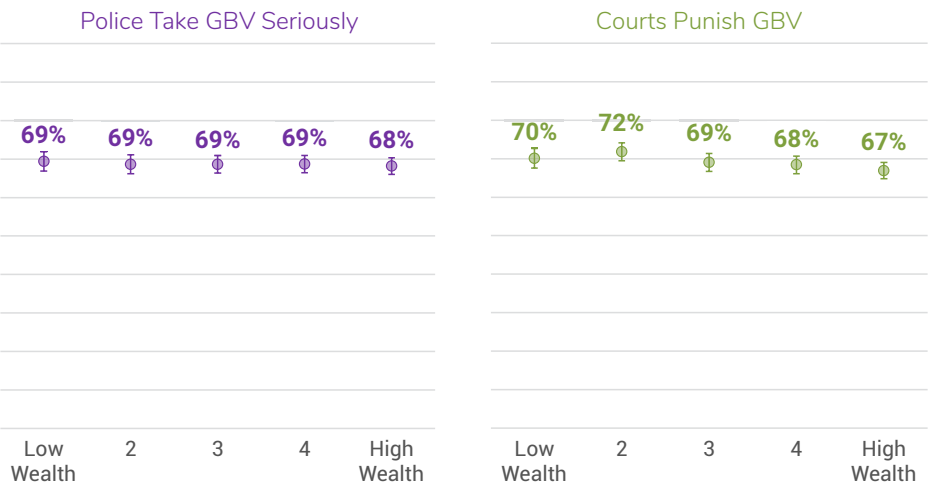
Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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Finally, **Figure 3.22** displays that wealth has less predictive leverage over perceptions of GBV impunity. Wealth levels have no discernible impact on people's perceptions of how police tackle GBV impunity. A wealth-based gap between the most

extreme categories of respondents' wealth is only appreciable regarding the judicial system: in comparison to their less wealthy counterparts, the wealthiest people are about 3 percentage points less likely to agree GBV will be punished by the courts.

Figure 3.22
Wealth predicts perceptions of GBV impunity from courts, not from police • % somewhat or very likely ----- 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021



Generating instruments to measure the public's view on the topic of GBV is not an easy feat (e.g., Castro and Riquer 2003; Palermo et al. 2014). That said, the AmericasBarometer 2021 data permit valuable assessments of citizens' views on justice for GBV victims: the extent to which law-enforcement (the police) and the judiciary (the courts) work to tamp down on impunity in this domain. The results show

fairly high levels of confidence in the likelihood that GBV reports are taken seriously and pursued fairly in the courts; there is, of course, room to improve. Further, the 2021 AmericasBarometer reveals that views on GBV and impunity have a distinctly gendered aspect: women in the LAC region are less confident that the rule of law is strictly adhered to in this domain.

The Public Opinion Consequences of Weak Rule of Law

Earlier sections of this chapter have touched on the notion that the public view of the rule of law—with respect to corruption, crime, and justice—matters for the broader nature of public opinion regarding one's community and the political system. When perceptions of government corruption are high, and citizens are forced to pay bribes for services, politicians are unlikely to be held accountable and services become inaccessible for those who do not have the means to pay bribes.

Those who are victims of crime and perceive insecurity in their neighborhood lack access to justice. If citizens do not expect GBV victims to be treated seriously by police and fairly in courts, then GBV perpetrators are more likely to remain unaccountable, and governments fail to protect the civil and human rights of vulnerable sectors of society.

We consider that those who perceive widespread corruption and insecurity, are victims of corruption and crime, and have little faith in institutions of justice to punish GBV may be less likely to trust in others, have lower confidence in the government, and have less support for democracy over other forms of government. To investigate these relationships, we assess how our measures of the rule of law correlate with the following variables:⁴³

And speaking of the people from your community, would you say that people in your community are very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or untrustworthy?

How much do you trust the national government to do what is right?
(1) A lot (2) Somewhat (3) A little
(4) Not at all

Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Responses on a scale from 1, "Strongly disagree," to 7 "Strongly agree"

Interpersonal trust is foundational for the functioning of society, but lack of justice, accountability and transparency can generate distrust between individuals.⁴⁴ We find that victims of crime and those who perceive high levels of corruption are somewhat less trusting of others in their community. Yet, neighborhood insecurity has quite a

strong relationship with interpersonal trust: there is a 21-percentage point gap between those who feel unsafe and those who feel safe in their neighborhood, as shown by **Figure 3.23**. Overall, these results suggest that a failure to provide security can be damaging to interpersonal trust in a community.



Failure to provide security can be damaging to interpersonal trust in a community

Figure 3.23

Perceptions of neighborhood insecurity are associated with lower interpersonal trust

● % people in the community are somewhat or very trustworthy



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

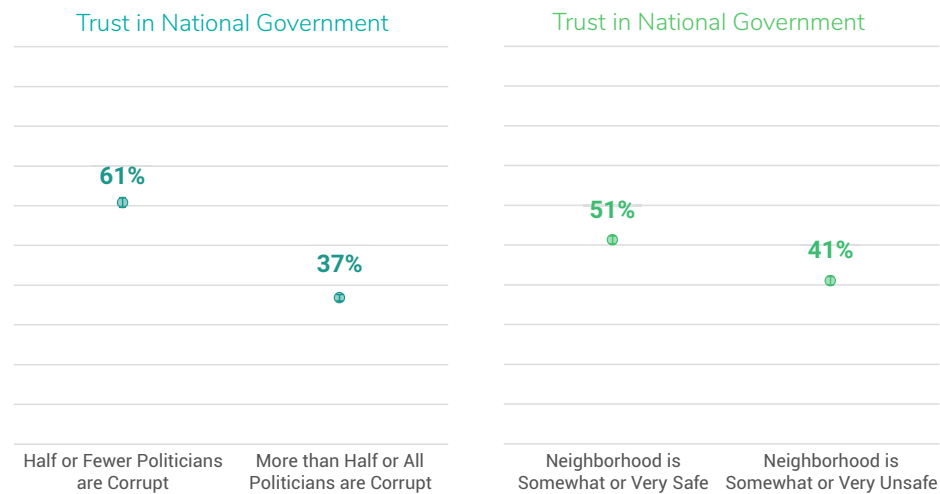
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When accountability, transparency, and justice are absent from a society, citizens are less likely to trust the government. We find that victims of corruption and crime are less likely to trust the national government to do the right thing. We find an even stronger relationship for perceptions of corruption and neighborhood insecurity, as shown in **Figure 3.24**.

Those who perceive most politicians as corrupt are 24 percentage points less trusting in the national government compared to those with lower perceptions of corruption. Overall, the data suggest that a lack of implementation of the rule of law at not only at the national level, but also at the local level, can undermine trust in the national government.

Figure 3.24

Perceptions of widespread corruption and insecurity undermine trust in government • % trust in national government - - - - - 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

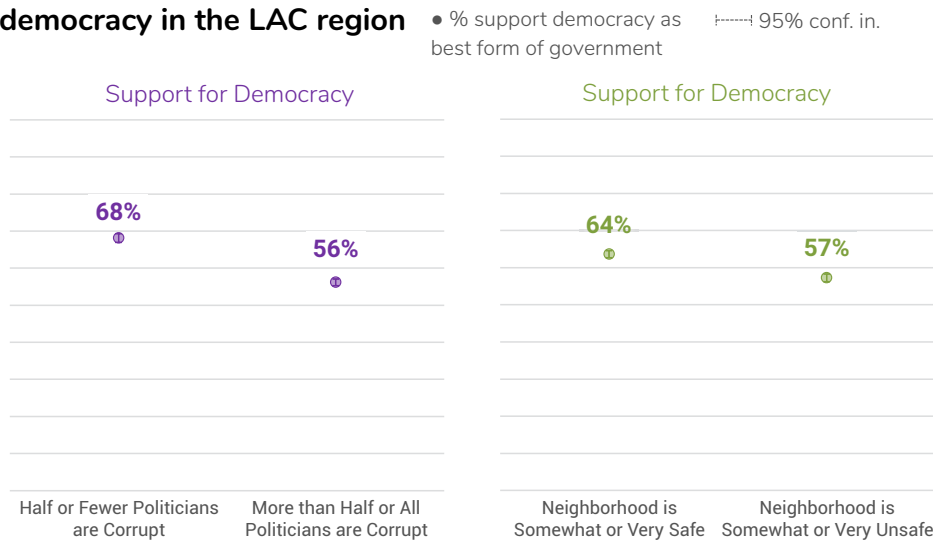


The final analysis shows the relationship between the rule of law and support for democracy in the abstract. **Figure 3.25** demonstrates how perceptions of corruption and insecurity may serve to significantly undermine support for democracy.

Those who perceive that most politicians are corrupt and those who feel their neighborhood is unsafe are about 12 and 7 percentage points, respectively, less likely to agree that democracy is better than any other form of government.

Figure 3.25

Perceptions of corruption and insecurity reduce support for democracy in the LAC region



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

We also probed how perceptions that a GBV report would be taken seriously by the police and punished by the judicial system are related to these three variables. We find that those who have less faith that the police take GBV seriously and that

the judicial system will punish GBV impunity have less confidence that the government will do the right thing, lower interpersonal trust, and lower support for democracy compared to their counterparts with contrasting views.

Conclusions: Implications for Democratic Governance

This chapter has offered a multi-dimensional assessment of the rule of law, from the viewpoint of the public in the LAC region. We focus on three dimensions that are a core part of the rule of law concept: corruption, crime, and justice. The assessment yields a mixed report with some positive and some concerning findings.

These results matter because the rule of law is integral to democracy. They also matter because, as we have shown, they have the potential to shape other attitudes that are important to the quality and durability of democracy: interpersonal trust, confidence in state institutions and the government, and—in some cases—support for democracy. Thus, reducing crime and corruption, as well as strengthening justice institutions, will shore up the rule of law, in addition to making democracies function in a more robust and enduring manner. It is worth noting, importantly, that fostering a healthy democracy via attitudes such as interpersonal and institutional trust may in turn be critical to maintaining a robust rule of law. Especially to the degree they likely are mutually reinforcing, it is

crucial to pay attention to the citizens' perspective on the rule of law and the broader set of attitudes that keep the pulse of democracy strong.

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Notes

- 1 The index is based on expert and public opinion surveys and is made up of eight factors: constraints on government powers, absence of corruption, open government, fundamental rights, order and security, regulatory enforcement, civil justice, and criminal justice.
- 2 In the most recent WJP data, Uruguay, Costa Rica and Chile, three of the countries with the strongest democracies and human development indices, have the highest rule of law scores in the region and are 22nd, 25th, and 26th in the world rankings. At the other end of the spectrum are Honduras, Nicaragua, Bolivia, three countries that have few constraints on government powers and high levels of political corruption.
- 3 Likewise, in the AmericasBarometer there was a big jump in the percentage of those who said their basic rights were protected between the 2018/2019 round and the 2021 round. El Salvador witnessed the biggest increase by far, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador also experienced a boost, but Guatemala did not have a statistically significant increase in those who said basic rights were protected between the two rounds.
- 4 Neuman 2020.
- 5 O'Boyle 2021; Porras 2021.
- 6 Cohen, Lupu, and Zechmeister 2017; Morris and Klesner 2010.
- 7 Papadovassilakis and Robbins 2021.
- 8 Most notably ex-president of Peru Martín Vizcarra and cabinet members both from his administration and that of then President Fernando Sagasti secured early access to vaccines and a Bolivian health minister was arrested for buying ventilators at inflated prices (Alonso and Gedan 2020). Argentina has been at the center of two major COVID-19 scandals: first with news emerging in February 2021 of elites using connections to get early access to COVID-19 vaccines (Heath 2021); and secondly, in August 2021 as photos of First Lady Fabiola Yañez's maskless birthday party attended by the President himself and others were leaked to media outlets, disobeying his own decree mandating strict lockdown and sheltering-at-home measures in July 2020 (Gillepsie 2021).
- 9 Warren 2004.
- 10 Lagunes, Yang and Castro 2019.
- 11 Mortera-Martínez 2021.
- 12 Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Chang and Chu 2006; Mishler and Rose 2001 Morris and Klesner 2010.
- 13 Seligson 2002, 2006.
- 14 Although Uruguay did experience a high-profile case of corruption with former vice president Raúl Sendic in 2017, Sendic resigned and his political career has not recovered. Compare this to Peru's Keiko Fujimori, who was nearly victorious in the 2021 presidential election despite having been jailed for her connection to the Odebrecht corruption scheme.
- 15 This does not appear to be driven by reported news consumption. Over half of all respondents claimed to follow the news daily, with about 58% of those with higher education compared to 53% of those with primary or less. Those who follow the news daily are *less* likely to say more than half or all politicians are corrupt compared to those who follow the news less often. Nevertheless, the substantive difference is quite small (63.5% versus 65.8%).
- 16 We performed a logistic regression where the dependent variable is coded as 1 if a respondent said more than half/all politicians are involved in corruption and 0 if the respondent said half or fewer are involved in corruption. We include sociodemographic controls—gender, age cohorts, education, and wealth—and country fixed effects. All else equal, both wealth and education remain consistent and statistically significant predictors of corruption perceptions.
- 17 The question about police bribe solicitation was not asked in Costa Rica in 2021.
- 18 Transparency International Corruptions Perceptions Index 2020.
- 19 We performed a logistic regression where the dependent variable is coded as 1 if a respondent was a victim of bribe solicitation and 0 if she was not. We include demographic controls—gender, age cohorts, education, and wealth—and country fixed effects. All else equal, gender, age and education remain significantly associated with corruption victimization.
- 20 Here and in all analyses in this report, the “women” category is more precisely “women/non-binary/other”. The 2021 AmericasBarometer included the option for individuals to select non-binary/other in response to the gender question; because there are too few observations to analyze independently, we group those who identify as non-binary/other with women, and our analyses compare that group to men.
- 21 Singer et al. 2020.
- 22 E.g., Müller 2018.
- 23 Soares and Naritomi 2010, p. 23.

- 24 Moncada and Franco 2021; Muggah and Dudley 2021.
- 25 Semple and Azam 2020.
- 26 Muggah and Dudle 2021.
- 27 Transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) have grown stronger in various ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, these criminal groups have provided governance in areas abandoned by the state. In Central America, gangs enforced the government lockdowns and distributed food supplies in their communities. In Mexico, some criminal groups have handed out food to communities under their control. In Brazil, "gangs in various favelas in Rio de Janeiro imposed curfews and social distancing on residents" (Cruz and Fonseca 2021).
- 28 A logit regression with country fixed effects indicates significant associations between age, gender, wealth, and education with crime victimization, all else equal.
- 29 A logit regression with country fixed effects indicates significant associations for gender and wealth with perceptions of neighborhood insecurity, all else equal. Age and education are not significantly related to neighborhood insecurity.
- 30 Results from an OLS regression suggest that crime and feeling insecure in the neighborhood are statistically significant, controlling for sociodemographic factors, such as age, gender, education, and wealth.
- 31 See, for example, Menjivar and Walsh 2017; Rondón 2003.
- 32 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>
- 33 O'Brien and Walsh 2020.
- 34 Choup 2016; Frías 2013; Htun et al. 2019; Roggeband 2016.
- 35 The GBV impunity questions were asked only in 8 of the countries. For the analysis, both have been recoded as 100 (1-2 on the 1-4 scale) and 0 (3-4 on the 1-4 scale).
- 36 See *Informe sobre Estado y Situación de la Violencia contra las Mujeres en El Salvador 2020*, available at <https://www.transparencia.gob.sv/institutions/instituto-salvadoreno-para-el-desarrollo-de-la-mujer/documents/402464/download>
- 37 See <https://presidencia.gob.do/noticias/presidente-abinader-pone-en-funcionamiento-doce-casas-de-acogida-para-victimas-de>
- 38 See <https://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/sociedad/violencia-genero-crean-juzgados-tobilleras-fiscalias-especializadas.html>
- 39 Agüero 2021; Wiener 2021.
- 40 See <https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/articulos/informacion-sobre-violencia-contra-las-mujeres-incidencia-delictiva-y-llamadas-de-emergencia-9-1-1-febrero-2019>
- 41 We performed OLS regressions where both dependent variables were recoded to range from 0 (very unlikely) to 100 (very likely). We include demographic controls—gender, age cohorts, education, and wealth—and country fixed effects. All else equal, gender remains a consistent and statistically significant predictor of perceptions of fair and serious treatment for the GBV victim.
- 42 The minimum voting age in the LAC countries surveyed with these questions is 18 years. There is a less notable but still significant gap between people aged 36-45 and those aged 56+.
- 43 We ran logistic regressions to uncover the relationship between the rule of law measures and these three variables. The main independent variables are perceptions of corruption, police corruption victimization, perceptions of neighborhood insecurity, and crime victimization. We recoded the three dependent variables into binary variables. For interpersonal trust, 1 equals somewhat/very trustworthy and 0 equals not very trustworthy/untrustworthy. For trustworthiness of the national government, 1 equals a lot/somewhat and 0 equals a little/not at all. Support for democracy is recoded as 1 agree (5-7 on the 1-7 agree-disagree scale), and 0 neutral/disagree (1-4 on the 1-7 scale). All main independent variables are rescaled to binary variables, where 0 represents no victimization or a lower value (i.e., half or fewer politicians are involved in corruption, and the neighborhood is safe) and 1 represents a higher value (i.e., more than half/all politicians are involved in corruption and the neighborhood is unsafe). The regressions also control for gender, age, education, wealth, and country fixed effects.
- 44 Montinola 2004.



Spotlight on Support for Reducing Judicial Power in the Americas

By Amanda Driscoll and Michael J. Nelson¹

Across the Americas, constitutional courts play an important role refereeing conflicts between the legislative and executive branches of government and adjudicating the extent of citizens' rights and responsibilities. Outside of Bolivia, which allows citizens to vote in elections to select the members of its high courts,² the judges who make these important decisions are largely protected from popular reprisal.

Should the power to address such important issues be taken out of the hands of (usually) unelected judges? We put this question to respondents in eight countries included in the 2021 AmericasBarometer, asking whether they agreed with the sentiment that "The [high court] should have less power to decide controversial issues." While political scientists regularly survey United States citizens on this topic, the 2021 AmericasBarometer marks, to our knowledge, the first time this question has been put to respondents in Central and South America.

The figure below shows the percentage, by country, who support reducing the high court's jurisdiction. That is, higher values correspond to *less* support for the national high court. Overall, outright support for reducing judicial power is low: a clear minority of Latin Americans across all eight countries supports a reduction to judicial power. Support for constitutional courts is highest in Argentina, Panama, and Nicaragua, where only about one-third of the public supports reducing judicial power, and lowest in Paraguay and Guatemala, where roughly 42-43% of citizens support reducing the high court's power.

A minority of Latin Americans across all eight countries support a reduction to judicial power

■ % giving anti-court response |---| 95% conf. int.



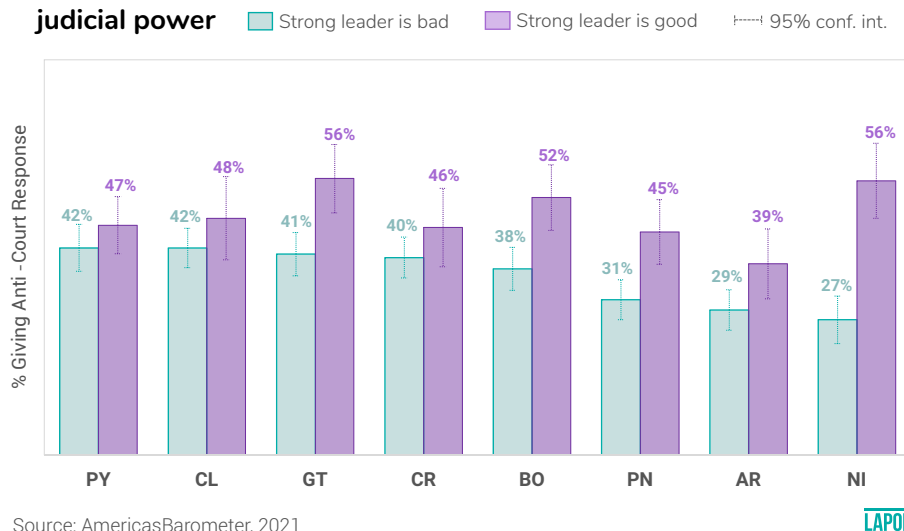
Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

Political scientists who study support for institutions have long thought that support for judicial power is contingent on more general democratic values: people who support democracy also tend to support the separation of power and express support for independent high courts.³ As a preliminary test of this relationship, the next figure shows

support for jurisdiction stripping in relation to opinions about the wisdom of having a strong leader in government, “even if the leader bends the rules to get things done.” The association here is strong: in five of the eight countries, those who support a strong leader are more often supportive of weakening an otherwise independent high court.

Those who support a strong leader also support a reduction to judicial power



Yet the within-country differences are striking. In countries like Paraguay and Costa Rica, there is relatively little difference in the percentage of people who support jurisdiction stripping across those with different opinions about a strong leader. On the other hand, there is a 29-percentage point gap in support for reducing judicial power among Nicaraguans, and a 15-percentage point difference for Guatemalans, depending on their support for a strongman leader. The polarization of public attitudes in these cases may well be related to recent high-profile clashes between high courts and popularly elected presidents who have openly campaigned to discredit judicial institutions and dismantle separation of powers.

Constitutional courts are a critical pillar of government in the separation of powers systems of the Americas, yet they are all too frequently the target of executive interference. A well-established literature suggests that widespread public support is a critical pre-condition for judicial independence and institutional power, yet only rarely have Latin American publics been asked about their awareness of, confidence in, and support for their constitutional courts.⁴ The 2021 AmericasBarometer survey provides a novel opportunity to better understand these dynamics, which will no doubt provide new and fruitful lines of inquiry for many years to come.

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2 Driscoll, Amanda and Michael J. Nelson. 2015. “Judicial Selection and the Democratization of Justice: Lessons from the Bolivian Judicial Elections.” *Journal of Law and Courts* 3: 115-148.

3 Gibson, James L. and Michael J. Nelson. 2015. “Is the U.S. Supreme Court’s Legitimacy Grounded in Performance Satisfaction and Ideology?” *American Journal of Political Science* 59: 162-174.

4 Driscoll, Amanda and Michael J. Nelson. 2018. “There is No Legitimacy Crisis: Support for Judicial Institutions in Modern Latin America.” *Revista de la Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Político* 12(2):361-377.



Spotlight on Trust in the United States and Chinese Governments

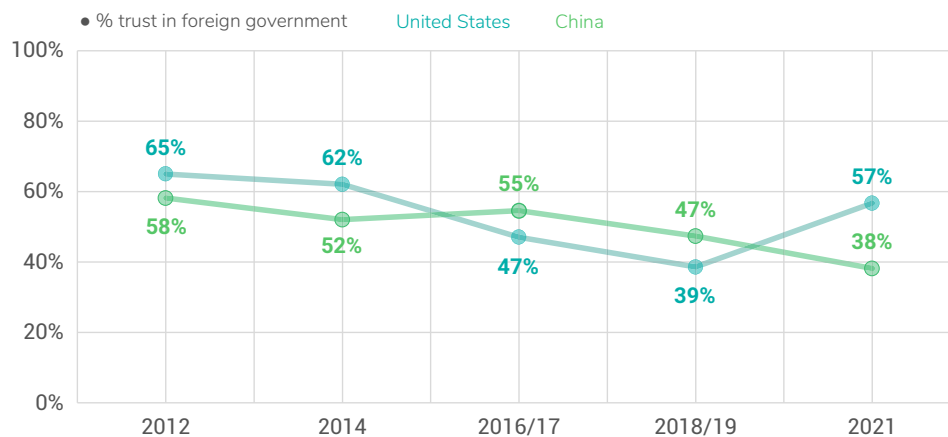
By Facundo E. Salles Kobilanski¹



The Great Hall of the People is China's parliament building in Tiananmen Square, Beijing (tcl/Shutterstock)

The United States has historically held robust political, economic, and cultural ties to the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. Meanwhile, in the 21st century, China has been increasing its regional connections. How much trust does the LAC public hold in the governments of these two countries?

Trust in the U.S. government has rebounded across the LAC region, while trust in the Chinese government has steadily declined



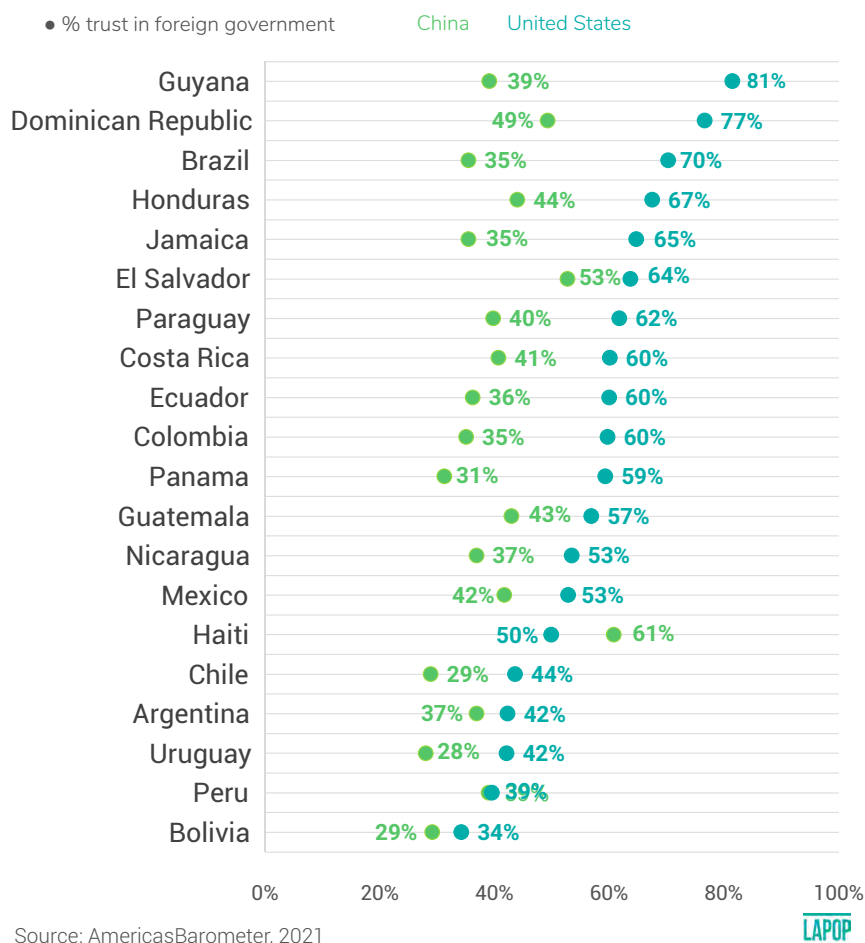
Source: AmericasBarometer, 2012-2021

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After years of decline, trust in the US government rebounded in 2021.² According to the 2021 AmericasBarometer, the region-average level of trust in the U.S. government approaches that seen during the Obama administration.³ Meanwhile, trust in the Chinese

government has continued to decline.⁴ These shifts have resulted in this outcome: in 2021, in most LAC countries (the exceptions are Haiti and Peru), there is greater trust in the U.S. government than in its Chinese counterpart.

In 2021, trust in the U.S. government is higher than trust in the Chinese government for nearly all LAC countries



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021



United States Capitol Building in Washington, DC (Orhan Cam/Shutterstock)

What factors predict trust in the U.S. and Chinese governments? People who evaluate U.S. and Chinese economic influence positively also trust these foreign governments more. Those who positively appraise U.S. political influence, likewise, have greater trust in the U.S. government. Interestingly, the same does not hold for China: evaluations of the country's political influence do not predict trust in its government.⁵ Moreover, among those people who believe democracy is the best political system, trust in the U.S. government is higher than trust in the Chinese government.⁶

What individual-level characteristics make people more likely to trust the U.S. and Chinese governments?⁷ Some political scientists argue that elites in the LAC region shape how people form opinions about the governments of the two of the most powerful countries in the world. However, scholars also point to the importance of individual traits, such as age, education, and gender.⁹ Analyses of the 2021 AmericasBarometer reveal interesting differences across these subgroups.

- 1 Facundo E. Salles Kobilanski is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University and a LAPOP affiliated researcher.
- 2 Variables for trust in the U.S./Chinese governments are recoded from the original 4-point scale into a dichotomous variable (i.e., somewhat or very trustworthy vs. not very or not at all trustworthy). These relationships remain significant even after accounting for sociodemographic variables (gender, age, ethnicity, wealth, and education).
- 3 Azpuru, Dinorah and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister. 2013. "Latin Americans' Perceptions of the United States and China." *Americas Quarterly*, June 24, 2013
- 4 Chile, Peru and Panama are the only countries in which the differences in trust in the US government between the 2018/9 and 2021 rounds are nonsignificant.
- 5 These results hold when controlling for sociodemographic factors (i.e., gender, age, education, and wealth).
- 6 Blair, Robert A.; Robert Marty and Philip Roessler. 2021. "Foreign Aid and Soft Power: Great Power Competition in Africa in the Early Twenty-first Century." *British Journal of Political Science*, First View, pp. 1-22.
- 7 Not everybody is willing to pass judgment on these foreign governments. Less than half of the sample people reports no opinion on trust in the Chinese government, while a third of people report no opinion on trust in the U.S. government.
- 8 Aldrich, John, and Jie Lu. 2015. "The Image of China in the West: How the Public in the U.S., Latin America, and East Asia Sees an Emerging China." *European Review*, 23(2): 227-241. Carreras, Miguel. 2017. "Public Attitudes toward an Emerging China in Latin America." *Issues and Studies*, 53 (1): 1-28. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1142/S1013251117400045>
- 9 Cohen, Mollie, Noam Lupu, and Elizabeth Zechmeister. 2017. "The Political Culture of Democracy in the Americas, 2016/17: A Comparative Study of Democracy and Governance." *LAPOP Regional Report*.
- 10 The AmericasBarometer surveys voting age adults. The minimum voting age in Nicaragua is 16 years old. In Argentina, Brazil, and Ecuador, voting is voluntary for citizens aged 16-18 years old.



On average across the region, younger adults (i.e., 18-25) are more trusting of the Chinese government than their older counterparts. In contrast, except for the oldest adults (i.e., >65), age does not predict trust in the U.S. government. Further, highly educated adults trust the Chinese government more than their less educated counterparts do. Yet, in the case of trust in the U.S. government, there are no discernible differences across education levels. There are also differences in how gender connects to opinion towards these two governments. Gender does not predict trust in the U.S. government, but it does predict

trust in the Chinese government: men report more trust in the Chinese government than women do. Interestingly, in analyses of the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer, a gender gap existed with respect to trust in both governments: in both cases, men reported more trust than women. Thus, the large increase in trust in the U.S. government stems in part from women now being on par with men. One hypothesis worth exploring is whether women have been more receptive to the U.S. government's recent assistance efforts in the LAC region, including with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic.

LAPOP team photo from
pretesting in El Salvador
during the 2018/19 round
of the AmericasBarometer



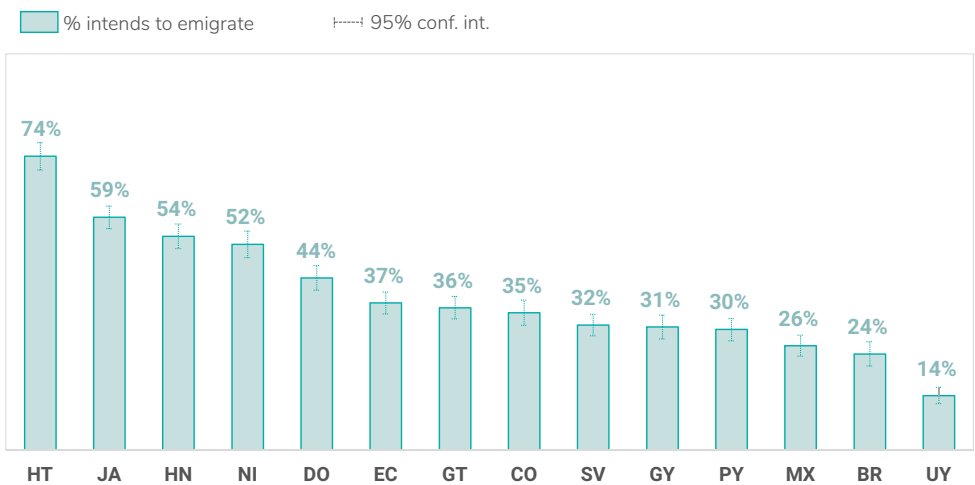


Spotlight on Intentions to Emigrate in Haiti

By Isabella Randle¹

In the 2021 AmericasBarometer, Haiti stands out with—by far—the highest rates of emigration intentions reported of any country in which a question on this topic was asked. About three-quarters of Haitians express having intentions to live or work abroad in the next three years.

Haitians report the highest rates of intentions to emigrate in 2021



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

Haiti, the poorest country in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region, has been challenged by weak governance, insufficient infrastructure and public services, natural disasters, and widespread violence. An ongoing political crisis has been defined by frequent protests over high-level corruption, controversy in the failure to conduct elections, and, most recently, the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in his home in Port-au-Prince on July 7, 2021. Just over a month later, on August 14, a magnitude

7.2 earthquake struck the nation, killing more than 2,200 and injuring thousands more.²

LAPOP collected data for the 2021 AmericasBarometer in Haiti in May of 2021, just before Moïse's assassination and the earthquake motivated additional migration to the United States. Yet, even before these events, Haiti's political instability created uncertainty about the country's path forward amid a persistent set of development challenges.

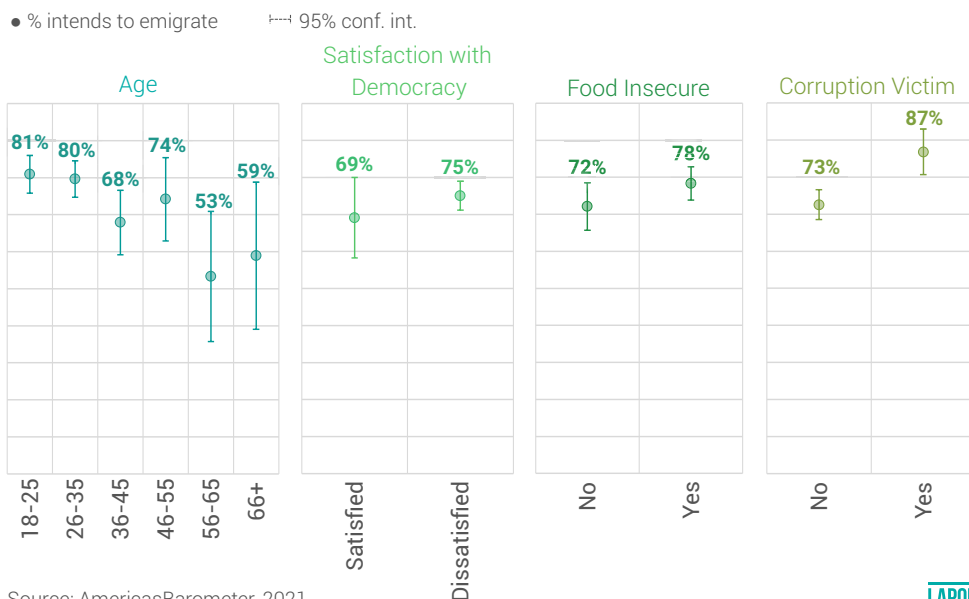
In the face of that uncertainty, and amid the many challenges facing the Haitian people, data from the AmericasBarometer record the largest percentage of Haitians with intentions to emigrate in the history of the survey.

Who is more likely to want to emigrate and why? One answer has been offered by Haiti's Prime Minister, Ariel Henry, who has made connections between emigration from Haiti and poverty. In a video speech presented to the United Nations in September, Henry said that "Migration will continue as long as the planet has wealthy areas,

whilst most of the world's population lives in poverty, even extreme poverty, without any prospects of a better life."³

Analysis of AmericasBarometer data shows that Haitians who are young, dissatisfied with the way democracy works in the country, experiencing food insecurity, and victims of corruption by a public official are most likely to intend to leave to live or work abroad.⁴ In brief, as Prime Minister Henry surmised, extreme poverty—captured here by food insecurity—matters, though experiences with poor governance matter as well.

Haitians who are young, dissatisfied with democracy, food insecure, and victims of corruption are more likely to intend to emigrate

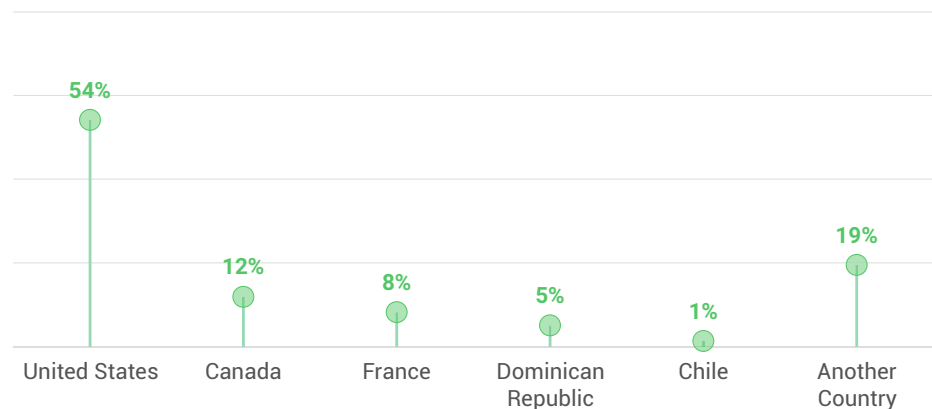


Among Haitians with intentions to emigrate, the United States is the preferred destination. More than half (54%) of those who have intentions to leave say they intend to emigrate to the United States. Other popular destinations for Haitians are Canada (12%), France (8%), and the Dominican Republic (5%). Elevated intentions to migrate to the U.S. are creating humanitarian and political challenges. In recent months, controversy has erupted over the treatment of Haitian migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border. Upon arriving

at the Southern border of the United States, several groups of Haitian migrants were met with U.S. Border Patrol Agents on horseback blocking their arrival onto U.S. soil—an incident that caused widespread indignation among officials and the public. More than 15,000 migrants were forcibly deported to Haiti before they were able to request asylum in the United States. U.S. Special Envoy to Haiti Daniel Foote resigned over the treatment of the migrants, which he called “inhumane” and “counterproductive.”⁵

More than half of Haitians with intentions to emigrate say the United States is their preferred destination

● % with intentions to emigrate who say country is preferred destination



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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1 Isabella Randle is a senior at Vanderbilt University, and a LAPOP Lab fellow and research assistant.

2 See <https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/27921/file/UNICEF%20Response%20Haiti%20Earthquake.pdf>

3 Peltz, Jennifer. September 25, 2021. Haiti's leader: Migration won't end unless inequality does. The Associated Press, online.

4 Findings are statistically significant when controlling for gender, education, wealth, and experience with natural disasters.

5 Goodman, Joshua, Matthew Lee, Danica Coto and Elliot Spagat. September 24, 2021. US special envoy to Haiti resigns over migrant expulsions. The Associated Press, online.

The situation in Haiti continues to be dire. The record-high level of Haitians with intentions to emigrate reflects dissatisfaction with the economic and political situation of the country: Haitians who are unable to meet basic needs and who are experiencing poor governance

are more likely to want to leave. Understanding these opinion dynamics, and their consequences for migration outflows, is an important step in addressing the larger problems of poverty, violence, and weak governance in Haiti.



Mexico, 2021: A Haitian mother feeds her child as she waits in front of the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance to request refuge in Mexico (Nelson Antoine/ Shutterstock)



Spotlight on Public Demand for Disaster Risk Reduction Policy Enforcement

By Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, Barry S. Levitt, and Richard S. Olson¹



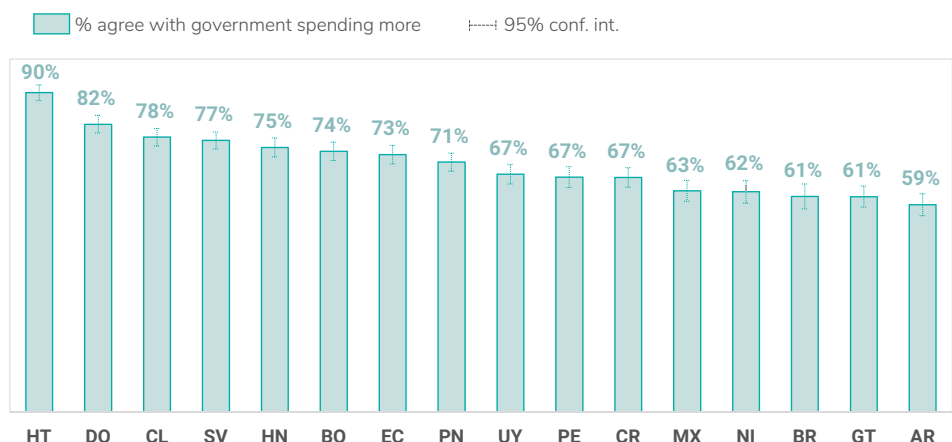
Those who expect that home renovation or construction in their neighborhood would require paying a bribe are less willing to support investing public money in code enforcement

Most citizens in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region favor increased government spending on efforts to make buildings safer from natural disaster.

Specifically, in the average LAC country, 70% of adults agree or strongly agree that the government

should spend more to enforce building codes and regulations, even at the expense of funding other programs.²

More than two-thirds of LAC residents support greater spending to enforce disaster risk reduction policy



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

Support for disaster risk reduction spending is particularly high in Haiti: nine in ten adults believe the government should spend more to keep buildings safer. The need for disaster risk reduction in Haiti was starkly demonstrated in August 2021, when a magnitude 7.2 earthquake leveled buildings in the southwestern part of the country, leading to more than 2,000 deaths

and more than 12,000 injuries. Support is also comparatively high in Haiti's neighbor, the Dominican Republic, as well as in Chile, El Salvador, and Honduras. In each of those countries, at least three in four adults support trading off expenditures on other programs for more investment in the implementation of disaster risk reduction policies.



Ecuador, 2016:
House destroyed by a
7.8-magnitude earthquake
in the city of Manta
(Foto593/Shutterstock)

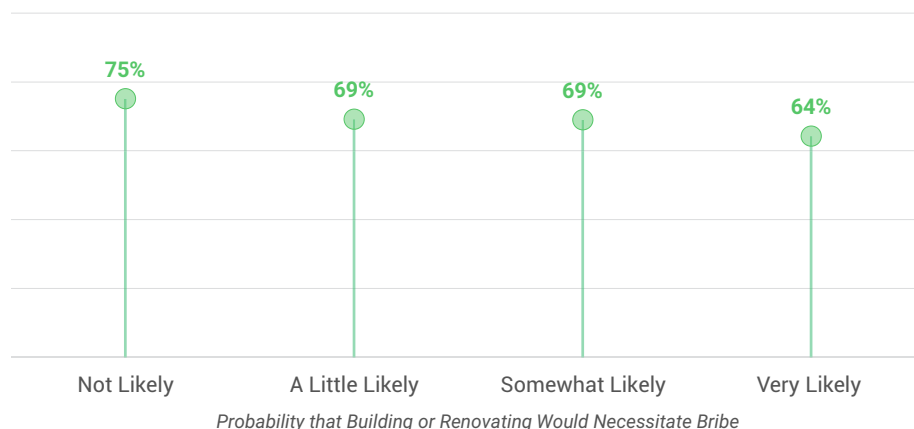
Who is more likely to support more public funding for the enforcement of building codes and regulations to keep people safe from natural disaster? The 2021 AmericasBarometer reveals that those who are less wealthy and less educated are more likely to support disaster risk reduction spending (analyses not shown).

neighborhood would require paying a bribe are less willing to support investing public money in code enforcement. People are unwilling to throw good money after bad: to the degree that they anticipate that officials will engage in corrupt behavior, they are more reluctant to support allocating resources to disaster risk reduction.

Good governance matters as well. Those who expect that home renovation or construction in their

Expecting corruption predicts lower support for government investment in regulation and code enforcement

● % agree with government spending more



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

Spotlight on the Public Demand for Disaster Risk Reduction Policy Enforcement *continued*

The LAC region ranks second in the world in vulnerability to natural disasters.³ This level of exposure is aggravated by changing climate conditions that increase weather anomalies and extreme events. The year 2020 saw a record number of tropical/subtropical storms in the Atlantic basin.⁴ In recent years mudslides in Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Venezuela, and other countries have taken lives and displaced thousands. Meanwhile, the region's vulnerability to earthquakes has increased as populations continue to grow in densely populated urban centers and in places with weakened infrastructure.

Public opinion can generate demands that elected officials are incentivized to meet. It is

important, then, to understand when public opinion shifts in favor – or against – government investment in, and enforcement of, disaster risk reduction policies. With support from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), a collaborative team of investigators at LAPOP-Vanderbilt and the Extreme Events Institute at Florida International University developed a new module on disaster risk reduction and related attitudes for the 2021 AmericasBarometer.⁵ These data can be used to further explore how governance shapes attitudes toward government investment in making buildings safer and – a key goal of the research team – how experiences with disaster alter public demand for disaster risk reduction.

1 Elizabeth J. Zechmeister is the Director of the LAPOP Lab and Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University; Barry S. Levitt is Chair and Associate Professor in the Department of Politics and International Relations at Florida International University; Richard S. Olson is Director of the Extreme Events Institute and Professor of Politics and International Relations at Florida International University.

2 Question wording: The government should spend more money to enforce building codes/norms/regulations to make homes safer from natural disasters, even if it means spending less on other programs. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement? – Strongly agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree or disagree, Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree.

3 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). 2020. *Natural Disasters in Latin America and in the Caribbean, 2000-2007*. Report available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20191203-ocha-desastres_naturales.pdf.

4 World Meteorological Organization (WMO). 2021. *State of the Climate in Latin America & the Caribbean 2020*. Report synopsis available at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/b9e1619f4897444babf79b21907b7910>.

5 The U.S. National Science Foundation Award numbers are #2019874 and #2019796.



Brazil, 2020: House damaged after a mudslide caused by heavy rains in the city of Guarujá (Nelson Antoine/Shutterstock)



Brazil, 2021: Houses are submerged after flooding caused by heavy rains and the rise of the Negro River in Manaus (Nelson Antoine/Shutterstock)

AmericasBarometer Data and Reports at a Glance

Data



The AmericasBarometer datasets feature a common core set of questions that has been asked from 2004 to present day. In addition, LAPOP has datasets that date back to the 1970s. Data files are free and publicly available for download [here](#).

Users can also access AmericasBarometer data through our

[Data Playground](#). This data analysis tool is free and interactive. It is particularly useful for those individuals unfamiliar with advanced statistical software programs. Users can analyze AmericasBarometer data through tabulations of a single variable, cross-country comparisons on a map, and cross-tabulations of two variables.

Reports



LAPOP produces numerous reports on the AmericasBarometer and other projects. Our goal is to provide analysis and evidence for scholars and practitioners on public opinion and democratic governance.

[Insights](#) reports are short briefs produced by students, network affiliates, our researchers, and our faculty. The series is used by journalists, policymakers, and scholars.

Standard *Insights* engage social science research and AmericasBarometer data to develop and assess theories regarding links between public opinion and democracy.

Topical Insights use project data to provide evidence and context on a current event.

Methodological Insights offer windows into our cutting-edge approaches, report on our innovations, and engage scholars who work at the survey research frontier.

Global Insights introduce findings from LAPOP-affiliated research outside the Americas.

[Spotlights](#) present quick snapshots of AmericasBarometer questions across countries, time, and subgroups.

Subscribe to receive *Insights* reports for free by emailing insight@mail.americasbarometer.org.

Country reports are book length, contain more extensive analyses, and are organized thematically to address findings relevant to democratic governance, strengthening, and stability. They include a focus on topics that stakeholders, especially USAID Missions, identify as important in the local context.

The following AmericasBarometer datasets (■) and reports* (●) are available for free download on our website (www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop):

	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016/17	2018/19	2021
Regional	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mexico	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Guatemala	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
El Salvador	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Honduras	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Nicaragua	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Costa Rica	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Panama	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Colombia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ecuador	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bolivia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Peru		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Paraguay		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Chile		●		●	●	●			
Uruguay			●	●	●				
Brazil				●					
Venezuela		●	●						
Argentina				●	●				
Dominican Republic	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Haiti		●	●	●	●	●			
Jamaica		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Guyana		●	●						
Trinidad & Tobago				●					
Belize									
Suriname					●				
Bahamas									
Barbados									
Grenada									
St. Lucia									
Dominica									
Antigua and Barbuda									
St. Vincent and the Grenadines									
St. Kitts and Nevis									
United States									
Canada									

*2021 AmericasBarometer country reports will be available in early 2022

Survey Methodology for the 2021 AmericasBarometer

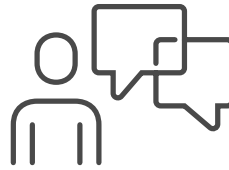
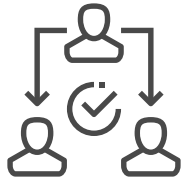
The AmericasBarometer is a multinational, multiregional, and multicultural (3MC) survey of voting-age citizens or permanent residents in North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. The project uses a standardized core questionnaire to interview respondents selected through nationally representative probability samples. Traditionally, surveys in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC region) have been 45-minute face-to-face (FtF) interviews with a minimum of 1,500 individuals selected through area probability sampling. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the LAPOP Lab switched the data collection mode in the LAC region from FtF to computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI).

Sampling. The sampling frame for the 2021 LAC-region surveys consists of mobile phone numbers. This decision was reached following an analysis of household coverage of mobile phones (~90% in the average LAC country, according to the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer), percent of landline only households (~28% on average), and a cost/benefit analysis of calling both. Mobile phone numbers were called using a random-digit dialing (RDD) approach to generate nationally representative samples. In cases of unanswered calls, each number selected into the sample was called at least five times to minimize nonresponse errors.

Weights. The weighting scheme includes four stages. First, we compute base weights to compensate for unequal selection probabilities (e.g., some voting-age individuals have access to multiple

mobile phones). Second, we compute weights to adjust for non-sampling errors from differential nonresponse rates gleaned from disposition code records that follow AAPOR's response rate guidelines. Third, we align the sample estimates with population benchmarks; to maximize the validity of cross-time comparisons and overcome challenges due to out-of-date or unavailable census data, we use the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer to generate these benchmarks. Fourth, we merge all weights together into a final raked weight.

Questionnaire Design. To avoid high rates of interview break-offs, phone surveys require instruments that are comparatively shorter than FtF surveys. The AmericasBarometer 2021 questionnaire consists of a split-sample questionnaire design with an overall length of about 25 minutes. The lab calls this a



“trunk-and-branch” approach: the trunk contains 3,000 interviews that are randomly assigned to one of two branches (n=1,500). A limitation of this approach is that certain variables cannot be correlated, because they belong to two different branches; the advantage is the ability to collect data on a greater number of outcomes of interest.

Pretesting via Cognitive Interviews.

LAPOP uses a three-stage iterative cognitive interviewing strategy. First, cognitive interviewers carry out a handful of tests of new modules and generate revisions. Second, the team conducts cognitive interview tests of the full questionnaire in a selected set of countries. Third, a similar process is carried out in each country with each country-customized questionnaire. For the 2021 AmericasBarometer, some cognitive interviewees were offered a small incentive and all cognitive interviews were conducted using video or phone calls.

Interviewer Training. All interview and supervising teams are trained according to the same standardized protocols. For the 2021 AmericasBarometer, training sessions consisted of videos and remote sessions using Zoom. Training sessions typically last two full days and all trainings conclude

with a learning assessment that team members have to pass (>80% correct answers) in order to be certified to work on the project.

Auditor Training. Each country's fieldwork team designated a set of auditors who were trained via remote workshop sessions. Auditors receive detailed training on how to identify low-quality interviews and how to flag and report these interviews in the CATI software.

Quality Control. The 2021 AmericasBarometer was implemented using a version of LAPOP's Fieldwork Algorithm for LAPOP Control over survey Operations and Norms (FALCON). FALCON was adapted to CATI and permits collection of multiple types of paradata, including voice recordings, question and questionnaire timing, and interviewer performance indicators. These paradata indicators are monitored daily during data collection so that any corrections or cancellations resulting from a failure to meet quality control standards are made while fieldwork is in progress. Final datasets include high-quality interviews only. Each technical report for an AmericasBarometer survey summarizes the results of this process.

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The AmericasBarometer emerges from collaborations among hundreds of individuals involved in its design and implementation. Those involved in the 2021 AmericasBarometer took on a special set of challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included a transition from face-to-face surveys in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region to phone surveys – a process that required significant learning and flexibility on the part of the LAPOP Lab team and our partners across the region.

We thank all the members of the public who generously shared their beliefs and experiences with our survey teams. We are also grateful to our dedicated partner survey organizations and fieldwork teams.

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The LAPOP Lab research team devoted tens of thousands of hours to the design, implementation, and dissemination of the 2021 AmericasBarometer. For this round, these exceptional individuals included, in alphabetical order, Rubí Arana, Fernanda Boidi, Oscar Castorena, Sebastián Larrea, Arturo Maldonado, Daniel Montalvo, Luke Plutowski, Georgina Pizzolitto, Camilo Plata, Mariana Rodríguez, Valerie Schweizer, and Carole Wilson. We are also grateful to Laura Kramer and Lindsey Thomas for project administration and coordination.

One way LAPOP achieves its mission of knowledge transfer and capacity building is by involving students in all aspects of the AmericasBarometer. While they gain experience with cutting-edge survey methodologies, they also contribute to the project's success. At the graduate level, the project benefited from input from Giovanni Bastiani, Kaitlen Cassell, Claire Evans, Margaret Frost, SangEun Kim, Carlos López, Daniela Osorio, Preeti Nambiar, Mariana Ramírez, Facundo Salles Kobilanski, Laura Sellers, Alec Tripp, and Adam Wolsky. The round also benefited from the involvement of undergraduate students, including Rosana Alfaro, Eric Asen, Ehab Alhosaini, Nikka Aminmadani, Samantha Chavez-Salinas, Cameron Deal, Brannen Dickson, Alyssa Dunsizer, Michael Gallego, Henry Green, Mark Grujic, Julia Iorio, Abhinav Krishnan, Maria Loaiza, Chase Mandell, Paul McDougald, Adin McGurk, Ria Mehrotra, Anabelle Mirhashemi, Jasmin Norford, Joshua Peng, Isabella Randle, Abrianna Rhodes, Adriana Rosario Surillo, Alexandra Rounds, Kathir Venkat, Aileen Wu, Yuehao Yang, and Amy Zhang.

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Noam Lupu
Liz Zechmeister

Nashville, Tennessee
October 2021

Photo by Kaitlen Cassell, Vanderbilt University
CLACX Latin American Images Photography
Competition 2018

Back cover photo by Christina Bowden,
Vanderbilt University CLACX Latin American Images
Photography Competition 2016

The AmericasBarometer

The AmericasBarometer is a regional survey carried out by LAPOP Lab, a center for excellence in international survey research based at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN. LAPOP has deep connections to the Latin America and Caribbean region, established during more than five decades of public opinion research. The AmericasBarometer is possible due to the activities and support of a consortium of institutions located across the Americas. To complete each round of the study, LAPOP partners with individuals, survey firms, universities, development organizations, and others in up to 34 countries within the Western Hemisphere. Project efforts are informed by the four core components of LAPOP's mission: to produce objective, non-partisan, and scientifically sound studies of public opinion; to innovate improvements in survey research; to disseminate project findings; and, to build capacity. The AmericasBarometer project receives generous support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Vanderbilt University. Other institutions that have contributed recently to multiple rounds of the project include Environics Institute, Florida International University, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, the Universidad de los Andes, and the World Bank. Over the years, the project has benefited from grants from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development in Brazil (CNPq), the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, and numerous academic institutions across the Americas. The 2021 AmericasBarometer was carried out via phone interviews in 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries, and via the internet in Canada and the U.S. All samples are designed to be nationally representative of voting-age adults. In all, more than 64,362 individuals were interviewed in this latest round of the survey. The complete 2004-2021 AmericasBarometer dataset contains responses from over 350,000 people across the region. Common core modules, standardized techniques, and rigorous quality control procedures permit valid comparisons across individuals, certain subnational areas, countries, regions, and time. AmericasBarometer data and reports are available for free download from the project website: www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop. Individuals can also use that website to access and query the data via LAPOP's interactive data playground. Datasets from the project also can be accessed via "data repositories" and subscribing institutions across the Americas. Through such open access practices and an extensive network of collaborators, LAPOP works to contribute to the pursuit of excellence in public opinion research and ongoing discussions over how programs and policies related to democratic governance can improve the quality of life for individuals in the Americas and beyond.



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