

AmericasBarometer *Insights*: 2010

Number 48

Insecurities Intensify Support for Those Who Seek to Remove Government by Force

By Arturo Maldonado
arturo.maldonado@vanderbilt.edu
Vanderbilt University

Executive Summary. This *Insights* report looks at support for those seeking to overthrow an elected government by force. In part, this attitude speaks to the depth of individuals' commitment to the democratic system.

The principal findings are as follows. First, men, younger citizens, and the less educated are more likely to express approval of this type of confrontational tactic. Second, certain measures tapping insecurity related to the economy, crime, and corruption are related to approval of those working to overthrow an elected government. Specifically, national economic evaluations, feelings of neighborhood insecurity, and corruption victimization all positively predict approval of individuals seeking to overthrow government by force.

The report concludes that a decayed rule of law threatens emerging democracies by increasing levels of public support for antidemocratic actions.

The interruption of constitutional order by armed forces has been a recurrent part of Latin American's history. Recently, it is more common for a president's term to be interrupted by impeachment or some other non-violent means. Nonetheless, public attitudes concerning the use of force to remove executives provide insight into the potential for instability in the region and, as well, the degree to which the ordinary citizen is committed to constitutional, democratic, and peaceful process. What, then, explains support for such confrontational tactics in the Americas? In this AmericasBarometer *Insights* report I show that individuals' insecurities intensify support for such extreme measures.¹

In the 2010 round of the AmericasBarometer survey by LAPOP, over 43,000 respondents from 26 nations in North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean were asked the following question²:

E3. "Do you approve or disapprove of people participating in a group working to violently overthrow an elected government?"

Figure 1 shows average scores with confidence intervals for 23 countries.³ Responses were initially given on a 1-10 scale, but recoded to run from 0 (strong disapproval) to 100 (strong approval).⁴

Figure 1.
Average Approval Expressed for Individuals Who Seek to Remove Elected Government by Force, 2010

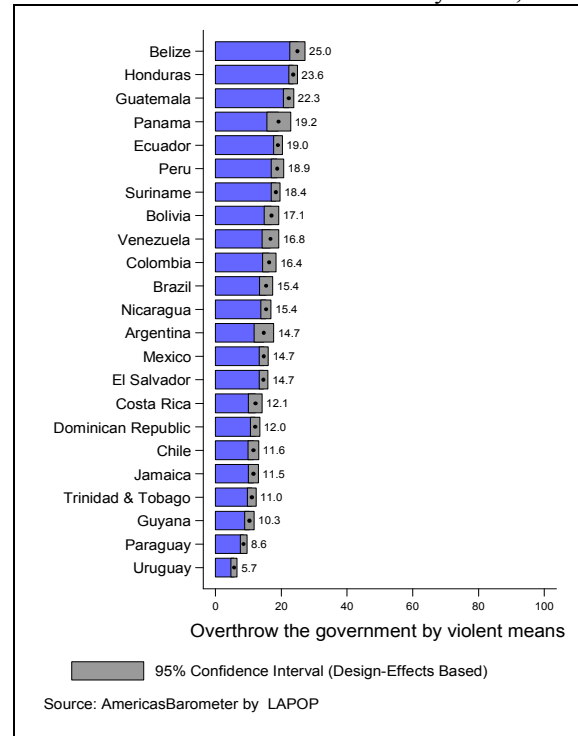


Figure 1 shows that overall levels of support are quite low, lower than 50 points on the 0-100 scale for all countries. Still, there is variance across the countries. Surprisingly, perhaps, respondents in Belize - at the top of the scale - express a level of support, on average, of 25 points on this scale. Likewise, Honduras shows a comparatively high score (23.6 points). In this case the result is arguably less surprising, given that Latin America's most recent military coup took place in that country in 2009. On the other end of the spectrum, the lowest average levels of support for this statement are found in Uruguay and Paraguay. In these two countries, average support for individuals working to overthrow the government by violent means is less than 10 points on the 0-100 scale. By other indicators, Uruguay is considered among the more democratic countries in the region. For instance, it scores comparatively high on trust in elections.⁵

Responses to the question provide insight into the extent of individuals' commitment to

¹ Prior issues in the *Insights Series* can be found at:

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>.

The data on which they are based can be found at:

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>.

² Funding for the 2010 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University.

³ Given that the surveys of the United States and Canada do not contain some independent variables I use and given the focus on Latin America and the Caribbean, I exclude them for a total sample size of 39,238 before case-wise deletion due to missing values. In addition, Haiti is not included here, but was surveyed by LAPOP in 2010.

⁴ Non-response was 1.54% for the sample.

⁵ See AmericasBarometer *Insights* No. 37, 2010 [I0837].

democratic processes. It is important to note that the question does not ask for individuals' own level of support for government overthrow, but instead the extent to which they approve or disapprove of those who participate in groups with that objective. The question is worded so that the nature of those groups is left undetermined, and therefore individuals could have in mind groups seeking to provoke forceful intervention by the country's military or by guerilla or other rogue organizations. Finally, the question does not make explicit reference to any specific country, and therefore may capture ambivalence toward the ways in which democracy is practiced at home and/or abroad.

In an analysis not reported here for the sake of space, I controlled for sex, age, education, wealth, and size of town. After controlling for those standard socioeconomic variables, the country rankings remain similar in comparison to those presented in Figure 1.⁶

What factors explain this attitude? In what follows, I will show first that selected socio-economic and demographic factors matter.⁷ I then turn to an assessment of the predictive power of insecurities, measured by way of economic evaluations, as well as perceptions of and victimization by crime and corruption.⁸

The Predictive Power of Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics

Poverty, unemployment, and a poor education are factors scholars have identified as increasing opposition to representative democracy (Córdova and Seligson 2009). Age has also been shown to be positively correlated with support for democratic governance (Seligson 2007).

Given that the distribution of the responses is skewed toward lower values on the scale⁹, I recalibrate the measure into a dichotomous variable in which values from 1 to 5 are coded as disapproval (89.5%), and values from 6 to 10 are coded as approval (10.5%).

To explore the predictive power of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, I first run a multivariate logistic regression analysis with fixed country effects.¹⁰ The analysis tests the ability of an individual's age, education, gender, wealth, and size of the place of residence to predict support for efforts to overthrow government by force.

The results are presented in Figure 2, in which dots indicate the contribution of each independent variable and horizontal lines indicate the confidence intervals of each contributor. If the interval does not cross the "0", the contribution is considered statistically significant. Those intervals on the left of the vertical zero line indicate a negative relationship, whereas those on the right indicate a positive impact.

⁶ See Appendix.

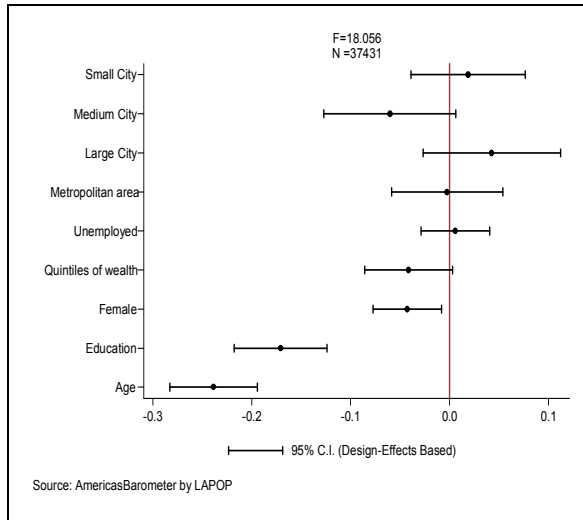
⁷ The data suggest interesting differences across countries, but assessing the causes of these lies outside the scope of this short report.

⁸ All statistical analyses in this paper were conducted using STATA v11 and results were adjusted for the complex sample design employed.

⁹ 57.6% of respondents answer that they strongly disapprove (1 on the 1-10 scale), and 89.5% of respondents place themselves on the disapproving side (between 1-5 on the scale).

¹⁰ Uruguay is the comparison (baseline) country.

Figure 2.
Socioeconomic Determinants of Expressions of Approval for Individuals Who Seek to Remove an Elected Government by Force, 2010



Previous research (Booth and Seligson 2009) has shown that men, younger citizens, the poor, the less educated, and rural residents are those who more likely support this antidemocratic statement in eight Latin American countries (most of them in Central America). Here, the results show a picture that is fairly, though not entirely, similar. Specifically, men, the younger, and the less educated are more likely to express approval with respect to this confrontational position. Conversely, wealth, unemployment, and size of residence are not statistically significant. This result for wealth is particularly noteworthy because of conventional claims that the poor have less commitment to democratic values. While the direction of the coefficient on the wealth variable is expected (indicating the wealthy tend to express less support for this attitude), the substantive effect of wealth is minimal and the result is not statistically significant at the standard $p < 0.05$ threshold. The largest and most significant effects, instead, are found for education and age.

Relating Insecurities to Support for Efforts to Overthrow Government by Force

While some demographic and socio-economic factors matter, they ultimately explain only a small amount of the variation in opinions on support for efforts to overthrow elected government by violent means¹¹. I therefore turn to additional explanations.

A long line of scholarship explains military coups, and public acquiescence or even support for them, as influenced by numerous factors including culture; (lack of) diffuse political support and legitimacy; social capital and interpersonal trust; and economic development and performance.¹² In considering what explains support for individuals who engage in groups seeking to overthrow an elected government with violent means, I assess the relevance of an individual's insecurities.

I distinguish among three dimensions related to insecurity: the economy, crime and violence, and corruption. Some of these dimensions have been utilized to explain support for military coups and democratic legitimacy (Pérez 2003). For example, crime has been associated with citizens' attitudes toward democracy and political participation (Malone 2010), and with the overall quality and durability of democracy (Bateson 2010). Booth and Seligson (2009) examine the relationship between indicators of legitimacy and experiences with crime and corruption, on the one hand, and willingness to accept armed overthrow of an elected government, on the other. In a similar vein as this existing research, but encompassing all three dimensions and with respect to 23 countries, I focus on the ability of these insecurities to predict support for those seeking to overthrow an elected government violently, a statement that can be considered to measure commitment to democracy, or the lack thereof.

¹¹ See the low Pseudo R² reported in the Appendix.

¹² Among others see Almond and Verba 1963; Bermeo 2003; Diamond 1999; Inglehart 1997; Lipset 1963; Linz 1990; Llanos and Marsteintredet 2010; Muller, Jukam, and Seligson 1982; Putnam 2002; Valenzuela 2004.

I consider two aspects of the economic dimension: the national and the personal economic situation.¹³ The expectation is that when people perceive their personal and the national economic situations more poorly, they are more dissatisfied with the performance of the incumbent administration and, as well, with the political system (in these cases, democracy). To the extent the latter is true; I should find a negative relationship between economic perceptions and support for antidemocratic measures.

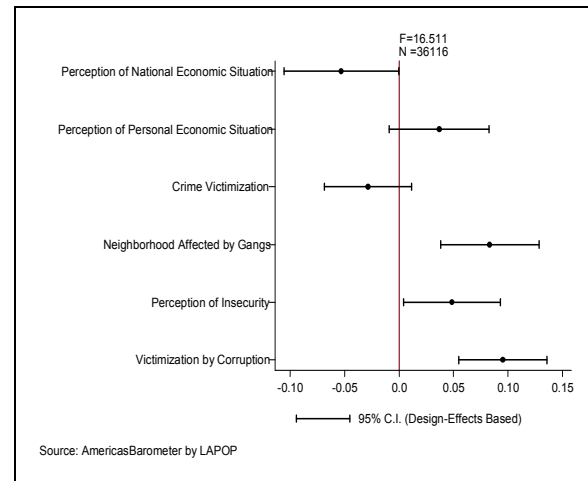
Regarding crime and violence, I include crime victimization¹⁴, the perception of insecurity in people's neighborhoods¹⁵, and the perception of the presence of gangs in their neighborhoods.¹⁶

Additionally, corruption is measured through a dichotomous variable that gauges people who have been victimized by corruption at least once.¹⁷ Again the expectation is that insecurities, in this case with respect to crime and corruption, decrease support for democratic politics.

Figure 3 shows a logistic model¹⁸ in which these variables predict support for those seeking to overthrow government by force; socioeconomic and demographic characteristics and fixed

country effects are included but not shown here.¹⁹

Figure 3.
Determinants of Expressions of Approval for Those Who Seek to Overthrow an Elected Government by Force, 2010



The results in Figure 3 show somewhat mixed results for economic factors. On the one hand, those with better perceptions of the national economic situation are less likely to support those who seek to overthrow government by force. On the other hand, the direction of the coefficient for personal economic evaluations is the reverse but not statistically significant.

The variables related to crime and violence also present slightly mixed results. The fact of being victim of any sort of crime appears as statistically insignificant (and in the unanticipated direction). However, perceptions of gang activities in one's neighborhood and general neighborhood insecurity positively predict support for those seeking to overthrow government by force. Likely this says that the communal experience is more relevant than the personal experience with crime to explain support for extreme antidemocratic measures. In this way, the results mirror those for the economic factors, where perceptions of the national, but not one's personal, situation matter.

¹³ Both the national and the personal economic situation are based on ordinal categorical responses questions with five alternatives that were recalibrated on a 0-100 scale. Higher values of these variables indicate better perceptions about national and personal economic situation.

¹⁴ This variable asked people if they have been victim of any type of crime in the last 12 months.

¹⁵ This question is worded as: "Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being victim of assault or robbery, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?" The responses were recalibrated to a 0-100 scale.

¹⁶ This variable asked people if their neighborhood is affected by gangs (a lot, somewhat, little, or none). The responses were recalibrated to a 0-100 scale.

¹⁷ This variable is based on a series of questions asking about whether the respondent has been received a request for a bribe from the police, public employees, municipal officials, anyone at work, in the justice system, when using health services, and at school.

¹⁸ As a robustness check, I also run separate logistic regressions for each of these variables and I find the same results.

¹⁹ See Appendix for complete results.

Finally, victimization by corruption is statistically significant and in the expected direction. Those who have been victimized by corruption at least once are more likely to express support for individuals who seek to overthrow a government with violence.

In sum, personal insecurities as reflected in national economic evaluations, experiences with corruption, and perception of crime in one's community intensify support for individuals who seek to overthrow elected governments by force. That is, they chip away at individuals' commitment to the rules of the democratic game.

These findings share some similarities to those reported in previous studies. For instance Booth and Seligson (2009) also find that experience with corruption is a positive predictor of this confrontational attitude, but personal experiences with crime are not significant predictors (though they find that communal perception of crime is not significant, and this report finds it is, for this larger set of countries). In a previous *Insights Report*²⁰, Pérez shows that perception of insecurity and crime victimization are determinants of support for military coups. Here, this paper shows another way in which public insecurity is linked to undemocratic attitudes. In all, taking into account findings in previous studies and the hemisphere-wide scope of the analyses reported here, there is overwhelmingly strong reason to conclude that insecurities undermine support for democratic processes and governance in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Discussion

The objective of this *Insights Report* is to identify some key factors that affect individuals' tendencies to approve of those working in groups to promote the violent overthrow of an elected government. I find that some socioeconomic characteristics matter. In particular, those who are less educated and younger are more likely to express support for

individuals working to overthrow an elected government.

At the macro level, extant scholarship has linked economic variables to events such as military coups and interrupted presidencies. At the micro level, I do not find that citizens' perceptions of the personal economy help explain support for individuals working to overthrow an elected government. However, evaluations of the national economy are important predictors of the likelihood that an individual will express approval of those who participate in antidemocratic groups.

The results for crime and corruption provide an indication of the ways in which mounting violence in the region can pose a threat to emerging democracies. As violence, crime, and corruption increase in these societies, support for those willing to break democratic rules increases. To the extent that commitment to democratic processes is relevant to democratic stability, such changes in public opinion arguably could increase the odds of new coups or new interruptions of presidencies.

References

- Almond, Gabriel A. and Sidney Verba. 1963. *The Civic Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bateson, Regina. 2010. "The Criminal Threat to Democratic Consolidation in Latin America". Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. Washington, D.C.
- Booth, John A. and Mitchell Seligson. 2009. *The Legitimacy Puzzle in Latin America: Political Support and Democracy in Eight Nations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Córdova, Abby, and Mitchell A. Seligson. 2009. "Economic Crisis and Democracy in Latin America." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42(04): 673-678.

²⁰ See AmericasBarometer *Insights* No. 32, 2009 [I0832].

- Diamond, Larry J. 1999. *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Linz, Juan. 1990. "The Perils of Presidentialism." *Journal of Democracy* 1(1): 51-69.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1963. *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Llanos, Mariana, and Leiv Marsteintredet. 2010. *Presidential Breakdowns in Latin America: Causes and Outcomes of Executive Instability in Developing Democracies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Malone, Mary Fran. 2010. "Does Crime Undermine Public Support for Democracy? Evidence from Central America and Mexico". Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. Washington, D.C.
- Muller, Edward N., Thomas O. Jukam, and Mitchell A. Seligson. 1982. "Diffuse Political Support and Antisystem Political Behavior: A Comparative Analysis." *American Journal of Political Science* 26(2): 240-264.
- Pérez-Liñán, Aníbal. 2007. *Presidential Impeachment and the New Political Instability in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2002. *Making Democracy Work*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Seligson, Mitchell A. 2007. "The Rise of Populism and the Left in Latin America." *Journal of Democracy* 18(3): 81-95.
- Valenzuela, Arturo. 2004. "Latin American Presidencies Interrupted." *Journal of democracy* 15(4): 5-19.

Appendix

Figure 2a.

Average Support for Individuals Seeking to Overthrow an Elected Government by Violent Means after Taking into Account Individual Characteristics in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008

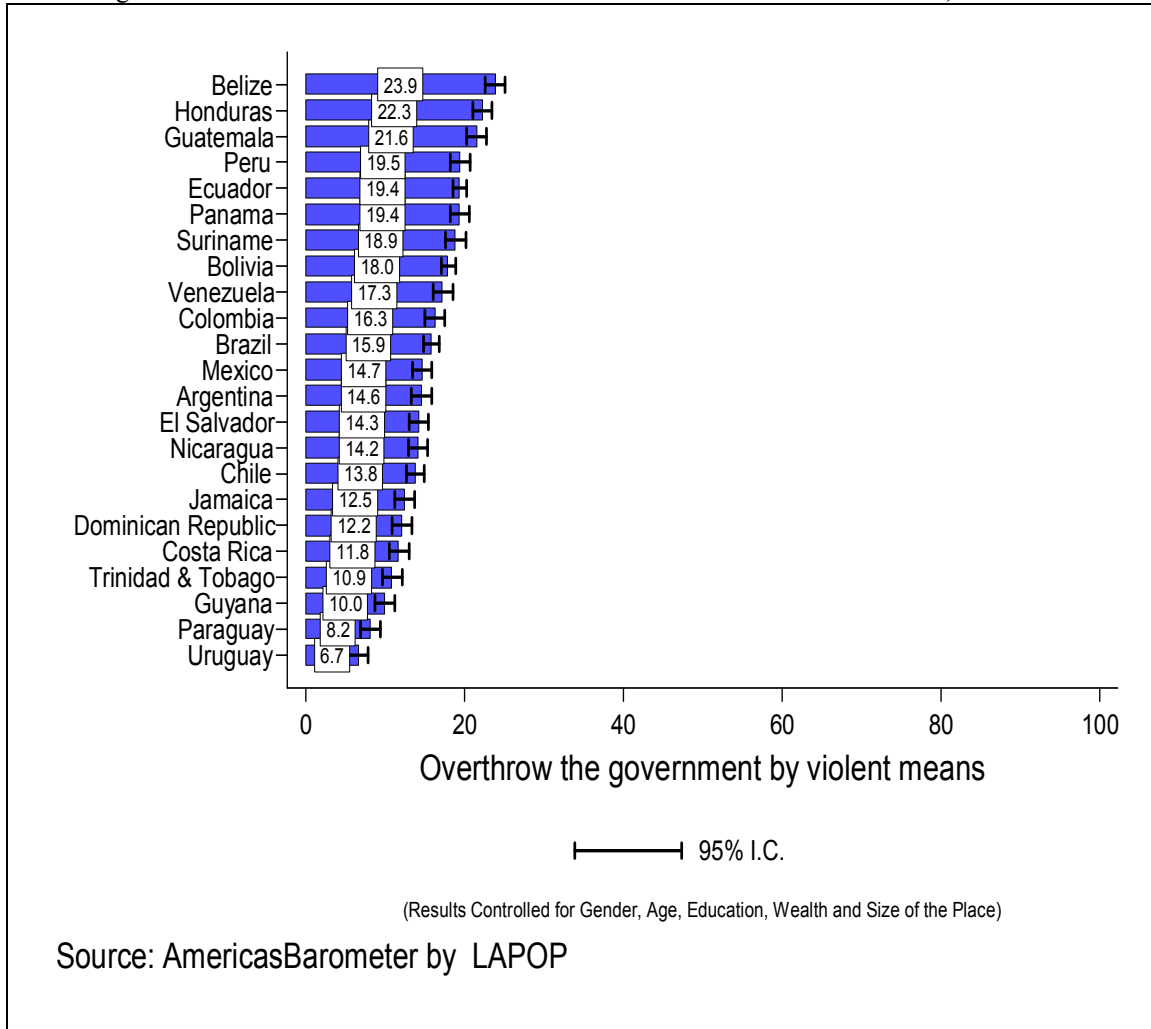


Table 1a.

Determinants of Support for Support for Those Seeking to Overthrow an Elected Government by Violent Means, 2010

Variable	Figure 2		Figure 3	
	Coefficient	t	Coefficient	t
Victimization by Corruption			.095*	(.020)
Perception of Insecurity			.048*	(.022)
Neighborhood Affected by Gangs			.083*	(.023)
Crime Victimization			-.028	(.020)
Perception of National Economic Situation			-.053*	(.026)
Perception of Personal Economic Situation			.036	(.023)
Unemployment	.006	(.017)	-.001	(.018)
Metropolitan Area	-.002	(.028)	-.040	(.030)
Large City	.042	(.035)	.021	(.036)
Medium City	-.060	(.034)	-.067*	(.033)
Small City	.018	(.029)	.018	(.029)
Quintiles of Wealth	-.041	(.022)	-.039	(.023)
Woman	-.042*	(.017)	-.039*	(.018)
Education	-.170*	(.023)	-.173*	(.024)
Age	-.238*	(.022)	-.228*	(.023)
Mexico	-.056*	(.024)	.138*	(.034)
Guatemala	.088*	(.023)	.291*	(.033)
El Salvador	-.055*	(.024)	.156*	(.033)
Honduras	.035*	(.022)	.257*	(.033)
Nicaragua	-.033	(.025)	.184*	(.034)
Costa Rica	-.050	(.031)	.167*	(.039)
Panama	-.028	(.049)	.192*	(.051)
Colombia	-.004	(.028)	.210*	(.036)
Ecuador	.037	(.030)	.320*	(.044)
Bolivia	-.121*	(.041)	.161*	(.051)

Insecurities Intensify Support for Those Who Seek to Remove Government by Force
 Arturo Maldonado

Variable	Figure 2		Figure 3	
	Coefficient	t	Coefficient	t
Peru	-.017	(.031)	.176*	(.040)
Paraguay	-.175*	(.028)	.026	(.037)
Chile	-.070*	(.035)	.179*	(.043)
Brazil	-.223*	(.032)	.231*	(.046)
Venezuela	-.037	(.034)	.247*	(.039)
Argentina	.039	(.032)	.198*	(.043)
Dominican Republic	.021	(.037)	.142*	(.034)
Jamaica	-.061*	(.026)	.157*	(.038)
Guyana	-.064*	(.030)	.096*	(.037)
Trinidad and Tobago	-.113*	(.029)	.134*	(.036)
Belize	-.079*	(.028)	.326*	(.033)
Suriname	.123*	(.024)	.228*	(.032)
Constant	-2.25*	(.026)	-2.277*	(.026)
F	18.06		16.51	
Pseudo R ²	0.028		0.031	
Number of Obs.	37431		36116	