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The 2010 AmericasBarometer

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On December 1, 2010, the latest round of the AmericasBarometer survey by LAPOP will be made available to the public. This round represents our largest regional survey of the Americas to date, with 26 countries included in the wave for a total of 43,990 interviews. While the surveys contain a multitude of questions on democratic attitudes, values, and experiences, a central theme of the 2010 AmericasBarometer is economic crisis. The purpose of this Insights report is to announce the completion of the 2010 round, show how the economic crisis was perceived in the Americas, and describe the process underlying the development, implementation, and dissemination of LAPOP's 2010 AmericasBarometer survey.

The Insights Series presents short reports on topics of interest to the policymaking and academic communities. The series is co-edited by Mitchell A. Seligson, Amy Erica Smith, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister with administrative, technical, and intellectual support from the LAPOP group at Vanderbilt.

www.AmericasBarometer.org

The 2010 AmericasBarometer survey took place in the context of the greatest global economic crisis in the past 80 years. In order to look at the implications of this crisis for the people in the region, the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) made it a central theme of the 2010 round of the AmericasBarometer series. The purpose of this *Insights* report is to announce the completion of the 2010 round, provide information as to how the economic crisis was perceived in the Americas, and describe the process underlying the development and implementation of the 2010 AmericasBarometer survey.¹

The 2010 AmericasBarometer represents the largest survey of democratic values ever undertaken in the Americas. In 2010, we conducted nationally representative surveys of voting age adults in 26 countries in the Americas, including every independent country in mainland North, Central and South America, and all of the larger (and some of the smaller) countries in the Caribbean, with the exception of Cuba. With a typical sample size of at least 1,500 individuals, but in some countries far larger, the 2010 round yielded a total of 43,990 interviews.

Economic Crisis as a Major Theme

Economic crisis resulted in decreased global GDP growth estimated (e.g., by the IMF) at negative 1.4 percent in 2009. While some countries were able to sustain growth, others, such as Mexico, were seriously affected. Moreover, while in many countries the economy was exhibiting signs of economic recovery by the time the 2010 round of surveys began, the direct and secondary effects of the crisis were still being suffered by many people in the region.²

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>

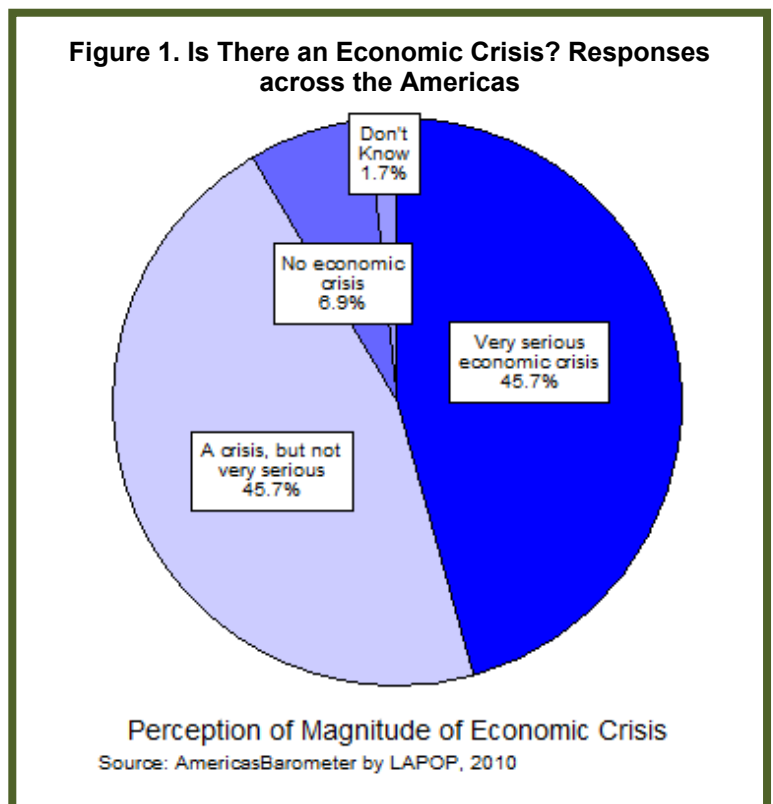
² Between 2008-2009, seven Latin American countries maintained positive growth: Colombia (0.4%); Argentina (0.9%); Peru (0.9%); Panama (2.4%); Haiti (2.9%); Uruguay (2.9%); Bolivia (3.5%); and, the Dominican Republic (3.5%).

To examine the impact of the crisis, LAPOP fielded both new survey items and standard core questions on economic assessments and experiences. The result is a lengthy battery of items scholars may use to answer important questions about the impact of the economic crisis on public opinion in the Americas.

Two new questions, asked as a sequence, focused specifically on assessments of the crisis. First, respondents were asked if they perceived an economic crisis³:

CRISIS1. Some say that our country is suffering a very serious economic crisis, others say that we are suffering a crisis but it is not very serious, while others say that there isn't any economic crisis. What do you think?

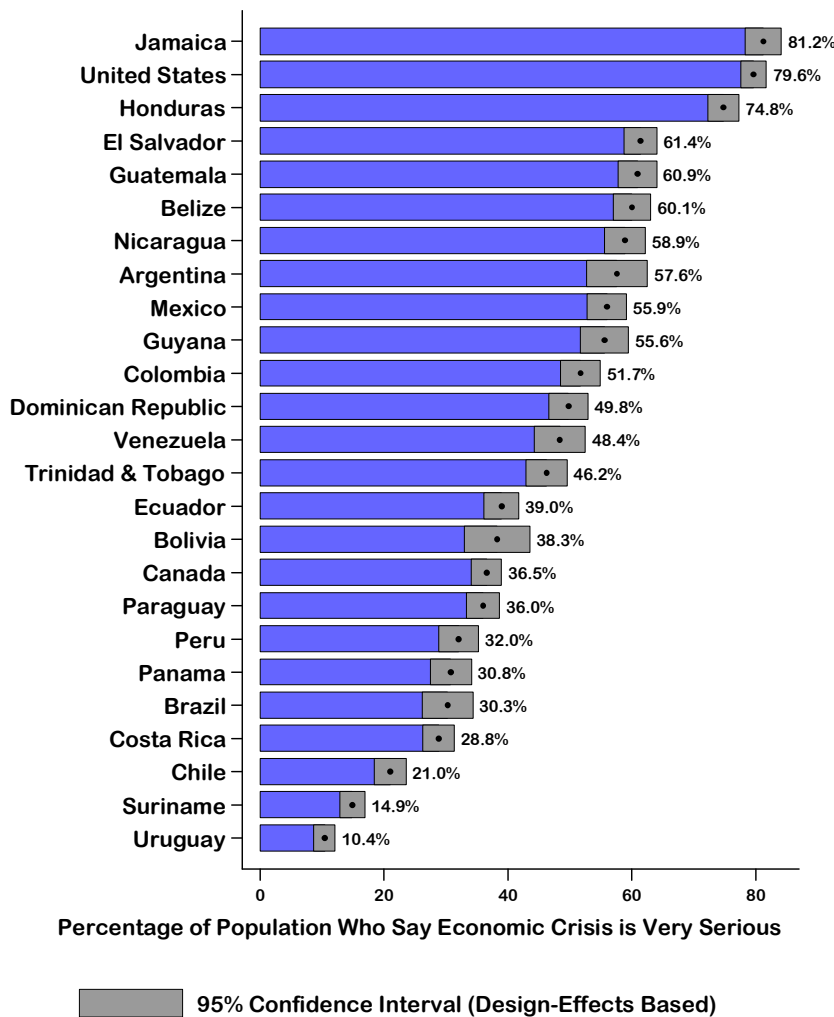
Figure 1 shows the percentages of the entire sample selecting each response. Considering the Americas as a whole, the data reveal that the majority of citizens in the Americas perceived an economic crisis in 2010, be it serious or not very serious. Generally speaking,



The Mexican economy fell from a growth rate of 3.3% in 2007 to -7.1% in 2009 (Izquierdo and Talvi, 2010).

³ The question was not asked in Haiti. Item non-response averaged 1.8% across the countries in which it was asked.

Figure 2. Perception that the Economic Crisis is Severe



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2010

respondents in the Americas were equally distributed between those perceiving the crisis as severe (45.7%) and those saying that it was moderate (45.7%).

When we examine the data at the country level, we find significant differences, suggesting that the impact of the crisis indeed varies across countries. Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents in each country (Haiti excepted) included in the 2010 AmericasBarometer who perceive a *severe* economic crisis. In some countries, the vast majority of respondents perceive a severe crisis; at the top are Jamaica, the U.S., and Honduras. In other countries,

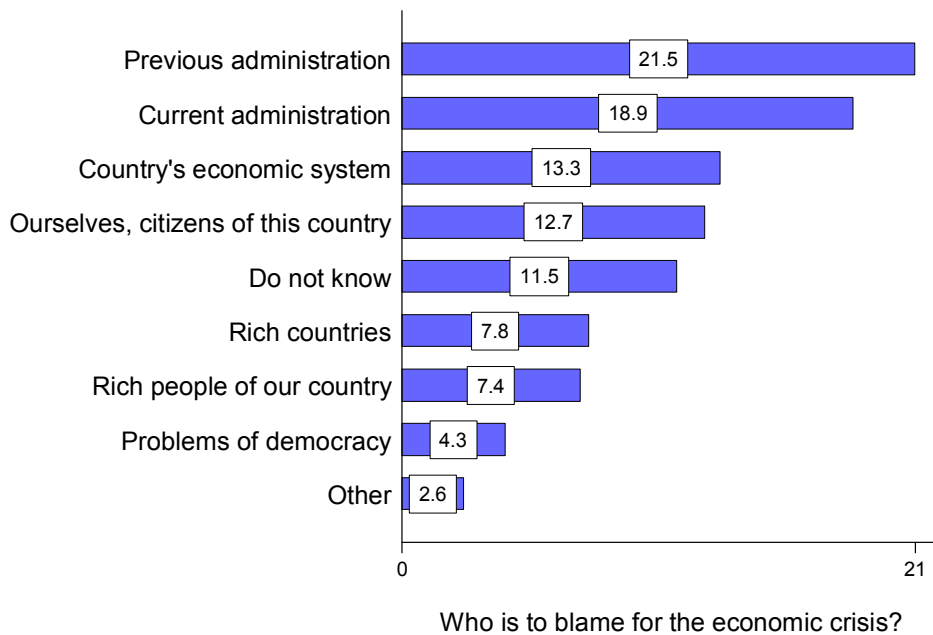
very few people perceive a severe crisis, for example in Chile, Suriname, and Uruguay.

The political significance of economic development and crises has long-occupied the attention of scholars of comparative politics (e.g., Przeworski et al. 1996, Bermeo 2003). To begin to tap political attitudes related to the crisis, we asked those who thought that there was a crisis whom they blamed for it. This question was worded as follows:

CRISIS2. Who is the most to blame for the current economic crisis in our country from among the following? [see Figure 3 for options that were provided]

As Figure 3 shows, the majority of citizens who perceive a crisis in the Americas blame either their current or previous administrations for it. Fewer than 10 percent of Latin American and Caribbean residents who perceive a crisis blame the “rich countries.” This is surprising given media attention to the role played by the financial systems of the United States and other advanced industrialized nations in the worldwide financial collapse. It is even more surprising when one considers the United States’ history of economic influence within Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as opposition historically expressed toward this influence among important segments of Latin American intellectuals and elites.

Figure 3. Attributions of Blame for the Crisis in the Americas, Among Those Perceiving a Crisis



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2010

- Longer reports focused on these and other topics within a given country. Many country reports are online now, and others will be added in the coming months.
- This *Insights* series, which provides a biweekly glimpse at the richness of the data and the diversity of research questions one can tackle with them.

But even these reports barely begin to touch the many research questions the 2010 data

The 2010 AmericasBarometer Survey

Making Our Results Accessible

Above we have reported findings from just two of hundreds of variables available for one or more countries within the 2010 AmericasBarometer dataset. As data have rolled in from across the region, the LAPOP team has been busy conducting analyses. We have made research findings from 2010 available in a number of formats, all of which can be found on our website, www.AmericasBarometer.org. These include

- Our just-published report, *The Political Culture of Democracy, 2010: Democratic Consolidation in the Americas During Hard Times*, describing economic experiences and perceptions, democratic attitudes and behaviors, and the relationship between these across the Americas.

can address. The 2010 data will constitute a major resource for researchers throughout the scholarly and policymaking communities in the coming years. On our website we offer an online data analysis feature that allows researchers to run on-the-fly analyses of the entire database ranging from simple frequency distributions and cross-tabs to multivariate regression models. The underlying microdata are made available to individual and institutional subscribers (see our website for information as to how to subscribe). Moreover, citizens of any of the countries surveyed may immediately request the data from their own countries at no cost.

Development and Implementation of the Survey

The release of the 2010 AmericasBarometer 2010 data on December 1, 2010 represents the culmination of a multi-year process. Building on prior waves, planning for the 2010 round began in January 2009 with a workshop

(sponsored by a generous grant from the Inter-American Development Bank), which allowed us to bring together leading scholars from around the globe in order to consider how the sharp economic downturn might influence democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean. The LAPOP Central Team carefully considered proposals for new questions suggested at this conference and also sought input from its country teams and the donor community. The initial draft questionnaire was prepared in early 2009 and we then began the arduous task of determining which items from prior AmericasBarometer surveys would be cut and which new items would take their place. In addition to distributing the draft questionnaire to our country teams and donor organizations, we built a Wiki on which we placed the draft so that all could make comments and suggestions.

We then began pretesting the instrument, first on the Vanderbilt campus, then in the local Hispanic community, and, once we had items that seemed to be working well, in countries throughout the hemisphere. Very slowly, over a period of months spent testing and retesting, we refined the survey by improving some items and dropping modules that were just not working. We sent repeated versions to our country teams and received invaluable input. In the end, the questionnaire was subject to hundreds of revisions, some major, most minor. The core items used in prior years, however, remained the same so that cross-time comparisons could be made. In November 2009, with the generous support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), we brought together all of our country teams and several members of the donor community to San Salvador, El Salvador in order to agree upon the final core questionnaire and plan for the survey's implementation.

Questionnaires and information on how to access or obtain the data are available on our website (www.LapopSurveys.org)

A common sample design has been crucial for the success of this comparative effort. We used a common design for the construction of a multi-staged, stratified probabilistic sample (with household level quotas⁴) of approximately 1,500 individuals per country.⁵ Detailed descriptions of the sample are contained in the appendices of each country report and on our website.

A concern from the outset was minimization of error and maximization of the quality of the database. We did this in several ways. First, we agreed on a common coding scheme for all of the closed-ended questions. Second, data files were entered in their respective countries, and verified (i.e., double entered), after which the files were sent to LAPOP at Vanderbilt for review and audit. Third, in the 2010 round we were able to expand the use of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) to collect data in 17 of the countries, and we added the Windows Mobile platform for handheld computers. Our partners at the Universidad de Costa Rica developed and enhanced the program, EQCollector, and formatted it for use in the 2010 round of surveys. We have found this method of recording the survey responses extremely efficient, resulting in higher quality data with fewer errors than with the paper-and-pencil method. The PDAs have another practical advantage: interviewers can switch languages used in the questionnaires even mid-question in linguistically diverse countries.

Conclusion

The data presented here only scratch the surface with respect to the numerous questions

⁴ Except in the case of Ecuador and Chile, where probabilistic selection at the household level was carried out.

⁵ With the exception in 2010 of larger samples in Bolivia (N=3,018), Brazil (N = 2,482), Chile (N = 1,965) Ecuador (N=3,000), and Haiti (1,752).

asked in the 2010 wave of the AmericasBarometer survey. The questionnaires used and information on how to access or obtain the data are available on our website.

Funding for the 2010 round came from our core donors, especially the United States Agency for International Development. Important additional sources of support also included, but were not limited to, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United States National Science Foundation (NSF), the Swedish Development Corporation (SIDA), and Vanderbilt University. We also collaborated with and received support from a number of other academic and non-governmental institutions across the Americas. We are especially grateful to Princeton University, the Université Laval and York University (Canada) as well as the Kellogg Institute of Notre Dame University. We are grateful to the individual people involved in this effort to develop and implement the 2010 round of the AmericasBarometer and the thousands of citizens of the Americas who responded to our survey. In addition to financial support, an extensive network of individuals at Vanderbilt and across the Americas put countless hours of human capital into the project.

We embarked on the 2010 AmericasBarometer in the hope that the results would be of interest to and of policy relevance for citizens, NGOs, academics, governments, and the international donor community. We are confident that the study can not only help individuals and agencies actively promote democratization, but that it will also serve the academic community, which has been engaged in a quest to determine which values and behaviors are the ones most likely to promote stable democracy.

More information on the AmericasBarometer and LAPOP can be found on our newly-redesigned website: www.LapopSurveys.org (also www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop).

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