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 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

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 crisis:\n
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,

![Figure 1. Is There an Economic Crisis? Responses across the Americas](image)

**Perception of Magnitude of Economic Crisis**

Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2010

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%).

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


- 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 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
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 quotas\(^4\)) 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

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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/laop).

REFERENCES

