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AmericasBarometer 2012 Round Draws on Lessons from 2010 Surveys

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Executive Summary. With fieldwork halfway complete and data rolling in from 26 countries across the hemisphere, the 2012 round of the AmericasBarometer promises to be the best yet. This *Insights* report describes the AmericasBarometer's fifth wave of surveys, which will be completed by the beginning of May. We focus especially on lessons learned from our 2010 round, in which we examined the impact of the economic crisis across the Americas. In that round, we found that while the region weathered the crisis perhaps surprisingly well, certain groups were disproportionately disadvantaged: in particular, citizens from marginalized ethnic groups, the less wealthy, and women. In 2012, we seek to understand further the extent, causes, and consequences of marginalization across the Americas.

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The recent economic crisis drew into sharp relief differences in the experiences and perceptions of various groups in the Americas, particularly ones defined by race, gender, and social class. As we prepared the 2010 AmericasBarometer survey to go into the field, the Americas were undergoing one of the worst worldwide economic crises of the past century. Concerned about the impacts of this crisis on citizens' well-being and on the fate of democracy in the region, for our 2010 round of surveys we chose to focus on the theme of "Democracy in Hard Times." As reported in our 2010 *Report on the Americas* (Seligson and Smith 2010), we asked such questions as: Who was most affected by the economic crisis? And, did pro-democracy attitudes and system support decline under crisis conditions?

Our analyses of the 2010 AmericasBarometer survey yielded many surprises. Some were pleasant ones for those who might have feared that democracy would collapse under the weight of economic crisis; others were more troublesome. Taken together, they pointed to the need to explore in much greater depth in 2012 the extent and effects of marginalization across the Americas.

The politics of marginalization is thus a core focus of the 2012 round of the AmericasBarometer, which will examine democracy and society in 26 countries of the Americas. While preserving a common core of questions for cross-temporal analyses, we have also been able to include a number of new questions in the 2012 round that will help us to address questions of discrimination and inclusion.

The process of developing this study entails contributions from a massive group of people across the region. Between January and early May of this year, we will interview 39,000 citizens of the Americas, from northern Canada to Chilean Patagonia, from Mexico City to the rural Andean highlands. These citizens will contribute to the project by sharing with us

their attitudes towards their democratic systems and governments, as well as such experiences as victimization by crime and corruption. Conducting these interviews will involve work by over a thousand people, from interviewers and data entry specialists, to academics from every country, to sampling statisticians and survey experts.

Preparations for the 2012 round of the AmericasBarometer began in the last quarter of 2010, as we were finishing analysis and reporting from the 2010 round, and continued full-swing throughout 2011. Field work for the 2012 round commenced in the first countries in January of this year, and will be concluded in the last countries by early May. When data collection is finished in each country, we undergo a rigorous process of data entry and verification to minimize sources of error in the data. These procedures, following internationally recognized best practices, give us greater faith in the validity of the analytical insights we will draw from the data. Our goal is to make the verified 26-country database available to the public by December 2012.

Once we have a final database, a new phase of research for the 2012 round will begin. We will comb through the fresh data, looking for unexpected patterns, surprising trends, and resolution of long-discussed puzzles. Many of the reports we produce based on the 2012 round will focus on a deeply important topic: the extent to which the region's citizens experience equality of opportunity.

In the remainder of this *Insights* report, we discuss the 2012 theme in greater depth. The selection of this theme reflects lessons learned in previous rounds, in particular our 2010 study of the politics of economic crisis.¹

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Lessons from the 2010 round of the AmericasBarometer: Economic Crisis, Marginalization, and Equality of Opportunity in the Americas

To measure the impact of the crisis, in our 2010 survey we asked 43,990 citizens across the Americas whether they perceived an economic crisis, and if they did so, whether they thought it was serious.² We found that most citizens in the Americas perceived an economic crisis, but that they were divided on whether or not it was severe. The perceived severity of the crisis varied greatly across the Americas, and also across different ethnic and identity groups. As detailed in the 2010 report, perceptions of a

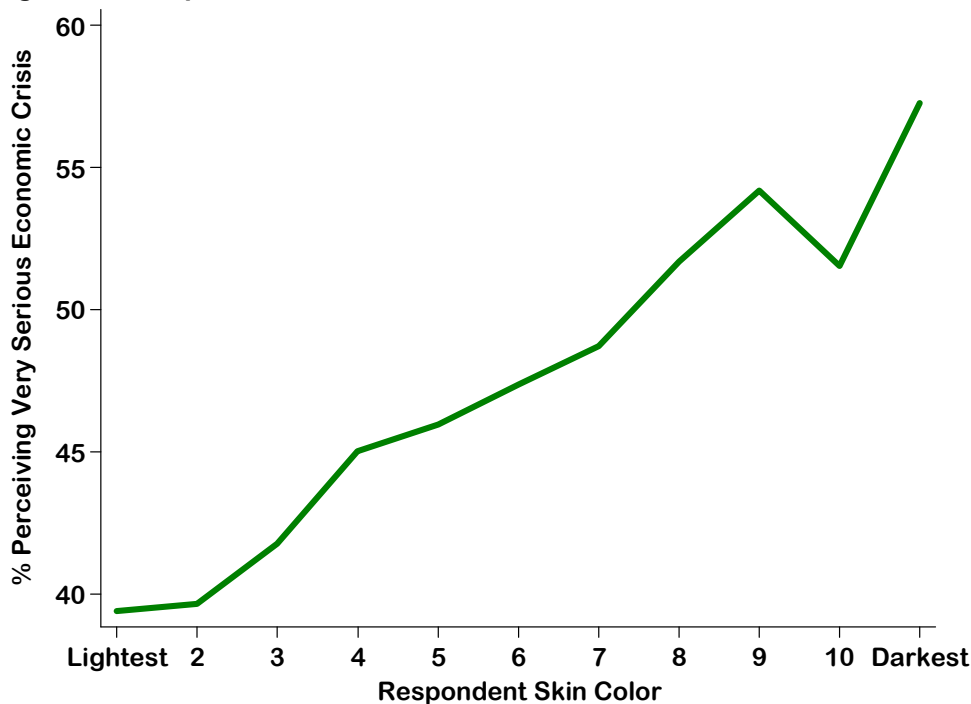
severe economic crisis were highest in countries such as Jamaica, the United States, and Honduras, where at least three-quarters of respondents reported that their countries faced a severe economic crisis. Unemployment especially affected countries such as Mexico and Colombia, where almost 40% of respondents reported that someone in their household had lost his or her job in the last two years. At the same time, though, we found that in many countries of the region, the crisis' impact was surprisingly muted. About three out of every four citizens told our interviewers that they either gained income or did not lose it during this period of worldwide economic decline.

Moreover, we found that citizens who perceived that the national government was doing a good job reported stronger support for democratic values. In other words, during times of crisis, good governance can help citizens retain their confidence in democracy and other key values. Our results also demonstrated some surprising good news: in general in the Americas, support for

democracy did not decline substantially as a consequence of the crisis. We thus concluded that unprecedented levels of macroeconomic

² The variable measuring economic crisis perceptions is CRISIS1.

Figure 1. Perceptions of Severe Crisis and Skin Color, 2010 AmericasBarometer



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP

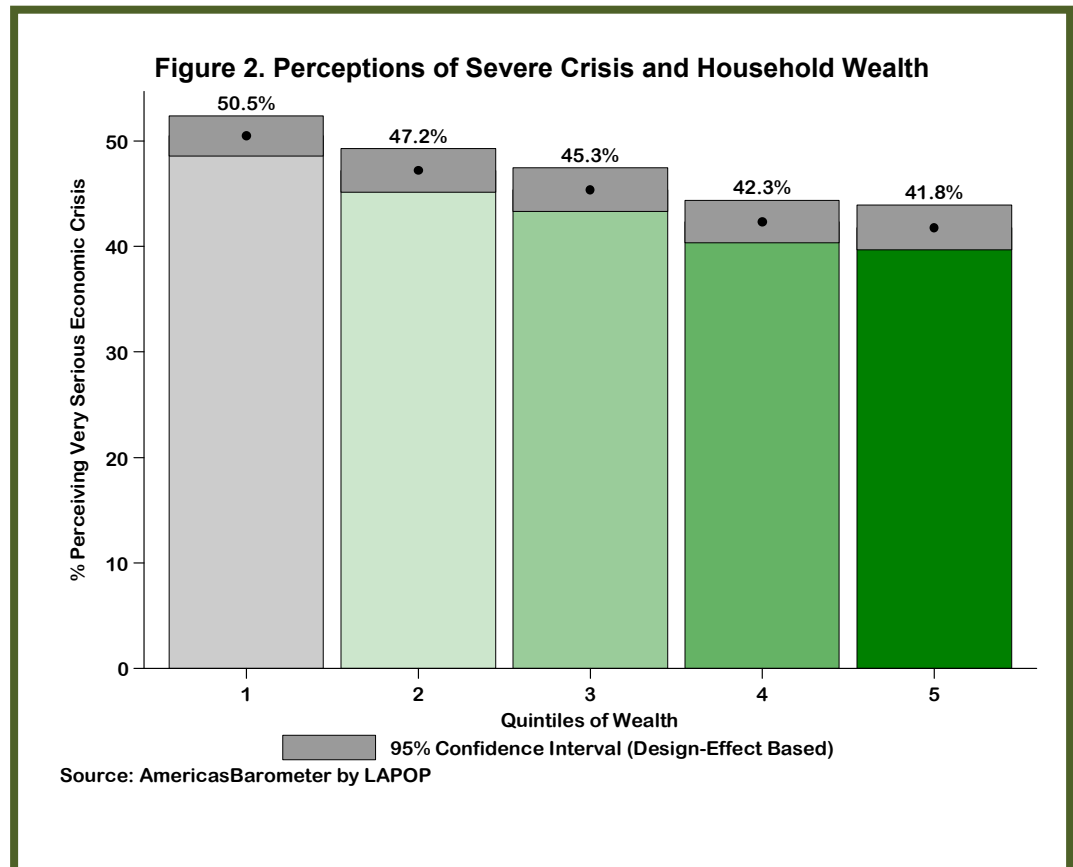
can be found on our website at www.LapopSurveys.org. Prior issues in the *Insights* series can be found at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>. The data on which they are based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>.

stability coupled with pro-poor policies that helped mitigate the crisis for those most affected by it, in the midst of a worldwide economic crisis may well have staved off not only more serious economic decline but also threats to democracy itself.

Importantly, however, we found that the impact of the crisis was not evenly distributed across important sub-groups within the population. An innovative component of our 2010 survey was that, for the first time, we asked the interviewer to code the skin color of the respondent's face using a color palette ranging from 1 (lightest) to 11 (darkest) (see Telles and Steele 2012). In a recent *Insights* report, Telles and Stelle (2012) show that skin tone is an important predictor of educational attainment in the Americas. In our analysis of the effects of the crisis, we find that reports of economic distress vary by skin tone. We further find that the crisis had different effects across income groups, and (to a more limited extent) by gender.

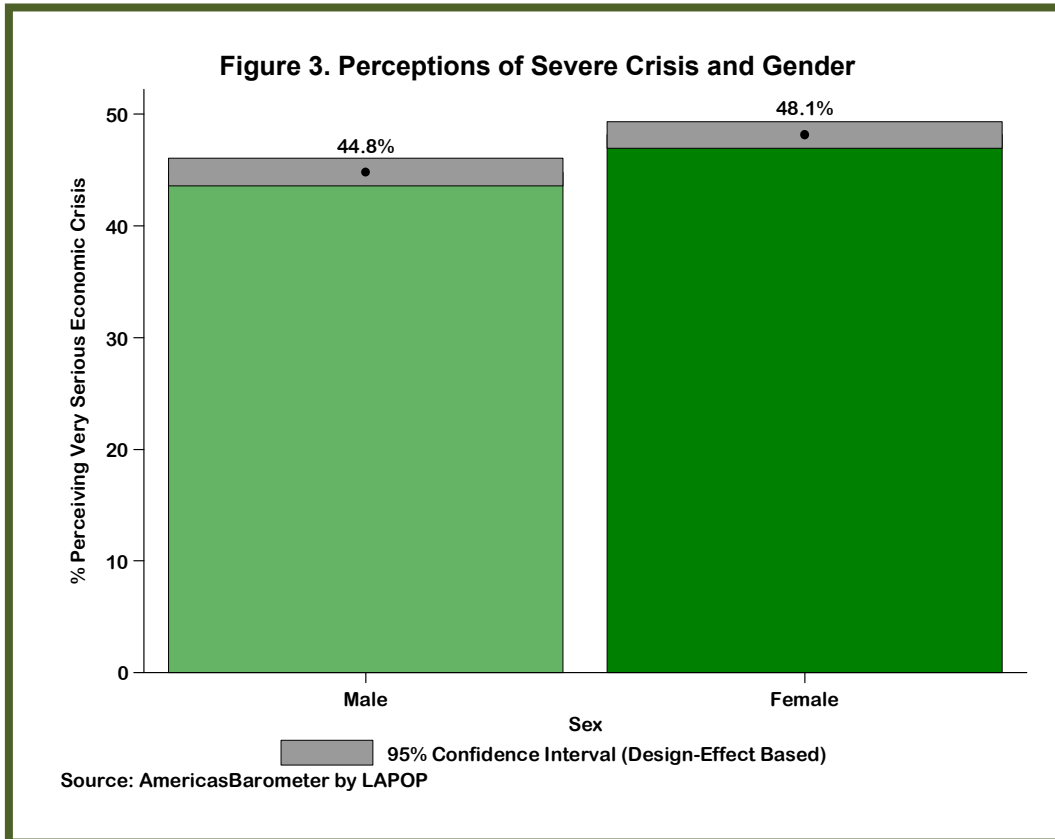
As Figure 1 shows, respondents with darker facial skin tones were much more likely to perceive a severe economic crisis. Among those with the lightest skin tones, the percentage of individuals who reported perceiving a grave economic crisis was around 40-45%, on average across the Latin American and Caribbean regions; at the other end of the scale, for those with the darkest skin tones, over 50% of individuals expressed the belief that their

country was experiencing a severe economic crisis.



Similarly, Figure 2 demonstrates that respondents from wealthier households were much less likely to perceive a severe economic crisis. This leads us to conclude that the crisis especially hurt the region's most vulnerable populations: those who were worse off prior to the crisis felt its negative effects most strongly.

Finally, we also uncover some limited evidence that women were more likely to be affected by the crisis. Figure 3 shows that, while 44.8% of men in the Americas perceived a severe economic crisis, 48.1% of women did so, a difference that is statistically significant, but not especially large.



hope to be able to answer with the 2012 round of the AmericasBarometer, we seek to deepen our understanding of marginalization in the region. We hope to understand the extent to which political and economic opportunities are distributed equitably, as well as what can be done about persist inequalities between women and men, and between citizens of different ethnicities and social backgrounds.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we reported some good and some bad news in our 2010 AmericasBarometer Report on the Americas. On the one hand, the economic crisis was relatively mild in most of Latin America, and democratic attitudes proved remarkably robust. On the other hand, the crisis especially hurt certain segments of the population that have been historically marginalized in the social, economic, and political systems of the Americas: those with lowest household wealth, ethnic minorities, and women. Among many questions that we

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