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Crime Diminishes Political Support and Democratic Attitudes in Honduras

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Main Findings:

- Crime victimization is associated with lower presidential approval, and with less support for the political system
- There is no association between political support and levels of insecurity in Honduras
- Both crime victims and non-victims, and those who feel insecure and secure, are just as likely to say that they support democracy as the best form of government
- However, victims of crime are more likely to say that a coup is justified in the case of high crime than non-victims

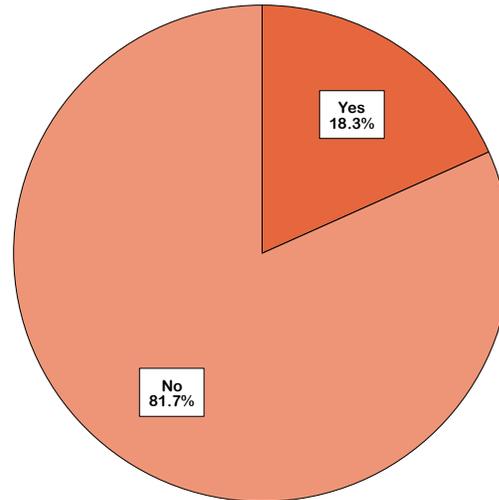
How does crime – directly through victimization and indirectly through insecurity – affect system support and democratic values in Honduras? Some authors suggest that fear of crime encourages citizens to demand punitive and repressive measures against alleged criminals (Sanjuán, 2003). Others assert that fear can generate support for authoritarianism (Corradi, 1992: 267). Concern about violent crime in Latin America seems to be so severe that people are "willing to sacrifice certain freedoms in order to feel more secure" (Tulchin and Ruthenberg 2006, 5). In a study of El Salvador, Pérez (2003) found that up to 55% of the population would support a military coup if there was high crime.

Coinciding with recent waves of crime in Latin America, the last two decades have seen a rise of a new form of police repression called *mano dura* or "iron fist," (Seelke 2012) as well as relatively high levels of support for authoritarian measures among the citizenry. As Pérez explains:

Crime undermines support for democratic regimes. As crime increases, pressure grows for a "strong" response by the government that, in many cases, results in highly repressive and undemocratic measures. (2003, 638)

Pérez (2011) also finds that not just crime victimization, but the *perception* of insecurity can be a significant determinant of opinions regarding institutions. Generally speaking, people who fear becoming victims of crime in their neighborhood are less willing to confer rights to the opposition; express less

Figure 1. Crime Victimization, Honduras 2014



Crime Victim in the Last 12 Months

Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2014; v3.0 Honduras

interpersonal trust; have less support for the idea that democracy is the best political system; and exhibit much less trust in political institutions.

How do these variables interact in the case of Honduras, as assessed recently via the 2014 AmericasBarometer? What consequences does crime in the country have for public opinion? This *Insights* report¹ assesses the extent to which crime victimization and perceptions of insecurity predict support for the president, the political system, and democratic values. It also examines the impact of crime victimization on support for authoritarian measures (specifically, support for coups).

Crime Victimization and Insecurity in Honduras

For decades, LAPOP has surveyed citizens regarding their experiences with crime and perceptions of insecurity. The 2014

¹ This report is based on Chapter Eight of "The Political Culture of Democracy in Honduras and in the Americas, 2014: Democratic Governance across 10 Years of the

AmericasBarometer," (eds.) Orlando J. Pérez and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister which can be found here: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/honduras/AB2014_Honduras_Country_Report_English_V2_W_082515.pdf

AmericasBarometer survey included two of these standard questions:

VIC1EXT: Have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, have you been a victim of robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats or any other type of crime in the past 12 months?

AOJ11: 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?

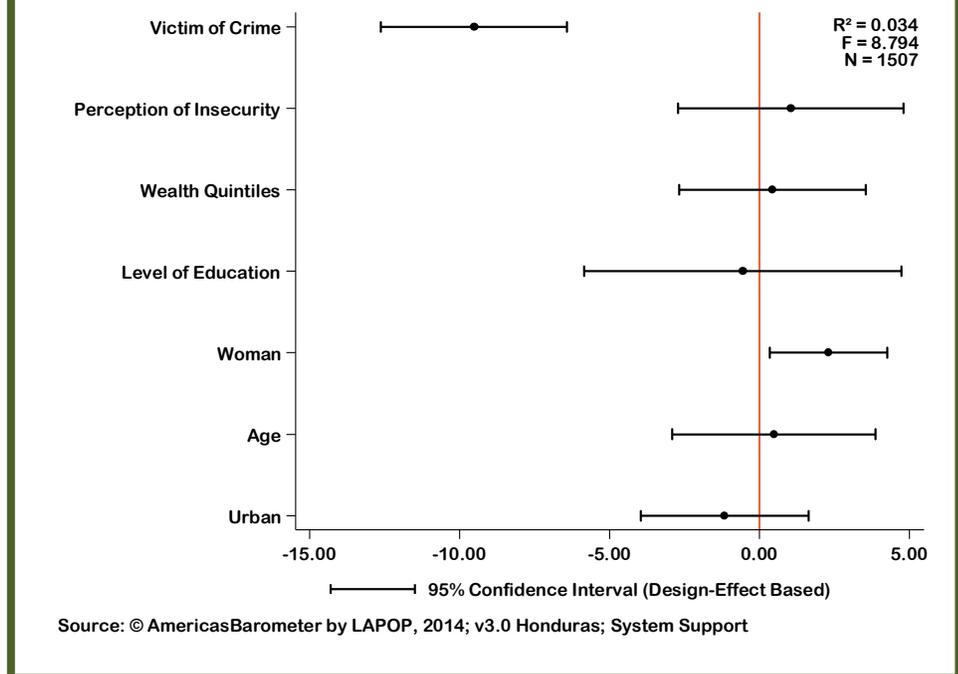
As Figure 1 shows, in 2014, just over 18 percent of voting-age Hondurans reported having been the victim of at least one crime over the past year. Additionally (not shown graphically), on a 0-100 scale, insecurity in the country averaged 40 degrees.

Crime, Insecurity, and System Support

What are the implications of crime victimization and perceptions of insecurity on support for the political system in contemporary Honduras? Do crime victimization and neighborhood insecurity correspond to lower levels of system

² System support is calculated as the average of respondents' answers to the five questions: **B1** To what extent do you think the courts in Honduras guarantee a fair trial?; **B2** To what extent do you respect the political institutions of Honduras?; **B3** To what extent do you think that citizens' basic rights are well protected by the political system of Honduras?; **B4** To what extent do you feel proud of living under the political system of Honduras?; and **B6** To what extent do you think that one should support the political

Figure 2. Model of Crime Victimization & Insecurity Predicting System Support



support? To answer these questions, I utilize multiple regression to predict system support. System support is measured using the average response to five questions measuring the extent to which citizens think the courts guarantee a fair trial; respect political institutions; believe basic rights are protected; feel proud of the system; and believe the political system should be supported.² Independent variables in the analysis are crime victimization and neighborhood insecurity. Control variables are included for sex, place of residence (urban/rural), age cohort, level of education, and quintiles of household wealth. All independent variables have been rescaled to range from zero to one to facilitate interpretation.³

system of Honduras? Original responses are on the scale of 1=Not at All to 7=A Lot; these are rescaled from 0 to 100.

³ Urban is a dummy variable, coded as 1 if the respondent lives in an urban region, and 0 if in a rural area. The sex dummy variable takes the 1 value if the respondent is female. The wealth measure is a five-category variable that is generated using a series of items about household possessions (for more information see Córdova 2009 <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/I0806en.pdf>). Age is divided by cohort, with respondents grouped into the

Figure 2 shows the results of the regression analysis in graphical form.⁴ Only two variables have a statistically significant relationship with system support: crime victimization and sex. Women have higher levels of system support than men, and those who have been victims of crime in the last year have significantly lower levels of system support than those who have not. However, there is no statistically significant relationship between perception of neighborhood insecurity and system support.

Direct experience with crime is inversely related to support for the political system. Security is one of the most important public goods and the State has the responsibility to provide the public with an acceptable level of order and security. When the State fails in this regard, it should not be surprising that the citizens' perception of the political system is affected.

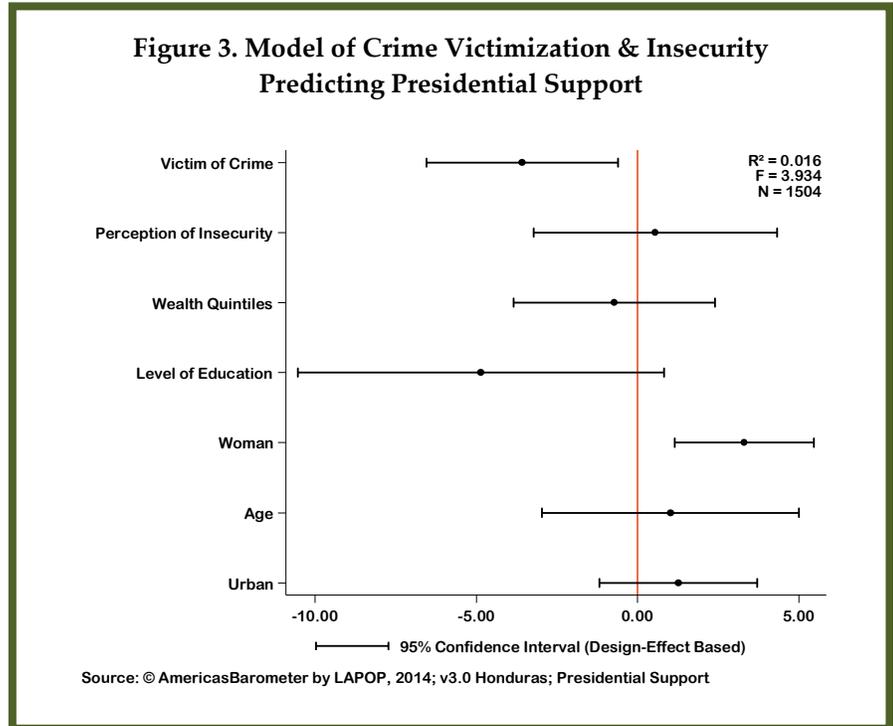
Crime, Insecurity, and Presidential Support

Crime victimization is also correlated with disapproval of presidential performance. Figure 3 is the graphical representation of the results. Using the same independent variables as in the previous analysis, but with presidential approval⁵ as the dependent variable, I find the same pattern of results: crime victims have significantly lower levels of presidential approval than those who were not victims, and women have higher levels than men.⁶

following categories: 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 56-65, and 65+. All independent variables are recoded on a scale of 0 to 1.

⁴ See Appendix for full model results.

⁵ M1 Speaking in general of the current administration, how would you rate the job performance of President Juan



Crime, Insecurity, and Democracy

In this section, I explore the extent to which crime victimization and perception of insecurity affect support for the abstract value of democracy. Although being a victim of a crime can cause public discontent with the functioning of the political system of Honduras and the support for the president, these experiences with crime may or may not lead to a more general loss of faith in the concept of democracy as a form of government.

To explore the impact of crime victimization and perception of insecurity on support for democracy in Honduras I utilize the AmericasBarometer question ING4 that seeks to establish the extent to which respondents

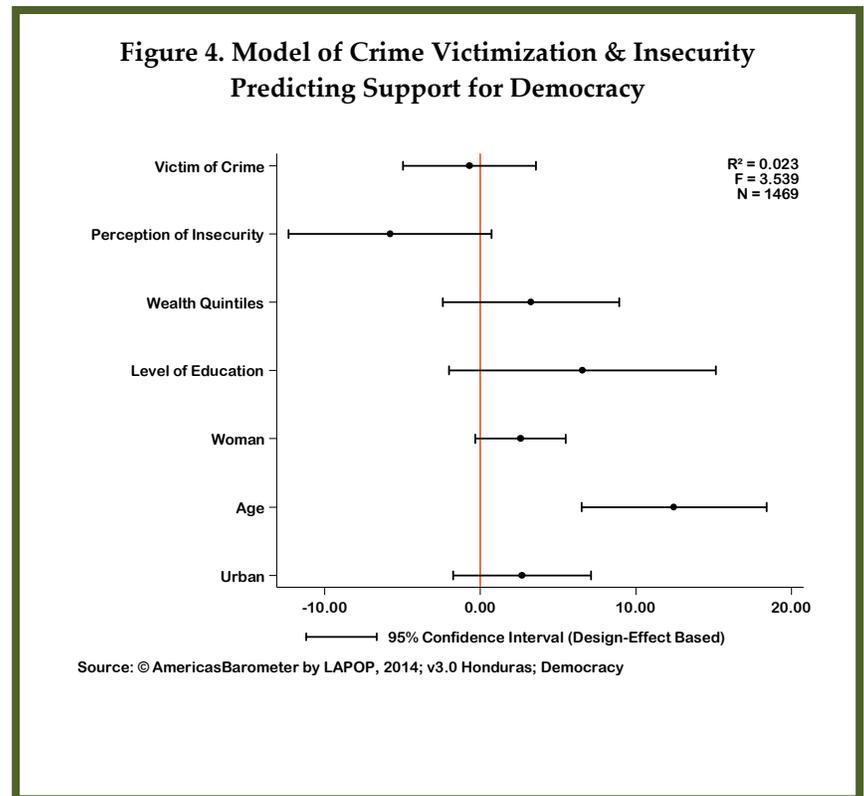
Orlando Hernández? Very Bad (0), Bad (25), Neither good nor bad (50), Good (75), Very Good (100).

⁶ See Appendix for full model results.

support the concept that democracy, despite its problems, is the best political system.

ING4. Changing the subject again, 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 7-point scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Figure 4 displays the results of a linear regression analysis including the control variables in the previous analyses, victimization by crime, and the perception of insecurity.⁷ Neither of the variables of interest, crime victimization nor perception of insecurity, have a statistically significant effect on support for democracy. Only the age cohort measure is significant—older cohorts are more supportive of democracy than the younger cohort.



- When there is a lot of crime.

Crime, Insecurity, and Military Coups

Once again, in 2014 the AmericasBarometer included a series of questions that measure the circumstances in which respondents are willing to justify a military coup. One such question asks if the respondent believes a coup is justified in response to high crime. The question is worded as follows:

JC10. Now, changing the subject. 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? [Read the options after each question]

⁷ See Appendix for full model results.

⁸ See Appendix for full model results.

⁹ Question **B12**: To what extent do you trust the Armed Forces? Responses were originally placed on a 7-point scale

What are the factors that support justification of a coup under conditions of high crime? Figure 5 displays a multiple regression model that analyzes this question.⁸ In addition to the socio-demographic variables included as controls in the previous regressions, I add a variable measuring trust in the Armed Forces.⁹

The results of this analysis are shown in Figure 5. Three variables are statistically significant. Younger cohorts, those who trust the Armed Forces and victims of crime are more likely to believe a coup is justified in the case of high crime.

This finding is consistent with the literature that suggests crime may lead to support for authoritarian practices (Tulchin and Ruthenberg 2006; Pérez 2003).

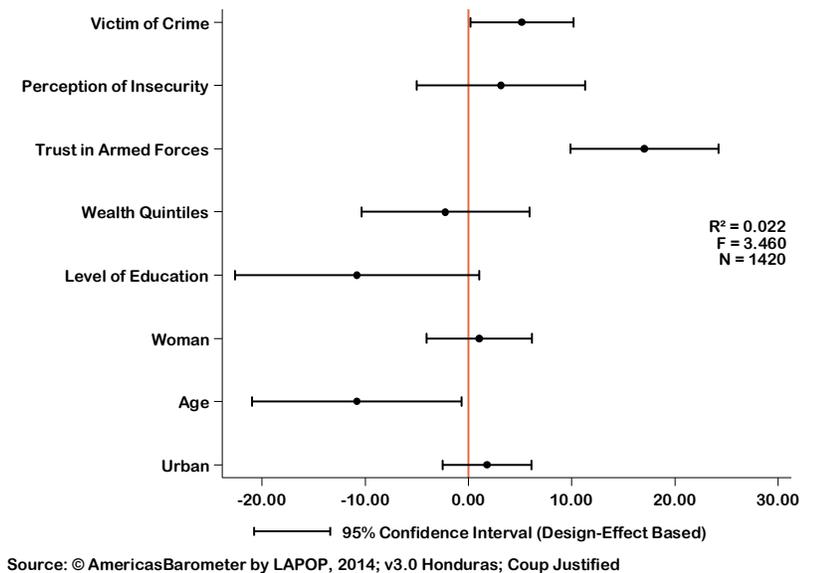
ranging from “Not at All” (1) to “A Lot” (7), and are recoded here on a 0-1 scale.

Conclusion

This *Insights* report reveals strong evidence that crime impacts political attitudes in Honduras. This makes sense: the experience of being a crime victim represents a failure of the State to provide security to citizens and thus victims penalize the political system. Moreover, this effect is consistent with much of the literature that links crime to such attitudes. Specifically, I find that crime victimization has a strong inverse relationship with support for the Honduran political system and approval of its president. There is also a relationship between crime victimization and support for a coup in the case of high crime. In contrast, crime victimization does not appear to affect support for the value of democracy more generally. Those who are victims of crime are not more likely to disagree with the statement that democracy is the best form of government, despite its problems, than those who are not crime victims.

Interestingly, and running counter to scholarship that has looked at other countries and/or time periods, I do not find the same relationships between perceptions of insecurity and the political and democratic attitudes examined in this report that is present for victims of crime. Insecurity does not have a statistically significant effect in any of the analyses. This is noteworthy because, while the deleterious effects of crime on support for the political system, the president, and coups is worrisome, there are fewer self-reporting crime victims in Honduras (fewer than 20 percent of the sample) than there are those who report feeling somewhat or very insecure (approximately 35 percent of the sample).

**Figure 5. Model of Crime Victimization & Insecurity
Predicting Support for Coup**



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Appendix

Model in Figure 2: System Support

	Coefficients	(t)
Urban	-1.16	(-0.83)
Age	0.48	-0.28
Woman	2.30*	-2.36
Level of Education	-0.56	(-0.21)
Wealth Quintiles	0.43	-0.27
Perception of Insecurity	1.04	-0.56
Victim of Crime	-9.52*	(-6.14)
Constant	53.29*	-32.4
F	8.79	
No. of cases	1507	
R-Squared	0.03	
* p<0.05		

Model in Figure 3: Presidential Job Approval

	Coefficients	(t)
Urban	1.26	-1.04
Age	1.02	-0.51
Woman	3.31*	-3.06
Level of Education	-4.86	(-1.72)
Wealth Quintiles	-0.73	(-0.47)
Perception of Insecurity	0.55	-0.29
Victim of Crime	-3.58*	(-2.41)
Constant	66.42*	-38.76
F	3.93	
No. of cases	1504	
R-Squared	0.02	
* p<0.05		

**Model in Figure 4: Support for
Democracy**

	Coefficients	(t)
Urban	2.70	-1.22
Age	12.45*	-4.2
Woman	2.59	-1.78
Level of Education	6.57	-1.53
Wealth Quintiles	3.26	-1.15
Perception of Insecurity	-5.79	(-1.77)
Victim of Crime	-0.70	(-0.33)
Constant	56.01*	-17.07
F	3.54	
No. of cases	1469	
R-Squared	0.02	
* p<0.05		

**Model in Figure 5: Coup is
Justified when Crime is High**

	Coefficients	(t)
Urban	1.79	-0.83
Age	-10.80*	(-2.14)
Woman	1.05	-0.41
Level of Education	-10.78	(-1.82)
Wealth Quintiles	-2.22	(-0.55)
Trust in Armed Forces	17.05*	-4.76
Perception of Insecurity	3.15	-0.77
Victim of Crime	5.17*	-2.08
Constant	26.65*	-5.34
F	3.46	
No. of cases	1420	
R-Squared	0.02	
Pseudo R-Squared		
* p<0.05		