

AmericasBarometer *Insights*: 2016

Number 128

Deficiencies in Basic Goods and Services more Damaging than Perceptions of Corruption to Venezuela's President Maduro

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Main Findings:

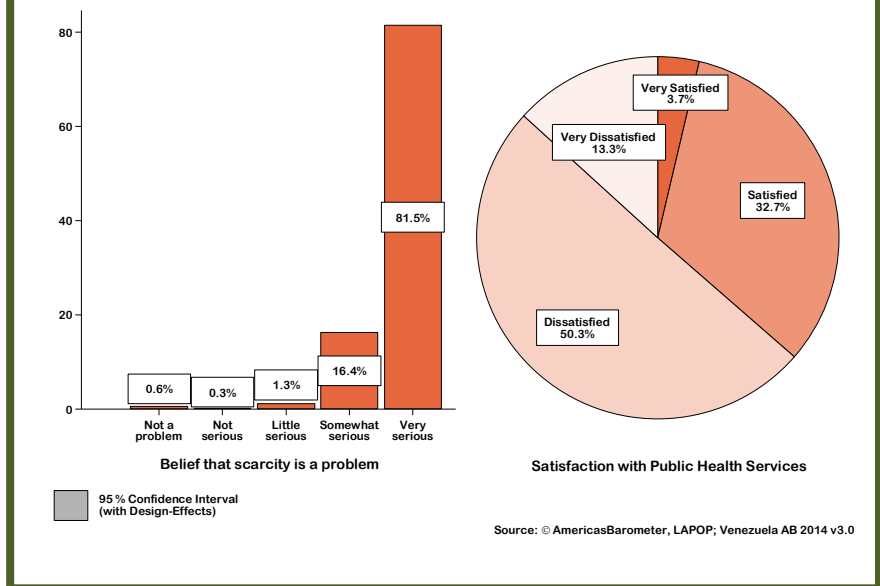
- The overwhelming majority of Venezuelans (81.5%) surveyed in the 2014 round of the AmericasBarometer reported that scarcity of food and other basic goods was “very serious” and 63.6% of respondents reported some degree of dissatisfaction with public health services
- Venezuelans’ inability to access food and quality medical services negatively impacts their approval of the president more than perceptions of widespread corruption
- Dissatisfaction with Maduro, concerns about the scarcity of basic goods and dissatisfaction with medical services are key motivators of protest participation and support for an opposition presidency

Venezuela is experiencing the worst economic crisis in its history. Inflation is projected to surpass 700% in 2016 (Biller 2016) and finding basic goods and medicine has become a daily struggle for most Venezuelans (Castro and Vyas 2015; Fishwick 2016; Naím and Toro 2016). These increasingly desperate living conditions are aggravated by daily power and water outages across the country, as well as crime rates that are among the highest in the world (BBC Mundo 2016; Brodzinsky 2016). This *Insights* report shows that

Venezuelans' inability to access food and quality medical services are important, negative predictors of presidential approval and willingness to support Maduro's party, more so than perceptions of widespread corruption.

As part of daily life in Venezuela today, citizens endure long lines at grocery stores to buy a limited supply of basic products, often ending up empty-handed (Castro and Vyas 2015). The scarcity of food and medicine has become so severe that it has recently been described as a humanitarian crisis (Naím and Toro 2016), and protests and looting are occurring with increased frequency (Castro and Vyas 2015; Brodzinsky 2016). The crisis has also resulted in the rapid rise of infant mortality and deaths of Venezuelans with treatable illnesses (Casey 2016). Symptoms of decaying living conditions are not limited to these occurrences in the past 12 months, but have been evident since 2014,

Figure 1. Perceptions of Scarcity and Health Services in Venezuela, 2014



when the Venezuelan government was still enjoying oil revenues of \$100 per barrel.

The left chart in Figure 1 shows that the overwhelming majority of Venezuelans (81.5%) surveyed in the 2014 round of the AmericasBarometer reported that scarcity of food and basic goods was “very serious.”¹ When asked about experiences with scarcity, 63.2% of respondents reported that it had been “very difficult” to find food and basic goods in the six months prior to the 2014 study.² Further, nearly one-in-three Venezuelans at the time reported scarcity as the most important problem facing the country, surpassed only by those highlighting security issues (30.3%) (see Appendix 1) .

Evaluations of public health services were also broadly negative in 2014. As shown in the right pie chart in Figure 1, 63.6% of respondents

¹ The wording for the survey question is as follows: VENESC1. “Many speak of shortages of food and basic products in Venezuela. Do you believe that the shortage of food and basic goods is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, little serious, not serious, or not a problem? (1) Very serious (2) Somewhat serious (3) Little serious (4) Not serious (5) Not a problem”

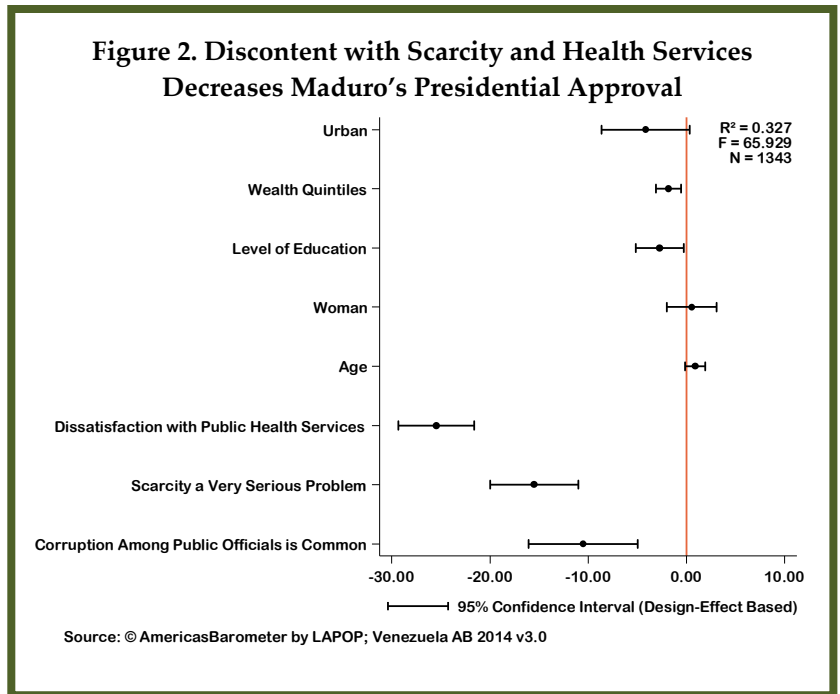
² The wording for the survey question is as follows: VENESC2. “How easy or difficult has it been for you in the last 6 months to find the food and basic goods that you consume in your home? (1) Very easy (2) Somewhat easy (3) Neither easy nor difficult (4) Somewhat difficult (5) Very difficult”

reported some degree of dissatisfaction with public health services in Venezuela. Only 3.7% reported in 2014 that they were “very satisfied”. In short, widespread discontent with the availability of goods and the quality of health services has been evident since at least 2014.

Today, dissatisfaction with the status quo and political instability in Venezuela have reached new highs. Street protests against Maduro’s regime have become increasingly common, and the opposition coalition has garnered enough public support to initiate a presidential recall process (Graham-Harrison 2016; Kumarev and Armas 2016). Approval of the president’s performance has declined steadily since his election in 2013: polls by the Venezuelan firm Datanalisis show that Maduro’s approval ratings have dropped from 55.2% at the time of his election to as low as 21.1% in 2015. So far in 2016, reports of the president’s approval ratings have fluctuated between 15% and 20% (BBC Mundo 2016; Mogollon and Kraul 2016).

Lack of Goods and Basic Services Fuels Discontent with Maduro and Protests

News reports suggest that citizens’ experiences with scarcity and low-quality public goods provision are contributing to anti-Maduro sentiment. Using data from the 2014 AmericasBarometer in Venezuela, the analysis in Figure 2 assesses the extent to which citizen dissatisfaction with goods and service provision drives discontent with Maduro. Independent variables are shown on the vertical axis and their estimated effects on



the dependent variable (or coefficients) are represented by dots plotted on the horizontal axis. Each coefficient includes a horizontal bar that shows the confidence interval of the predicted effect of the variable. Bars that do not intersect the red vertical “0.00” line are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level.

Figure 2 shows the results from a linear, multivariate regression model, which predicts approval of Maduro’s administration with perceptions that public services provision is unsatisfactory, that scarcity is a serious problem, and that perceptions of corruption among public officials is common. The analysis also includes standard socioeconomic and demographic variables.³ Perceptions of

Widespread discontent with the availability of goods and the quality of health services has been evident since at least 2014

³ The variable for perceptions of scarcity is coded 1 if the respondent thinks it is “very serious” and 0 otherwise. The variable for dissatisfaction with public health services is coded 1 if a respondent reports being “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” and 0 if “satisfied” or “very satisfied”. The variable for perception of corruption is coded 1 if the

respondent thinks corruption is “common” or “very common” and 0 if “uncommon” or “very uncommon”. Urban is a dummy variable, coded 1 if the respondent lives in an urban area and 0 if in a rural area. Gender is also a dummy variable, coded 1 if the respondent is female. The wealth measure is a five-category variable that is generated using a

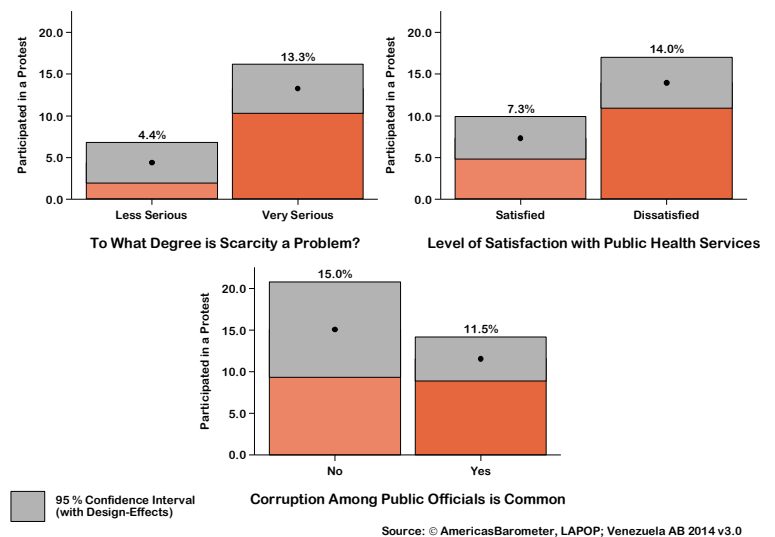
corruption are included in the model because of the salience of corruption in Venezuela, which arguably aggravates the already low legitimacy of Maduro's government.⁴ According to the AmericasBarometer, 90.7% of Venezuelan respondents reported that corruption was common or very common among public officials. The dependent variable, presidential approval, is scaled from 0-100 with higher values indicating greater satisfaction with Maduro's performance;⁵ the independent variables are scaled from 0-1 so that the results in Figure 2 show the predicted effects of a maximal increase in the independent variables on evaluations of Maduro.

Results indicate that discontent with Maduro is indeed aggravated by Venezuelans' concerns over food scarcity and perceptions of poor public health services. In fact, the coefficients associated with these issues surpass the negative effect that perceptions of corruption among public officials have on satisfaction with Maduro's performance.

Furthermore, the data also provide evidence that concern about the scarcity of basic goods and dissatisfaction with medical services motivate protest participation, while views of corruption

Concern about scarcity of food and basic goods motivates protest participation, while views of corruption do not

Figure 3. Protest Participation is Higher among those that View Scarcity as a Problem and are Dissatisfied with Health Services



do not. As shown in Figure 3, protest participation in 2014 was significantly higher among those expressing serious concern about scarcity and dissatisfaction with public health services compared to those who had a more positive outlook.⁶ On the other hand, there is no statistically significant difference in protest participation among respondents who reported corruption

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 following categories: 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 56-65, and 65+.

⁴ The wording for the survey question is as follows: EXC7. "Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption among public officials is: (1) Very common (2) Common (3) Uncommon or (4) Very uncommon?"

⁵ The wording for the survey question about presidential approval is as follows: M1. "Speaking in general of the current administration, how would you rate the job performance of President Nicolás Maduro? (1) Very good (2) Good (3) Neither good nor bad (fair) (4) Bad (5) Very bad"

⁶ This significant correlation between views of scarcity and discontent with public health services is suppressed when

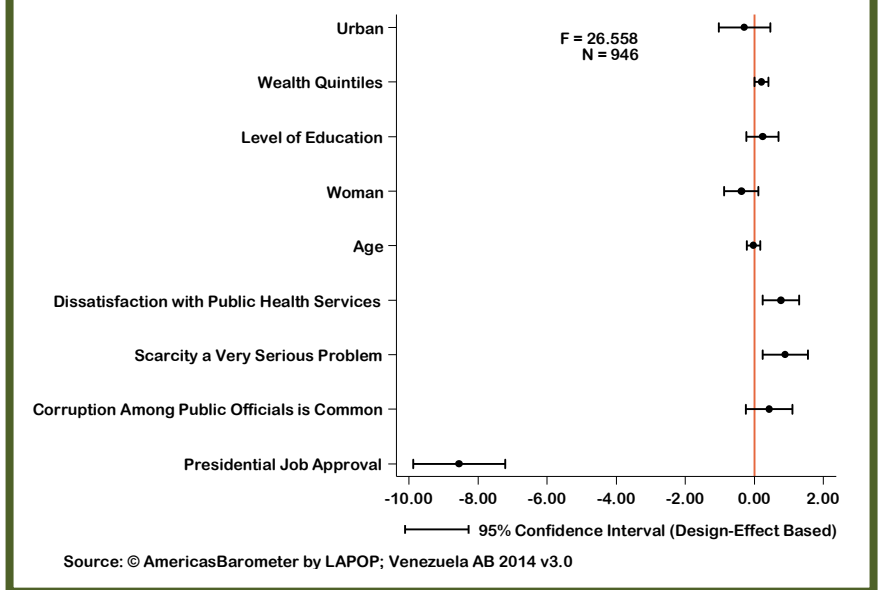
controlling for evaluations of Maduro's performance, meaning that these factors indirectly influence protest behavior (see Appendix 2). That is, these factors serve as motivators for protest but only because they decrease satisfaction with the presidents' performance. Further analysis employing Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediational model confirms that the effects of perceptions of scarcity as a serious problem and dissatisfaction with public health services on protest participation are mediated by evaluations of Maduro. Appendix 2 shows the results of a logistic regression that regresses protest participation on perceptions that scarcity is a serious problem, dissatisfaction with public health services, perceptions that corruption is common. The analysis also controls for urban residence, wealth, level of education, gender, and age.

among public officials as common versus uncommon.

Those who are more educated and wealthier also report lower approval of Maduro and are more likely to report participating in a protest. This is not a surprising finding given the nature of political divisions along socioeconomic lines experienced in Venezuela under *Chavismo*, a political movement that repeatedly found electoral success by mobilizing previously marginalized and underrepresented sectors of Venezuelan society (Rodríguez 2013). However, the deepening of the Venezuelan economic crisis since the AmericasBarometer survey in 2014 has hit the poor the hardest, to the point of reversing the benefits lower classes reaped due to Chávez's social spending efforts during the oil bonanza of the mid-2000s. Over 75% of Venezuelans now live below the poverty line, an increase from 55% during Chávez's presidency (Nagel 2014; Vyas 2015; *Economist* 2016). The result has been growing discontent with the *Chavista* system beyond segments of the Venezuelan population usually linked to the opposition (Graham-Harrison 2016).

In other words, continued declines in the availability of food, medicine, and medical services may erase deep-rooted differences in political support across educational and wealth divides that have been present in Venezuelan politics since the rise of *Chavismo*. The next section examines how declines in the provision of goods and services affect the dynamics of support for an opposition candidate.

Figure 4. Discontent with Scarcity and Health Services Lead to Increase Electoral Support for the Opposition



Linking Discontent to Opposition Support

Venezuelans' discontent with Maduro and willingness to protest is likely to increase support for the opposition across sectors of society. A growing desire for political change is evident among Venezuelan voters, and is perhaps best illustrated by two recent events: the opposition's landslide legislative victory in 2015 and growing public support for a presidential recall. In fact, the opposition's landslide victory in legislative elections in December 2015 has been attributed to widespread economic dissatisfaction, even among formerly loyal *Chavistas* (Neuman 2015; Ulmer 2015).

Though the 2014 AmericasBarometer survey did not include a question about support for a recall referendum, the survey did ask respondents who they would vote for if a presidential election were to be held the next day.⁷ Approximately 54.2% of Venezuelan

⁷ VB20. "If the next presidential elections were being held this week, what would you do? (1) Wouldn't vote (2) Would vote for the incumbent candidate or party (3) Would vote for

a candidate or party different from the current administration (4) Would go to vote but would leave the ballot blank or would purposely cancel my vote."

respondents indicated that they would vote for a candidate other than Maduro.⁸

Figure 4 presents the results of a logistic regression model predicting the likelihood of supporting an opposition candidate in a hypothetical presidential election.⁹ The figure shows that the driving forces of support for an opposition electoral option are concerns over the scarcity of basic goods, dissatisfaction with public health services, and negative evaluations of Maduro's performance. While a respondent's level of education does not significantly predict support for a hypothetical opposition candidate, wealthier respondents are more likely to express support for an opposition candidate. Beyond the direction of the effect of predictor variables, Figure 4 does not allow us to interpret the degree to which these factors affect the likelihood of voting for the opposition. Calculating predicted probabilities based on the model, however, shows that a hypothetical female Venezuelan respondent between the average population age range of 36-45 with average levels of wealth and education who perceives scarcity as a very serious problem, is dissatisfied with public health services, and perceives corruption as common has an 84% likelihood of supporting an opposition candidate. On the other hand, a hypothetical respondent of the same gender, age cohort, wealth and education, but who holds positive views about scarcity, public health services, and corruption, is only 38% likely to support a hypothetical opposition candidate.

Discussion: Voter Discontent and the 2016 Recall Referendum

In May 2016, an opposition-led effort collected sufficient public signatures in support of a recall referendum that now represents a real threat to

Maduro's hold on power. In fact, Datanalisis' survey in February 2016 shows that nearly two thirds of those polled are in favor of removing Maduro through a recall referendum (Ulmer 2016). Whether or not a recall referendum will take place in Venezuela is yet to be determined. Given Maduro's control over the Supreme Court of Justice and the partisan nature of the National Electoral Commission (CNE), the success of a referendum process and its implementation are not guaranteed.¹⁰

This *Insights* report shows that performance metrics related to scarcity and healthcare are connected to (eroding) support for Maduro. If the availability of goods and the quality of medical service provision continue to decline, Venezuelan voters' motivations to protest and vote to for an alternative to Maduro will continue to rise. Whether this pent up frustration will release itself through a new wave of protests, a recall referendum, or both, is likely to be determined by the decisions the Maduro administration makes about through which channels these grievances and desires are allowed to be expressed.

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⁸ 29.1% indicated that they would vote for Maduro's party, while 14.3% said they would not vote, and 2.4% that they would cast a null vote.

⁹ The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent would vote for an opposition candidate and 0 if the respondent would vote for a candidate from Maduro's party.

¹⁰ According to the 1999 Constitution, CNE officials are to be elected by the National Assembly. However, current CNE officials were elected by the Supreme Court, whose members were appointed by the Executive.

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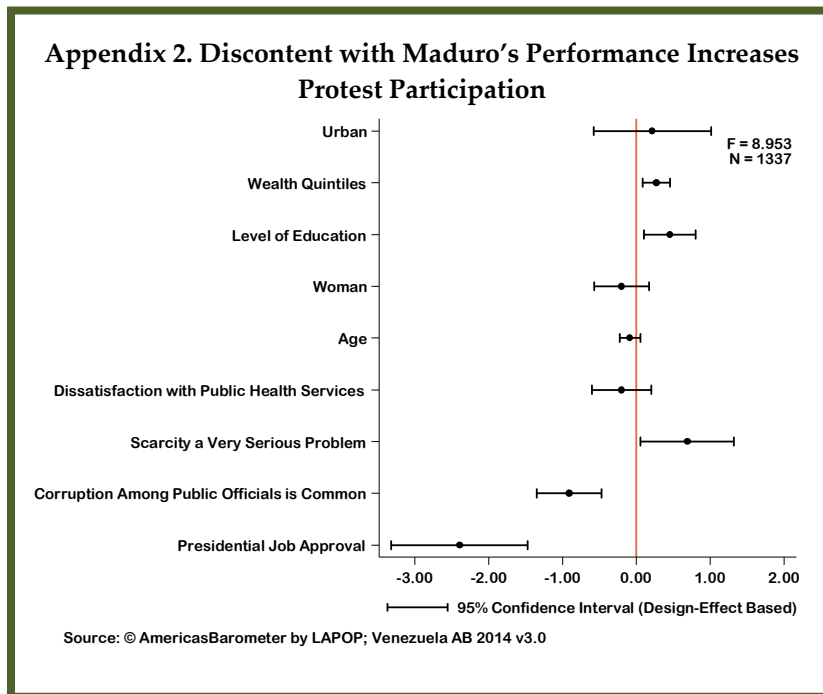
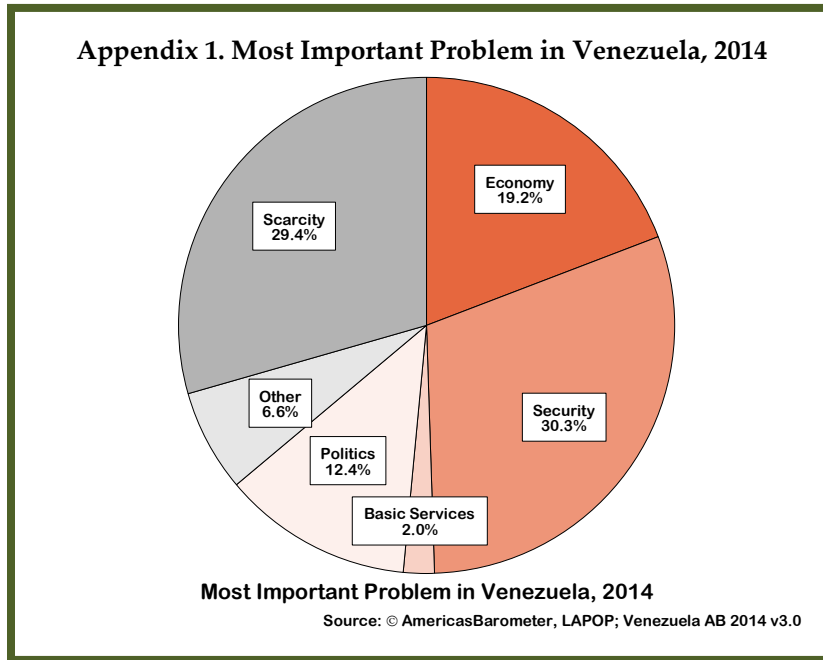
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Funding for the March 2014 Venezuela data collection came from Vanderbilt University, the University of Tennessee, and the Tinker Foundation. Funding for the broader AmericasBarometer project, and this *Insights* series, comes from support from USAID and Vanderbilt University. This *Insights* report is solely produced by LAPOP and the opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of USAID or any other supporting agency.

Appendix



Determinants of Maduro's Presidential Job Approval (Figure 2)

	Coefficients	(t)
Corruption Among Public Officials is Common	-10.515*	(-3.76)
Scarcity a Very Serious Problem	-15.504*	(-6.87)
Dissatisfaction with Public Health Services	-25.458*	(-13.13)
Age	0.875	(1.72)
Woman	0.539	(0.42)
Level of Education	-2.730*	(-2.22)
Wealth Quintiles	-1.832*	(-2.87)
Urban	-4.150	(-1.84)
Constant	85.293*	(17.82)
F	65.93	
Number of cases	1343	
R-Squared	0.33	

* p<0.05

Determinants of Protest Participation (Appendix 2)

	Coefficients	(t)
Presidential Job Approval	-2.397*	(-5.18)
Corruption Among Public Officials is Common	-0.913*	(-4.15)
Scarcity a Very Serious Problem	0.688*	(2.17)
Dissatisfaction with Public Health Services	-0.200	(-1.00)
Age	-0.086	(-1.26)
Woman	-0.199	(-1.07)
Level of Education	0.454*	(2.59)
Wealth Quintiles	0.268*	(2.86)
Urban	0.216	(0.54)
Constant	-2.839*	(-3.98)
F	8.95	
No. of cases	1337	

* p<0.05

Determinants of Hypothetical Vote for Opposition Candidate (Figure 4)

	Coefficients	(t)
Presidential Job Approval	-8.553*	(-12.78)
Corruption Among Public Officials is Common	0.430	(1.26)
Scarcity a Very Serious Problem	0.898*	(2.74)
Dissatisfaction with Public Health Services	0.774*	(2.91)
Age	-0.028	(-0.28)
Woman	-0.379	(-1.53)
Level of Education	0.235	(1.01)
Wealth Quintiles	0.207*	(2.10)
Urban	-0.283	(-0.75)
Constant	2.002*	(2.14)
F	26.56	
No. of cases	946	

* p<0.05