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Education and Engagement Predict Tolerance for Anti-System Protest

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Key Findings:

- In most countries across the Americas, a majority of adults affirms that system critics have the right to hold peaceful demonstrations.
- Among basic socioeconomic and demographic factors, education is the most substantially significant predictor of tolerance for anti-system protest in the LAC region.
- Political interest and political knowledge are substantively important, positive predictors of political tolerance, while executive approval is negatively correlated with this attitude.
- Catholicism is a negative predictor of political tolerance, at the margins and on average for the LAC region.



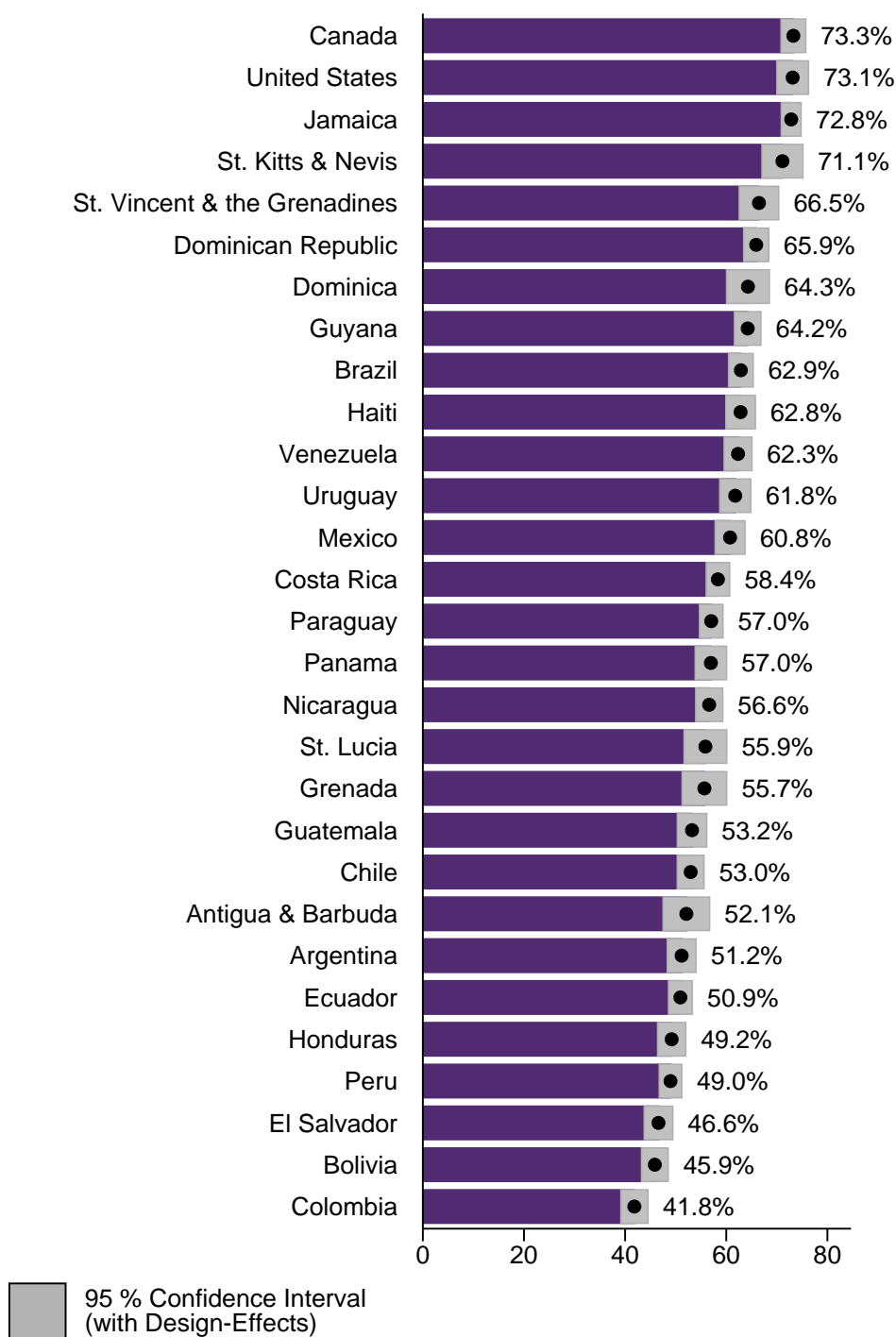
Competing viewpoints need to exist for democracy to function.¹ Civil rights and liberties, such as the freedom of speech and the right to peacefully assemble, are also necessary for the proper functioning of democracy.² As such, tolerance of government critics' right to peaceful demonstrations is a sign of healthy democratic attitudes and values in a country. As democratic institutions face challenges both globally and in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region,³ democratic attitudes and values demand study. Analyses of political tolerance increase understandings of the nature of core democratic orientations, and thus help researchers and policymakers better assess the quality of democracy in a country.

We use 2016/2017 AmericasBarometer survey data to analyze political tolerance as measured via responses to the question:

D2: "How strongly do you approve or disapprove that such people [who only say bad things about their system of government] be allowed to conduct peaceful demonstrations in order to express their views?"

This question provides insight into how people view the right of individuals to express disapproval of the current system of government.⁴ The first figure in this report shows mean levels of this particular measure of political tolerance by country, the second presents an assessment of individual demographic and socioeconomic predictors of political tolerance, and the third documents some additional individual-level predictors of tolerance. Education, age, and wealth are all statistically and substantively significant predictors of tolerance. Further, several measures of political engagement statistically and substantively predict greater tolerance, while on average Catholics are significantly, though only marginally, less politically tolerant than those who are not Catholic.

Figure 1 displays the mean percentage of respondents in 29 Latin American and Caribbean countries, as well as in the United States and Canada, who express tolerance for anti-system protests. To be clear, the question asks about approval of the rights of those who hold anti-system views to protest; throughout this report, we consider approval of such rights



Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2016-17; GM v07172017

Figure 1: Tolerance for Anti-System Protest across the Americas

to indicate a tolerance for anti-system protests. To create Figure 1, we coded those who responded with values of 7, 8, 9, or 10 on the 1-10 scale as “tolerant”. In all but five countries, the majority of the adult public expresses anti-system tolerance. The United States and Canada demonstrate the highest levels of support for this democratic value (73.3% and 73.1%, respectively). Various Caribbean countries follow closely behind, such as Jamaica at 72.8%, St. Kitts & Nevis at 71.1%, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines at 66.5%. The lowest levels of anti-system protest tolerance are found in Colombia at 41.8%, Bolivia at 45.9%, El Salvador at 46.6%, Peru at 49.0%, and Honduras at 49.2%. In these nations, a minority of the population expresses anti-system protest tolerance. Readers might be surprised at Argentina’s relatively low support for peaceful demonstrations: support there is estimated at 51.2% despite its strong protest culture.⁵ Overall, there is significant, and interesting, country-level variation of responses. Nonetheless, the remainder of this report focuses on analyzing individual-level factors that predict this variation.

Education is a Key Predictor of Tolerance of Anti-System Protest

In this section, we consider how a set of standard socioeconomic and demographic factors predicts the extent to which an individual approves of the right to protest by those who hold anti-system views. We limit our focus here to the LAC region countries included in the 2016/17 AmericasBarometer. Figure 2 shows the results of an OLS regression analysis, in which we predicted tolerance of anti-system protest with five socioeconomic and demographic variables. In this analysis, the dependent variable (tolerance) is included on its original ten-point scale, which here runs from 0 (least tolerant) to 9 (most tolerant). The independent variables—education, wealth, age, gender, and urban vs. rural location—are scaled to run from 0 to 1.⁶ The figure shows regression coefficients that can be interpreted as the predicted effect on anti-system protest tolerance of a minimum-to-maximum (0 to 1) change on any given inde-

pendent variable.

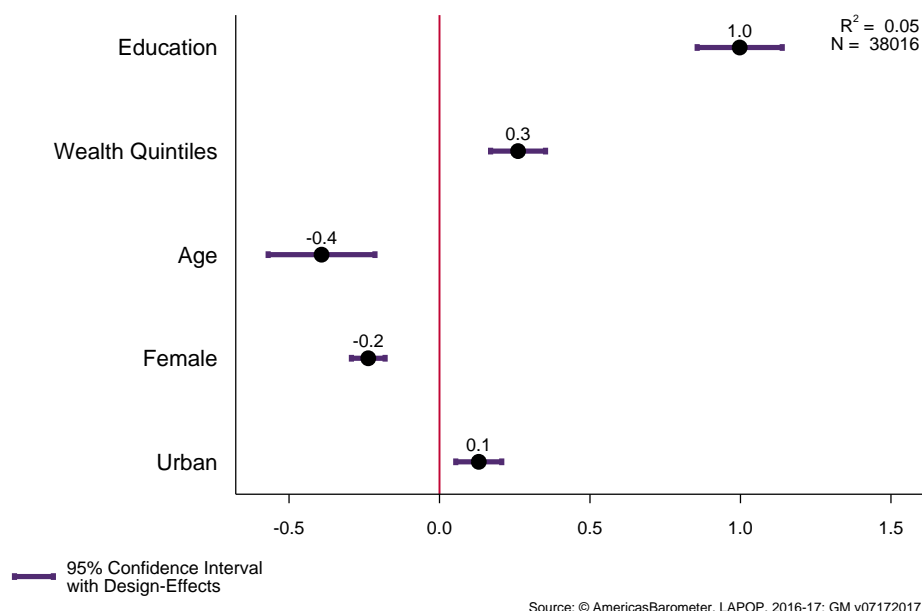


Figure 2: Sociodemographic and Economic Predictors of Tolerance for Peaceful Anti-System Protests

Education, wealth, and urban location are positive indicators, with education predicted to have the greatest positive influence, followed by wealth and then urban location. We note that urban location, while statistically significant, does not appear to be all that substantively significant. Age and female are negative predictors of tolerance for peaceful anti-system protests. While both of these indicators are statistically significant, they are not substantively as relevant as education.⁷ As shown in various studies, and discussed in a prior *Insights* report, those with more formal education are generally more supportive of tenets of democracy and accepting of different viewpoints.⁸ Figure 2 supports this existing theory regarding the importance of education. Education is the most substantively significant, positive predictor, while other factors such as wealth are not as substantively important predictors, despite what one might expect based on previous scholarship.⁹

Political and Religious Orientations Predict Tolerance of Anti-System Protest

Political engagement, executive approval, and religion ought to shape the extent to which individuals have positive or negative views regarding anti-system protests. In this section, we turn to variables that reflect these factors, in order to develop a more complex model of political tolerance. To gauge political engagement (in the sense of how engaged one is in politics mentally and intellectually) as in Klesner (2004), we include identification with a political party, political interest, and political knowledge. Our focus on political engagement is motivated by the fact that the Latin America and Caribbean region faces challenges to democracy. A positive correlation between engagement and tolerance implies that those who most actively engage in political systems are more likely to tolerate opposition, which is a core tenet of democracy.¹⁰ A negative correlation would suggest the opposite, that those who are most engaged and informed are the least tolerant. Thus, we see uncovering the nature of this relationship as crucial, since a negative correlation would be troubling for those hoping to instill democracy into the region in the long-term. Scholars assume “stable democracy” is linked to elevated levels of political “associational activism”;¹¹ it would be in accord with that line of thinking to find a positive correlation between engagement and tolerance.

In considering executive approval, we want to understand how approval for the current head of state predicts tolerance of protests by those with who disagree with the political system. Should executive approval be statistically insignificant, we posit that it is more likely that the political tolerance expressed via responses to this survey question has firmer roots in core democratic values, especially tolerance of opposition.¹² This tolerance is essential to standard views on democratization; for example, scholars such as Lacewing (n.d.) link tolerance and democracy. If executive approval is a negative predictor, we would interpret this finding as meaning that those content with the governmental status quo

are less tolerant of those protesting against it. Executive approval is relevant to such an analysis because, as the head of state, the president is the face of the government to much of the country's population. Since our question focuses on anti-system critics, analyzing approval can help capture the conditionality of tolerance—that is, whether respondents only support anti-system critics to the degree that they themselves are discontent with the political status quo.

Finally, we assess the relationship between Catholicism and political tolerance. Scholarship indicates that the Catholic Church and its papacies have historically imposed rigid political beliefs onto their followers in times of ideological conflict, especially in the Latin American region.¹³ Research on the relationship between these factors suggests that the Catholic Church has bolstered political tolerance in some contexts and weakened it in others, especially in regards to political protest.¹⁴ However, other sources take stronger stances, arguing that Catholicism has definitively bolstered or weakened tolerance, respectively by source. For example, Katnik (2002) relates a lack of Catholicism (whether it be non-Catholic Christianity or non-Christianity) and increased church attendance with decreased political tolerance. In contrast, Rivera (2016) observes that opposition and lack of tolerance for such opposition sharpens in regions where the Catholic Church possesses more power. Thus, we do not have a definitive prediction as to how Catholicism helps or not in predicting political tolerance; however, given the emphasis placed on this factor in extant scholarship, we anticipate some sort of significant relationship.

Figure 3 shows the results of a second OLS regression analysis. The dependent variable, tolerance, is coded the same way as in Figure 2; in addition, the same variables are included as controls in Figure 3 that we included in Figure 2. Figure 3 showcases the correlations (regression coefficients) between five independent variables – political party identification, political interest, political knowledge, presidential approval, and Catholicism – and tolerance of anti-system protest.¹⁵ All of these factors are statistically significant, though vary in their substantive significance. Political interest and political knowledge are the most substantively sig-

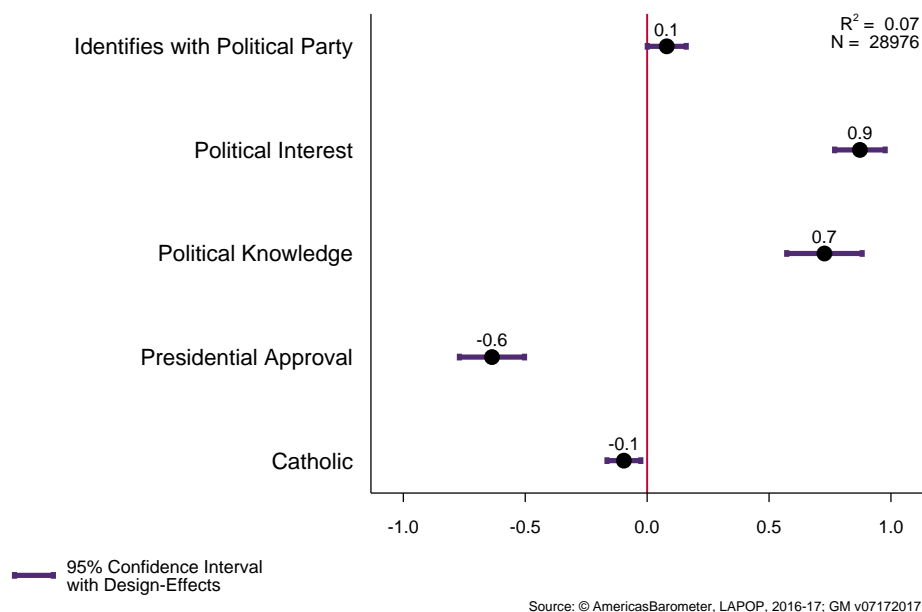


Figure 3: Political and Religious Predictors of Tolerance for Peaceful Anti-System Protests

nificant predictors. Greater values on these two measures are associated with more tolerance of anti-system protest. On the other hand, executive approval and Catholicism are significant negative predictors of political tolerance. However, the predicted correlation with Catholicism is not large when compared to the correlation between political interest and tolerance.¹⁶ The negative coefficient on Catholicism is in line with one of the theories presented in Levine and Mainwaring (1986), which holds that the Catholic Church decreases political tolerance. However, to fully interpret these results in the context of that manuscript, we would need to disaggregate the data by country and view it within the cultural context of how the Catholic Church in that country acts. Doing so, however, is outside the scope of our short report, and so something we leave for other researchers to consider.

Overall, we find results that provide support for our hypotheses. First, we expected to see a positive correlation between tolerance, on the one hand, and identification with a political party, political interest, and political

knowledge, on the other hand. The coefficients on these signs of political engagement¹⁷ are all positive, but the correlation with identification with a political party is substantively small. We offer as a conjecture that this lack of substantive significance could be due to a trend of individuals (in particular, the youth) drawing away from party identification, while still maintaining political engagement in other ways such as in protest culture.¹⁸

Second, we posited that if executive approval was statistically insignificant, this would demonstrate that political tolerance has deep roots within the democracy. On the other hand, we also noted that if executive approval was a negative predictor, that would indicate people were less tolerant of protest when they agreed with the party in power — signaling a more conditional political tolerance. The results in Figure 3 indicate the latter, with executive approval registering as a negative predictor. Lastly, in delineating expectations for how Catholicism would predict tolerance, we combined perspectives from conflicting sources of literature and theorized that it would be a significant predictor, although we were unsure in what direction. In Figure 3, we show that — on average across the region — Catholicism is a negative predictor of anti-system protest tolerance. This finding is in line with views that posit that Catholic Church discourages tolerance of protest, though — as we noted above — more research is required to fully test the extent to which the Church actively transmits such messages and, if so, when and where.

Conclusion

Region-wide levels of approval of the protest rights of anti-system critics (i.e., tolerance of anti-system protest) vary considerably. Among a set of basic individual socioeconomic and demographic factors, education is the most substantively significant predictor. Educated individuals are substantially more likely to express tolerance for peaceful demonstrations by those who criticize the government, a result that is in accord with findings reported by Orcés (2008). This supports the theory that

education fosters democratic values/greater support for democracy.¹⁹ Further, political interest and political knowledge are substantively relevant, positive predictors of tolerance for anti-system protest. These results illustrate possible channels through which to promote democratic values such as tolerance for peaceful demonstrations: increasing access to education, including and teaching about politics in public school curriculum, and encouraging political involvement and active citizenship. The significance of political and civic education to democracy has been examined by many sources,²⁰ with one robust study analyzing twenty-four national case studies of civic education.²¹ In that study, Colombia was the only LAC country examined.²² It is interesting that, in this *Insights* report, this country registers the lowest levels of political tolerance on the measure we examine here. Given the findings we present here on the significance of political knowledge and education, supporters of democracy in the LAC region would be justified in using successful examples of civic education from around the world to advocate for political involvement and education to encourage tolerance in their country.

Notes

1. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018); Powell (2000).
2. Baviskar and Malone (2004); Russell (1969).
3. Freedom House (2006).
4. The question tests not just approval or disapproval of the current incumbent administration, but rather the entire system of government. The previous question that starts this group of questions, **D1**, specifies this by saying “There are people who only say bad things about the (country) form of government, not just the current (incumbent) government but the system of government.”
5. Moseley (2018).
6. Urban vs. rural location is coded as 1 if the respondent lives in an urban region, and 0 if

in a rural area. Gender is coded as 1 if the respondent is female, and 0 if the respondent is male. Wealth is measured through a five-category factor based on analysis of a series of items about household possessions (see Córdova (2009)). Age is measured in years and rescaled to range from 0 to 1 such that 0 is the lowest recorded age in the data (16) and 1 is the highest (112). Education is measured by the respondent's highest level of education, which ranges from none to primary, secondary, and post-secondary. All independent variables are recoded on a scale of 0 to 1. Note that country fixed effects are included in the analyses for Figure 2 (and Figure 3), although are not shown for the sake of parsimony.

7. Since items in the preceding analyses are not included in all countries, Figure 2 includes countries that are not in the Figure 3 analysis (Guyana, Grenada, St. Lucia, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and St. Kitts and Nevis). The results and conclusions are the same if the model is restricted to the sample of countries included in the analysis for Figure 3. Those results are available from LAPOP upon request.
8. Glaeser, Ponzetto, and Shleifer (2007); Zelenický, Stehlíková, and Tirpáková (2010); Orcés (2008).
9. Such as in Castillo-Gallardo and Maldonado-Graus (2015).
10. Assembly (2008).
11. Klesner (2004); 30, 31.
12. Assembly (2008).
13. Harrington (1977).
14. Levine and Mainwaring (1986).
15. Political party identification is coded so that identification takes on a value of 1 and a lack of identification takes on a value of 0. Political interest is coded on a 4-point scale, where 0 represents no, 0.33 represents little, 0.66 represents some, and 1 represents a lot of political interest. Political knowledge is assessed by the interviewer. We re-coded this variable on a scale of 0-1, with 0 indicating "very low knowledge" and 1 indicating "very high knowledge." Executive approval is coded on a 5-point scale (0 - not at all, 1 - a lot). Catholicism is coded such that Catholicism takes on a value of 1 and non-Catholicism

takes on a value of 0.

16. Before singling out a focus on Catholicism, we tested various variables related to religion. Some of these were seen to be statistically significant predictors (such as degree of expressed religiosity), but others, such as religious meetings attended per week, were not. After disaggregating religion as a predictor, we determined that Catholicism accounted for most of the explanatory power we found in other religious variables. Thus, subsequent analysis on religion in this report focuses on the difference between Catholics and non-Catholics (in which non-Catholics includes those who identify as non-religious and those who identify as religious but not Catholic).
17. Klesner (2004).
18. Zovatto (2014).
19. See discussion in Orcés (2008).
20. Diamond (1994); Westheimer and Kahne (2003); Lutz, Cuaresma, and Abbasi-Shavazi (2010).
21. Torney-Purta, Schwill, and Amadeo (1999).
22. Torney-Purta, Schwill, and Amadeo (1999).


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