

AmericasBarometer: Topical Brief – April 8, 2013

Trust in elections in Venezuela

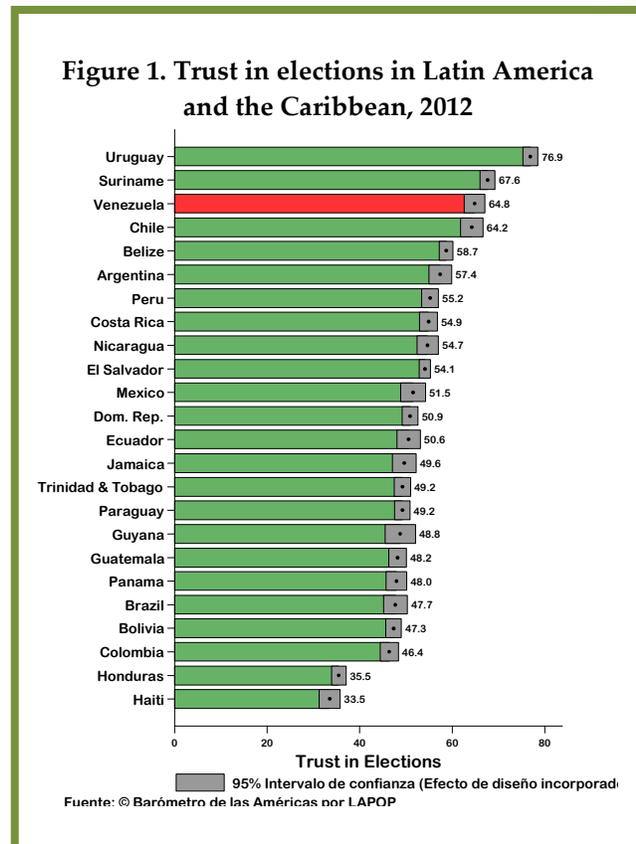
By Frederico Batista Pereira, Dr. Mitchell A. Seligson, and Dr. Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, Vanderbilt University

Venezuelans will decide on April 14 who is to replace Hugo Chávez in leading the country. Given the high levels of polarization between pro- and anti-Chávez supporters we identified in our previous *Insights Topical Brief*, it is important to what extent do Venezuelans trust in the electoral processes in their country?¹ Trust in electoral processes is likely to be an important factor in determining the extent to which Venezuelans participate in and accept the outcome of elections this coming weekend. Therefore, in this *Insights Topical Brief* we examine Venezuelans' trust in elections, election outcomes, and the secret ballot.

The most recent AmericasBarometer survey carried out by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) provides the data for the analyses that follow. During February and March of 2012, a nationally representative sample of 1,500 respondents was interviewed as part of a broader study conducted in 26 countries of the Americas.² In all countries but

¹ This *Insights Topical Brief* is the third in a series of reports focused on political attitudes in Venezuela. In the previous two *Insights Topical Briefs* we showed that the level of support for democracy in abstract is high among Venezuelans, but that there is also some concerns about the possibility of unrest in case of a transition.

² Funding for the 2010 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University. Prior issues in the *Insights* series can be found at:



the United States and Canada, respondents were asked to what extent they trust elections in their countries. Figure 1 shows the average level of trust in elections among respondents

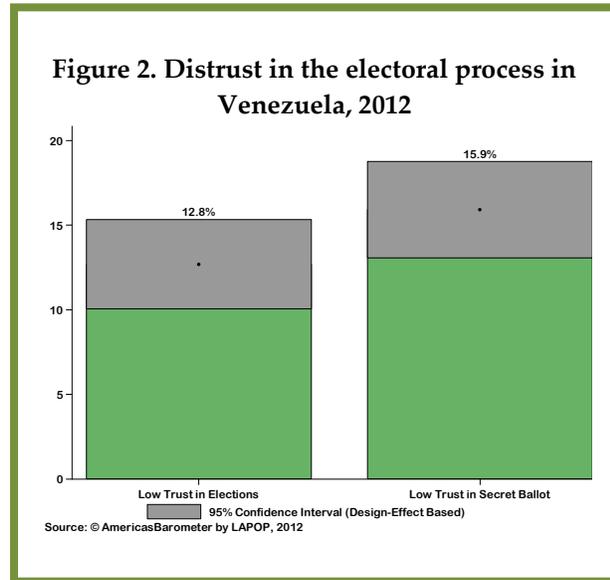
<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>. The data on which they are based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>.

from 24 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean:³

Figure 1 shows that the level of trust in elections in Venezuela equals around 65 points on the 0-100 scale, which is the third highest score among all countries in the figure. Only Uruguay (77) and Suriname (68) display higher levels of trust in elections. Thus, we find comparatively high levels of trust in elections in Venezuela in 2012.

Two other questions about the fairness of the electoral process were asked exclusively in Venezuela due to the proximity of the survey to the 2012 presidential elections. Respondents were asked to what extent they believe that Venezuelan electoral results reflect actual votes, and if they believe the ballot is secret in Venezuela. Even though the questions were asked in early 2012, we believe that they help to shed light on the public's general impressions of electoral fairness. Figure 2 shows the percentages of respondents who express high levels of distrust in elections in their responses to those questions.⁴

Figure 2 shows that very few Venezuelans report significant levels of distrust in the electoral process. About 13% percent of respondents do not trust that the elections reflect actual votes in the country, while 16% of them do not trust that the vote is secret. Overall, these numbers show that the vast majority of Venezuelan survey respondents believe have confidence in these specific



aspects of the electoral process: the accuracy of results and the secret ballot.

The data discussed in this *Insights Topical Brief* paint a portrait of a public in Venezuela that expresses relatively high degrees of confidence in the Venezuelan electoral process. Combining these results with those from our previous *Insights Topical Briefs* on this topic, the overall picture with respect Venezuelan public opinion toward democratic politics is mixed. On the one hand, Venezuelans support democracy in the abstract and trust the electoral results in the country. On the other hand, they have concerns about unrest depending on the electoral results. These findings may indicate that the mass public in Venezuela is willing and ready to experience a peaceful and fair electoral process, but is somewhat concerned about how some of the losers may react in case of defeat. In such a context, it is especially critical for political elites to comport themselves with a level of transparency and integrity that allows themselves, and the public, to engage in and accept the results of this weekend's election.

³ The question wording is: "B47A. To what extent do you trust elections in this country?" Responses are in a 1-7 scale with the extreme points labeled as "not at all" and "a lot". The scale was transformed to 0-100, and Figure 1 shows the mean values for each country. Item nonresponse was 10%.

⁴ The wordings of the questions are: "VENB51: To what extent do you trust that the electoral results reflect the actual votes in Venezuela?" and; "VENB11: To what extent do you trust that the vote is secret in Venezuela?" Responses are in a 1-7 scale with the extreme points labeled as "not at all" and "a lot". Respondents that chose 1 or 2 as answers to the above questions are coded as 1 (distrustful), while the remaining is coded as 0. Item non-response was 4% for VENB51 and 2% for VENB11.

Frederico Batista Pereira is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Political Science and an affiliate of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University. He can be reached at frederico.b.pereira@vanderbilt.edu.

Dr. Mitchell A. Seligson is Director of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and Centennial Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University. He can be reached at mitchell.a.seligson@vanderbilt.edu.

Dr. Elizabeth J. Zechmeister is Associate Director of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and Associate Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University. She can be reached at liz.zechmeister@vanderbilt.edu.

Full results of the 2012 AmericasBarometer - Venezuela survey and the AmericasBarometer 2012 comparative study can be consulted on-line at www.LapopSurveys.org. The full data set is available for on-line analysis or download (in SPSS and Stata formats) at no cost.