

AmericasBarometer:

Topical Brief – December 11, 2014

Frente Amplio to Govern Uruguay for the Third Time with the Challenge of Sustaining Economic Growth and Combating Insecurity

By María Fernanda Boidi

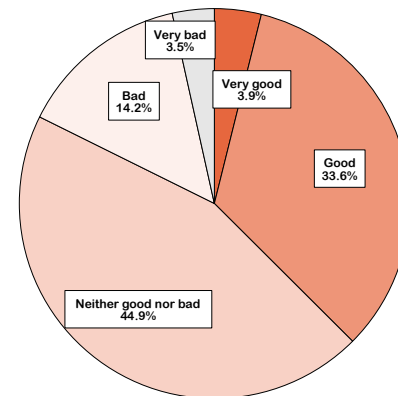
Tabaré Vázquez, the presidential candidate of *Frente Amplio*, was elected President of Uruguay on Sunday, November 30. Vázquez defeated Luis Lacalle Pou from the *Partido Nacional* with 53.6% to 41% of the votes.¹ *Frente Amplio* received a relative majority of the votes in the presidential and legislative elections held on October 26, 2014; it got close to, but did not reach the benchmark of 50% of the vote, thus a run-off was necessary according to the electoral law. *Frente Amplio* will continue to hold the majority of the seats in the two legislative chambers.

The new government's term will begin on March 1, 2015. This will be the seventh presidential term after the return to democracy, the third consecutive term for the *Frente Amplio*, and the second term for Tabaré Vázquez, a medical doctor who was the first left-wing mayor of Montevideo (1990-1995) and the first left-wing president (2005-2010) in the history of the country. Vazquez leads a country that is growing economically – although at a slower pace than in the recent past² - with a citizenry that approves of the current economic performance but is highly concerned about insecurity.

¹ Data from the preliminary vote count, Corte Electoral.

² See World Bank Indicators: <http://datos.bancomundial.org/indicador/NY.GDP.MKT.P.KD.ZG>

Figure 1. Evaluation of the National Economy



Evaluation of the economic condition of the country
Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2014; v.UR14_1_1

Using data from the 2014 Uruguay national survey³ from LAPOP's AmericasBarometer, this Topical Brief⁴ describes Uruguayans' views of the national and their personal economy, which are currently at their peak relative to the governing left-wing party's past record. It also examines Uruguayans' concerns about, and

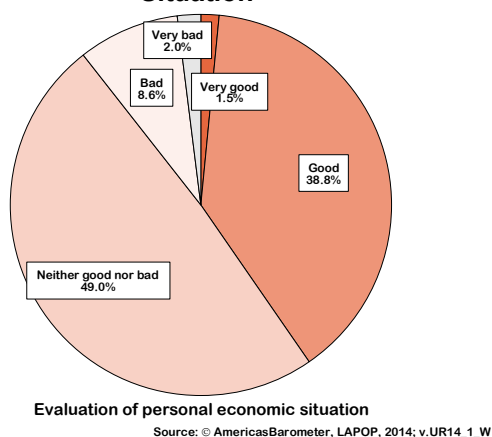
³ The Uruguay national survey was carried out in March and April 2014. Funding for the 2014 round of the AmericasBarometer came mainly from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and Vanderbilt University. This *Topical Brief* report is solely produced by LAPOP and the opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the point of view of USAID or any other supporting agency.

⁴ Prior issues in the *Topical Brief* and *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>.

recent experiences with insecurity, one of the country's biggest challenges in recent times.

Uruguayans assess the current economic situation between moderate and positive. Asked "How would you describe the country's economic situation? Would you say that it is very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad or very bad?" 44.9% answered "neither good nor bad." The second most-mentioned response was "good," with 33.6%. Positive views ("good" and "very good") added together represent 37.5% of the responses; this is more than twice the figure for the negative views ("bad" and "very bad"), which add up to 17.7% (Figure 1).

Figure 2. Evaluation of Personal Economic Situation

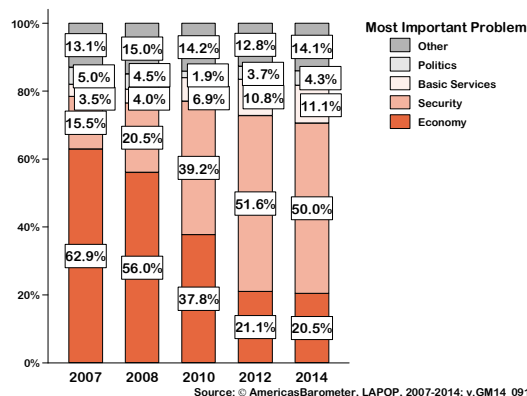


A similar pattern of responses emerges with respect to a question about the respondents' personal economic situation. When asked "How would you describe your overall economic situation? Would you say that it is very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad or very bad?" the neutral answer is mentioned by 49% of respondents; the gap between positive views (38.8% "good" and 1.5% "very good") and negative views ("bad" 8.6% and "very bad" 2%) is even greater: positive views outweigh negative views by 29.7 percentage points (Figure 2).

Given the recent economic performance in the country and citizens' perceptions of that performance, the economy is no longer the

most important problem for Uruguayans. In fact, by the 2010 AmericasBarometer concerns about safety had surpassed concerns about the economy in Uruguay (Figure 3).

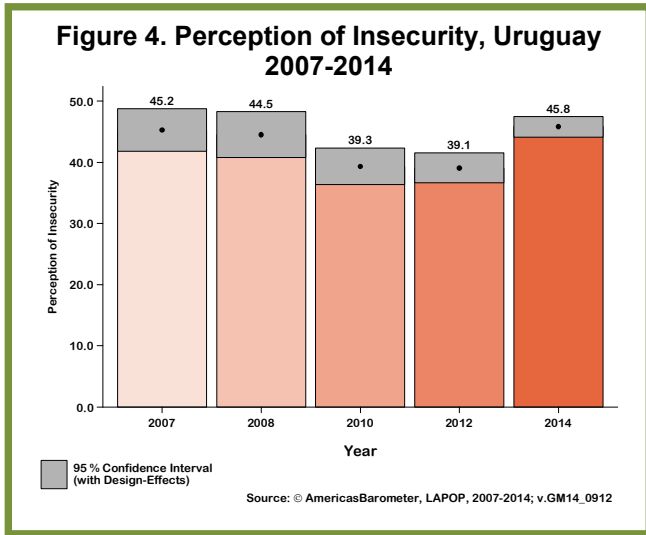
Figure 3. Most Serious Problem, Uruguay 2007-2014



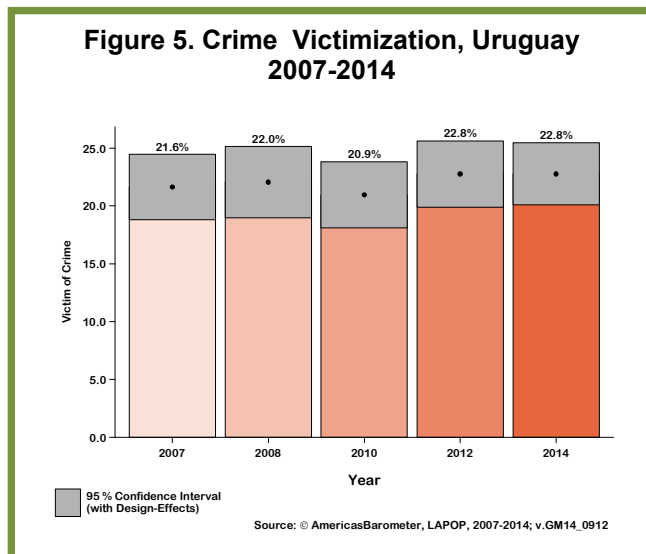
Uruguay successfully weathered the world economic crisis of 2008, unemployment rates remain low, and citizens perceive that the economy is doing relatively well; all these reasons help to explain why the economy is not the major concern for Uruguayans. In 2014, only one fifth of respondents (20.5%) indicated that a problem of an economic nature is the most serious problem faced by the country, in contrast to 2007, when more than 6 out of 10 respondents (62.9%) expressed an economic issue as their primary concern. The rising concern over security – the most serious problem according to essentially half of respondents in 2012 and 2014 – is likely explained by both experiences and perceptions regarding personal safety.

As for perceptions, the AmericasBarometer data show that 2014 is one of the years in which Uruguayans have felt the most insecure, approximately equaling the levels recorded at the beginning of the series in 2007 and 2008: 45.8 points on average in the 0-100 scale (Figure 4). In this scale, 0 means "very safe" and 100 means "very unsafe." Uruguay ranks between Argentina (46.2) and Colombia (45.3), well below Venezuela (63.2) - the most insecure country according to its citizens' perceptions -

but also far from the safest country (Canada, with a score of 22 points on the insecurity measure).⁵

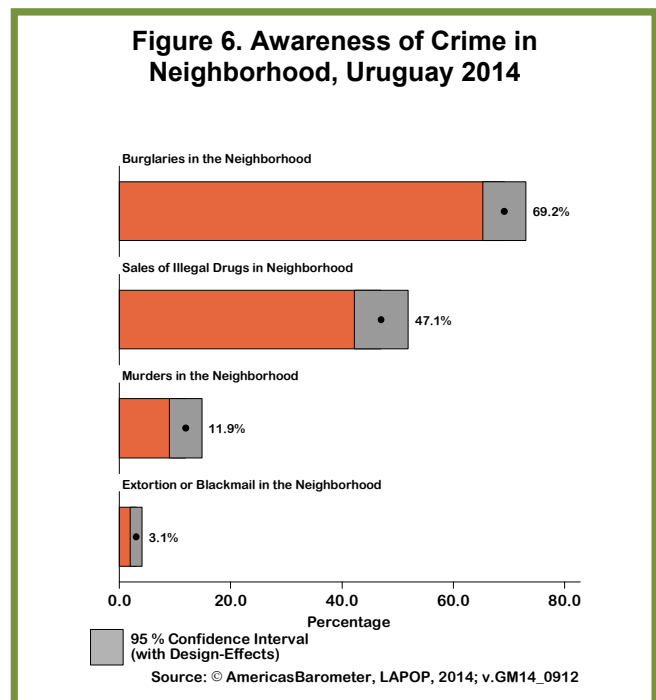


The AmericasBarometer also measures direct experience with crime. In 2014, more than 1 out of 4 Uruguayans reported having been a direct victim of a crime within the previous 12 months. This figure is identical to that of 2012 and the value has remained stable since the beginning of the series (Figure 5).



⁵ Perception of insecurity is measured with the following question: 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**? To facilitate the analysis, responses are scaled in a 0-100 rank, where 0 means “very safe” and 100 means “very unsafe.”

Personal experiences are amplified by what individuals have seen directly or heard of in their neighborhoods. According to what respondents report in the AmericasBarometer, burglaries and drug sales are widespread phenomena: 69.2% indicate that burglaries had happened in their neighborhoods during the previous 12 months, and 47.1% report that drug sales had occurred in the area during the same time period. A non-trivial 11.9% reports being aware of murders having occurred in the neighborhood during the last year. Extortions – a problem common in many countries covered by the AmericasBarometer – do not seem to be a significant issue in Uruguay (Figure 6).



The economy has been an asset for the most recent governments in Uruguay, but citizen safety is still problematic according to the data. Upcoming AmericasBarometer *Insights* series reports focused on Uruguay will address this topic in more detail. It seems clear that, according to what citizens reported in the most recent AmericasBarometer survey, this is a topic that deserves attention and will require immediate efforts to rectify. Citizen safety will surely be one of the biggest challenges for the government that will take office in March 2015.

References

Corte Electoral de Uruguay. Resultados segunda elección, Escrutinio primario <http://segundaeleccion2014.corteelectoral.gub.uy/>

World Bank. GNP Growth Indicators <http://datos.bancomundial.org/indicador/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>

Dr. Fernanda Boidi is LAPOP Regional Coordinator for South America and Co-Director of the Uruguay survey. She can be reached at fernandaboidi@gmail.com.

The 2014 AmericasBarometer is available online. Full results of the AmericasBarometer surveys in Uruguay and the additional 27 countries surveyed in the region can be consulted on-line at www.LapopSurveys.org. The country data sets are available for on-line analysis or download (in SPSS and Stata formats) at no cost.