

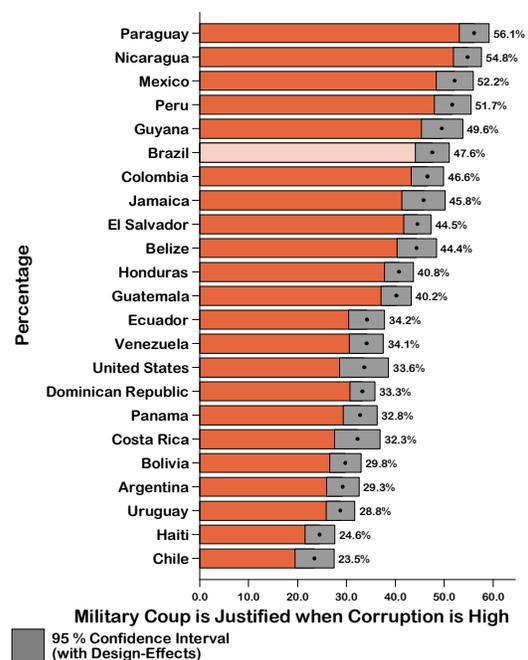
AmericasBarometer: Topical Brief – March 23, 2015

Amid Brazil's Protests, a Troubling Surge in Support for Military Intervention

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Over the past weeks, Brazil has witnessed two of its largest political mobilizations in decades. On March 13, 2015, social movements and labor unions organized demonstrations of support for President Dilma Rousseff in a number of cities around the country. Two days later, opponents of the administration staged a massive protest in the streets of São Paulo to vent their discontent (Magalhaes and Jelmayer 2015).¹ Reports on the size of the demonstration by opponents in São Paulo ranged from two hundred thousand to one million people. By either measure, it was the largest political mobilization since the 1984 “Direct (Elections) Now!” movement (G1a 2015).² In marches throughout the

Figure 1. Percent who believe a Military Coup is Justifiable under High Corruption in the Americas, 2014



¹ For more details on the protests, see *Folha de São Paulo* for local coverage in Portuguese (<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/especial/2015/protestos-15-de-marco/>) or the *New York Times* for coverage: (<http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/03/15/world/americas/ap-15-brazil-protests.html>).

² The Diretas Já [Direct (Elections) Now] movement emerged during military rule in Brazil and demanded a return to direct elections (see, e.g., <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/02/19/world/direct-vote-demanded-for-brazil.html>).

country, demonstrators have demanded Rousseff's impeachment or resignation as her government faces an economic crisis and another large corruption scandal involving, among others, the president's political party, the Worker's Party (The Economist 2015). A number of protesters have

declared their dissatisfaction not only with the standing president, but also with the way democracy is working in the country. At the extreme, some have called for the military to take power (Watts 2015).

In this *Topical Brief*,³ I assess public opinion with respect to military intervention in Brazil.⁴ The analyses presented here show that *the percentage of the Brazilian public who find it justifiable for the military to intervene under conditions of high corruption is high in comparison to other countries, and has increased significantly in the last two years.* Further, results show that acceptance of military intervention is found among those who disapprove *and* those who approve of Rousseff's government.

The presumably small but vocal group of protesters calling for military intervention claims that democratic institutions are ineffective and controlled by a corrupt government, and that only a return to a military rule could reestablish order (G1b 2015). Although citizens with this opinion

appear to be a minority among those dissatisfied with the current administration, their appeal to return to rule by the armed forces has engendered heated debate with those in favor of impeachment (Bergamim Jr. and Campanha 2015).

In light of these events and discussions, it is illuminating to assess the degree to which such calls for a military intervention might resonate with the mass public. As a standard question, the AmericasBarometer asks respondents if a military coup-d'état would be justified under conditions of "a lot of corruption" in their country.⁵ Figure 1 presents the percent of individuals who agree that a military intervention is justifiable under high corruption in each country surveyed by LAPOP in 2014.⁶ Brazil ranks near the top, with the sixth highest percentage of respondents (47.6%) agreeing that a military take-over is justifiable. This level of acceptance stands in stark contrast to other Southern Cone countries with recent histories of military regimes (Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay are all in the bottom four in the figure).

³ Prior issues of the *Insights* Series can be found at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>. The data on which this report is based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>.

⁴ For this purpose, I look at the following question: JC13. 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? When there is a lot of corruption. A military take-over of the state would be justified (1) or would not be justified (2).

⁵ The Brazil AmericasBarometer national survey was conducted from March 21st to April 27th, 2014.

⁶ Funding for the 2014 AmericasBarometer mainly came 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 *Brief* 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.

Moreover, the rate of acceptance of a military intervention under high corruption in Brazil has increased significantly in the last two years. As Figure 2 shows, the percentage of respondents who think a military intervention would be justified under high corruption slightly decreased after 2008 (though the change was not statistically significant), but then significantly increased by more than ten percentage points between 2012 and 2014. *In 2014, 47.6%, or nearly one out of every two adults in Brazil, report that they would find a military coup to be justified under conditions of high corruption.*

Interestingly, acceptance of a military intervention does not come only from those who disapprove the current government. Although those who perceive Rousseff's administration as "Very Bad" or "Bad" are more likely to approve of a military intervention, Figure 3⁷ shows that 45.6% of those who find her government to be "Very Good" or "Good" also approve of a military take-over in times of high corruption. Therefore, the high percentage of approval for a military intervention in times of corruption presented here cannot be interpreted as a direct manifestation of support for the armed forces to oust President

⁷ Aside from JC13, Figure 3 draws on question M1. Speaking in general of the current administration, how would you rate the job performance of President Dilma Rousseff? (1) Very good (2) Good (3) Neither good nor bad (fair) (4) Bad (5) Very bad.

Figure 2. Percent Who believe a Military Coup is Justifiable under High Corruption in Brazil, 2007-2014

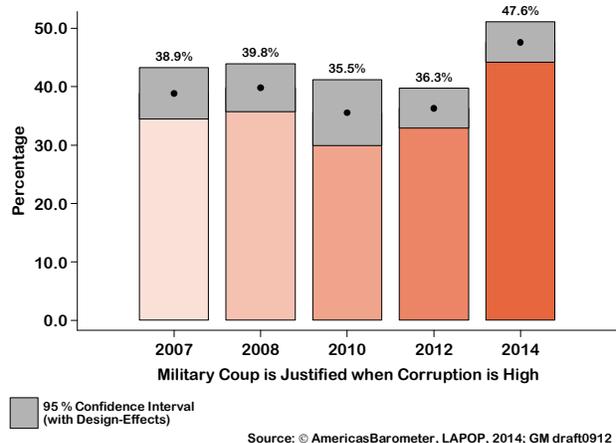
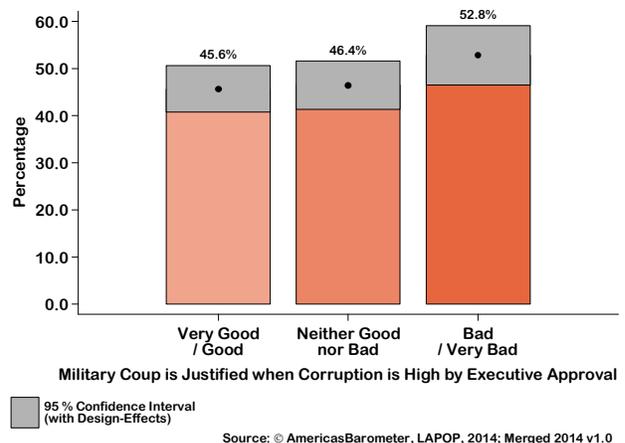


Figure 3. Percent who believe a Military Coup is Justifiable under High Corruption by Level of Approval of Brazil's President, 2014



Rousseff. Rather, *we see widespread tolerance for undemocratic measures to combat corruption in politics.*

Whether these expressions of support would manifest themselves in active support in the case of a military intervention is a question that one can

hope remains untested. What is known is that since the 2013 demonstrations through the present day, Brazilians have been increasingly determined to manifest their political opinions in street demonstrations.⁸ As the country just completed the 30th anniversary of its most recent democratic transition,⁹ Brazil still stands as a political system that permits citizens to enjoy their freedoms of organization and expression, even accommodating the freedom to call for a military intervention.

On Wednesday (March 18), President Rousseff responded to the protests by presenting a package of initiatives to combat corruption (Folha de São Paulo). If these measures will have any impact on the public's perceptions of her government is yet to be seen. Since her tight reelection in October of last year, President Rousseff has not enjoyed a "honeymoon period" with the public. Instead, this past week her approval rate reached a new low with only 13% of the public evaluating her administration as "Great" or "Good" (Datafolha 2015). Although a military intervention seems far from likely, and an impeachment process would require

⁸ Per the AmericasBarometer, the percent of respondents who reported participating in a demonstration or protest march increased significantly in Brazil from 4.68% in 2012 to 7.74% in 2014. The question employed was **PROT3**: In the last 12 months, have you participated in a demonstration or protest march?

⁹ On March 15, 1985 José Sarney was inaugurated as the first civilian president after twenty-one years of military rule.

direct evidence against her, President Rousseff would be well-advised to redouble efforts to combat corruption and economic stagnation, or challenges to her government may continue to escalate while the public's commitments to democratic values may continue to deteriorate.

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Full results of the 2014 AmericasBarometer and previous rounds 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.