

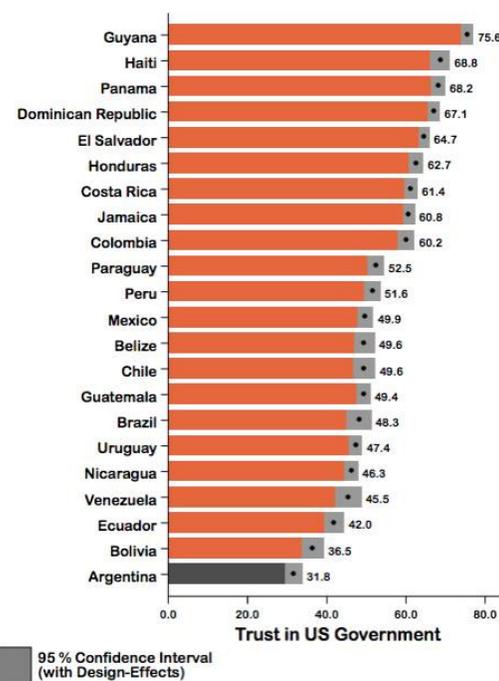
# AmericasBarometer: Topical Brief – March 23, 2016

## *Ahead of Obama Visit: What do Argentines Think of Warming Relations with the United States?*

By Facundo E. Salles Kobilanski and Cory Weaver

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> President Barack Obama will visit Argentina, marking the first “bilaterally focused” visit to that country by a U.S. President in nearly two decades.<sup>1</sup> The visit coincides with a warming of relations between the two countries following the election of President Mauricio Macri. When compared to the two previous administrations, Mr. Macri has taken a noticeably distinct approach to Argentina-U.S. relations (Russell 2010).<sup>2</sup> In the three months since taking office Macri’s government has moved swiftly to address issues that previously have been snares for bilateral relations, such as bond disputes and trans-national cooperation. But how receptive might the Argentine public be to a warming of relations with the United States? In this

**Figure 1. Mean Degrees of Trust in the U.S. Government, 2014**

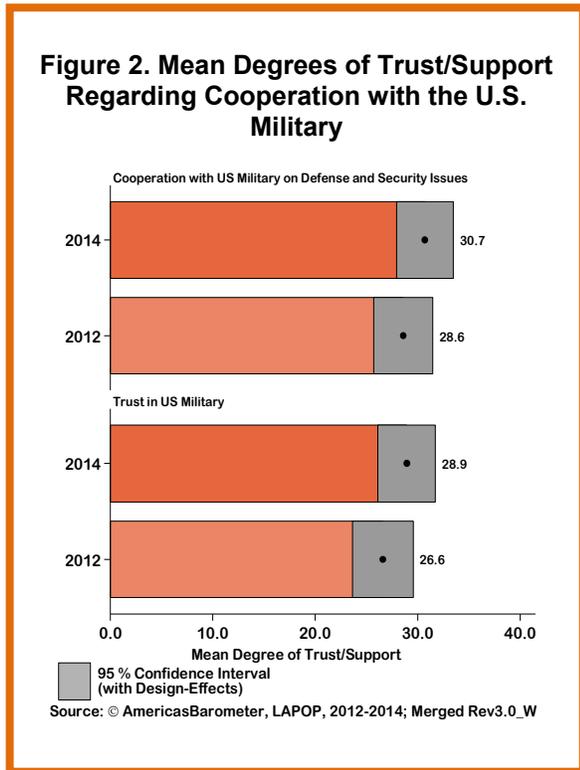


<sup>1</sup> The phrase “bilaterally focused” comes from a White House Press release, to reference a visit that is not for an international summit or focused on and attended by multiple heads of state. The last bilaterally focused visit by a U.S. president to Argentina was by President Clinton in

1997: (<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/20/world/us-alliance-brings-prestige-to-argentinians.html>).

<sup>2</sup> According to Russell (2010: 107), the main features of Argentina-U.S. relations during the Kirchners’ Era were a “mutual pragmatism within a framework of unstable and distant coexistence.”

*Topical Brief*<sup>3</sup> we draw on LAPOP's 2012 and 2014 AmericasBarometer surveys to illustrate how public attitudes in Argentina might inform this new chapter in Argentina-U.S. relations.<sup>4</sup>



For many years, there has been little love lost between between the Argentine public and the U.S

government. Anti-U.S. attitudes date at least to the 1940s, when President Perón maneuvered to confront U.S. hegemony in the region (Watt and di Tella 1989). Despite shifts in the exact nature of distrust of the U.S. government, Argentine public opinion continues to reflect such sentiment. As seen in Figure 1, the average degree of trust in the U.S. government reported by Argentines who responded to the survey question<sup>5</sup> is lower than that in any other country in the Latin America and Caribbean region.<sup>6</sup> Notably, from those who provided valid responses, Argentina (31.8 degrees of trust) ranks lower than other countries that are more commonly portrayed as harboring anti-U.S. attitudes, such as Venezuela (45.5) and Bolivia (36.5).<sup>7</sup>

The focus of President Obama's visit to Argentina is to increase trans-national cooperation in the areas of trade, investment, and citizen security.<sup>8</sup> With the latter goal in mind, Figure 2 depicts mean degrees of trust in, and willingness to cooperate with the U.S. military on defense and security issues.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 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://vanderbilt.edu/lapop/raw-data.php>.

<sup>4</sup> Funding for the AmericasBarometer project has come from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the Tinker Foundation, 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.

<sup>5</sup> The analyses do not include those who selected not to respond or reported that they did not know their answer; see footnote 13 for more information on these missing values.

<sup>6</sup> MIL10e. "In your opinion, is the U.S. Government very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or not at all trustworthy, or do you not have an opinion?" For this report, we reversed and rescaled the original 4-point measure to range from 0 to 100, where 100 is the maximum mean degree of trust in the U.S. Government.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/17/opinion/evo-morales-of-bolivia-and-democracy.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/18/statement-press-secretary-presidents-travel-cuba-and-argentina>

<sup>9</sup> MIL3. Changing the topic a little, how much do you trust the Armed Forces of the United States of America? and MIL4. To what extent do you believe that the Armed Forces of the United States of America ought to work together with the Armed Forces of (country) to improve national security?

In both the 2012 and 2014 waves, average degrees of trust in the U.S. military and support for cooperation were far below the mid-point on the 0-100 scale: on average, the public displays only 26.6 to 28.9 degrees of trust in the U.S. military and just 28.6 to 30.7 degrees of support for military cooperation.

The Macri administration has already sent a high-level delegation of security officials to meet with U.S. counterparts in Washington D.C.<sup>10</sup> Figure 2 suggests that both Argentina and the U.S. will want to consider carefully the most effective ways to bring the Argentine public on board with this type of transnational cooperation. Underlying the data in Figure 2 may be concerns among many in Argentina about the potential for involvement in their country by U.S. agencies like the CIA or DEA.

Given the current Argentine government's appetite for cooperation with the U.S., which groups within the Argentine public might be most

receptive to, or otherwise oppose, such a warming in relations? In Figure 3 we use data from the 2014 AmericasBarometer survey of Argentina and an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model that regresses individuals' trust in the U.S. government on their socioeconomic, demographic, and certain attitudinal characteristics.<sup>11,12</sup> The dependent variable is trust in the U.S. government. Responses have been recoded such that 100 means that a respondent expressed a lot of trust in the U.S. government and 0 the contrary.<sup>13</sup> Figure 3 reports the coefficients for each predictor as a dot surrounded by the 95% confidence interval, which is represented by a horizontal bar. A result is interpreted as statistically significant if the error bar does not overlap the 0 line in red. All predictors have been scaled to range from 0 to 1, which means that results can be read as the maximum predicted effect for each variable on the dependent variable. It is important to note that about half of the sample chose not to respond to some questions in the

---

For this report, we rescaled the original 7-point measure for both variables to range from 0 to 100, where 100 means a lot.  
<sup>10</sup><https://www.dhs.gov/news/2016/02/25/readout-secretary-johnsons-meeting-argentine-minister-security-bullrich>

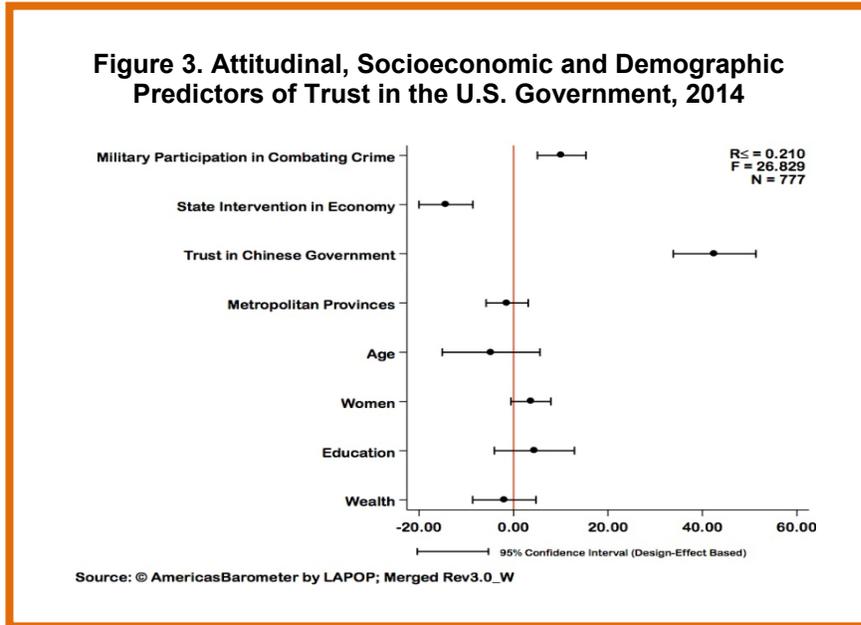
<sup>11</sup> The attitudinal questions are as follows: MIL7. The Armed Forces ought to participate in combating crime and violence in Argentina. How much do you agree or disagree? ROS1. The Argentine government, instead of the private sector, should own the most important enterprises and industries of the country. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement? These variables are measured on a 7-point scale; for this analysis, 0 and 1 denote the lowest and the highest scores, respectively.

<sup>12</sup> **Wealth** is measured as quintiles of household assets (QUINTALL), as derived from LAPOP's Relative Wealth Index (Córdoba 2009). **Education** (EDR) is measured as a 4-point scale, where the lowest category is no education and

the highest category is post-secondary education. **Age** is a continuous variable, and it is expressed in years (Q2). **Gender** is a binary variable and it is coded by the enumerator (MUJER). **Metropolitan Province** variable is based on AmericasBarometer's ESTRATOPRI variable. It equals 1 when a respondent lives in a metropolitan province (Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, Province of Buenos Aires, Córdoba or Santa Fe) and 0 otherwise. As all predictors, this variable was also rescaled from 0 to 1.

<sup>13</sup> 423 respondents (28%) answered "don't know" (DK) to the MIL10e question. Unpacking the meaning of these "don't know" responses is outside the scope of this report, though lack of familiarity with the U.S. could be a possible source of non-response. Nearly 41% of DK respondents could not correctly name the President of the United States (Obama) (GI1), while only 17% of respondents who provided an answer to MIL10e incorrectly identified the U.S. president.

model. For this reason, the findings presented here speak only to the 777 individuals who answered these questions, and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Argentine population as a whole.<sup>14</sup>



Strikingly, Figure 3 reveals that favoring military participation in domestic security issues has a statistically significant, positive relationship with trust in the U.S. government. In substantive terms, moving from the least support for military involvement to the most support increases trust by 10.2 degrees (units).

The predictor with the largest positive effect on trust in the U.S. government,

per Figure 3, is trust in the Chinese government.<sup>15</sup> The estimated effect of moving from the lowest level to the highest level of trust in the Chinese government increases trust in the U.S. government by 42.6 degrees on the 0 to 100 scaled dependent variable. This stands at odds with the bipolarity that many likely see in today's international arena, with the U.S. and China staking out distinct, competitive positions. Curiously, those who trust in the Chinese government also tend to trust in the U.S. government, and vice versa. This also stands in contrast with the tendency to pick

sides that has marked Argentine foreign policy in President Macri's deliberate pivot from China to the U.S.<sup>16</sup>

In keeping with the fact that some of the legacy of anti-U.S. sentiments in Argentina rests in differing views of the role of the state (Sheinin 2006), Figure 3 also shows that those who favor more state intervention in the national economy express lower levels of trust in the US government. A maximal change in support for state intervention in the

<sup>14</sup> If these cases are not missing at random, then there is potential that our estimates are biased and do not reflect the opinions of the Argentine population, more generally.

<sup>15</sup> In recognition of concerns regarding the loss of 198 observations when we include trust in the Chinese government in the model presented in Figure 4, we

estimated the same model without this variable. The effects of the other variables remain similar in magnitude and significance in that alternative specification.

<sup>16</sup><http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1871089-macri-pide-cambios-en-el-acuerdo-por-la-base-china-del-sur>

economy is associated with a decrease in trust in the U.S. government of 14.3 degrees. Interestingly, though, standard socioeconomic predictors of age, education, wealth, and living in a metropolitan province (Gibson and Calvo, 2000) do not significantly predict trust in the U.S. government among those in Argentina who responded to this question.<sup>17</sup>

As a final remark on the analysis of the 777 responses, women in Argentina, when compared to men, are marginally more inclined to express trust in the U.S. government. This could help create an area of common ground for the U.S. and Argentina, as both have taken initiative in promoting women's issues in the region. Additionally, the theme of gender equality could be a valuable tool for Argentina in promoting its U.S.-oriented agenda to at least one sector of the Argentine public.

Upon his arrival in Buenos Aires, President Obama will be received by an Argentine government eager to improve relations. However, the perspective of the Argentine public is ripe with skepticism and caution. Argentines are sparing in their trust for the U.S. government and tend not to support extensive cooperation between the two countries on issues related to state security. A certain amount of patience and calculation is likely needed by both sides in order to win the

endorsement of the Argentine people for the emerging Argentina-U.S. bilateral agenda.

---

<sup>17</sup>As a robustness check, we excluded all attitudinal measures. We still found no significant effect of socioeconomic and demographic variables on trust in the

U.S. government. We also found no support for non-linear effects of age, education, or wealth on trust in the U.S. government in alternative model specifications.

## References

- Córdova, Abby. 2009. "Methodological Note: Measuring Relative Wealth Using Household Asset Indicators." *AmericasBarometer Insights* 6: 1-9.
- Gibson, Edward and Ernesto Calvo. 2000. "Federalism and Low-Maintenance Constituencies: Territorial Dimensions of Economic Reform in Argentina." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 35, 3 (Fall): 32-55.
- Russell, Roberto. 2010. "Argentina and the United States: A Distant Relationship." In Domínguez, Jorge I. and Rafael Fernández de Castro (Eds.): *Contemporary U.S.-Latin American Relations: Cooperation or Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?* New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sheinin, David. 2006. *Argentina and the United States: an Alliance Contained*. Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press.
- Watt, Donald Cameron and Guido di Tella. 1989. *Development as Freedom*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Facundo Salles Kobilanski is a second-year 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 [facundo.e.salles.kobilanski@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:facundo.e.salles.kobilanski@vanderbilt.edu).

Cory Weaver is a Master's student in the Center for Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt University. He can be reached at [david.c.weaver@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:david.c.weaver@vanderbilt.edu).

Full results of the 2014 AmericasBarometer and previous rounds can be consulted on-line at [www.LapopSurveys.org](http://www.LapopSurveys.org). The full data set is available for on-line analysis or download (in SPSS and Stata formats) at no cost.

## Appendix

**Table 1.** Attitudinal, Socioeconomic and Demographic Predictors of Trust in the U.S. Government, 2014

<b>VARIABLES</b>	<b>Figure 4: Trust in U.S. Government</b>
Wealth Quintiles	-1.955 (3.360)
Education	4.412 (4.255)
Women	3.675* (2.112)
Age	-4.747 (5.197)
Metropolitan Province	-1.354 (2.236)
Trust in Chinese Government	42.58*** (4.392)
State Intervention in Economy	-14.31*** (2.866)
Military Participation In Domestic Security	10.18*** (2.583)
Constant	16.04*** (5.132)
Observations	777
R-squared	0.210

Standard errors in parenthesis

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1