



# The Political Culture of Democracy in Jamaica and in the Americas, 2021: Taking the Pulse of Democracy

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AmericasBarometer  
*Barómetro de las Américas*

LAPOP Lab is a center for excellence in international survey research. Located at Vanderbilt University, our mission is to:

- Produce high-quality public opinion data
- Develop and implement cutting-edge methods
- Build capacity in survey research and analysis
- Generate and disseminate policy-relevant research

The lab is led by scholars with expertise in survey methodology and innovative approaches to the study of public opinion, a dedication to pedagogy, and a commitment to providing high-quality input into evidence-based decisions about programs and policy.



## A Letter from USAID

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is a proud supporter of the AmericasBarometer, an award-winning project that captures the voice of the people of the Americas. In numerous ways, the AmericasBarometer informs discussions over the quality and strength of democracy in the region.

USAID relies on the AmericasBarometer to inform strategy development, guide program design, and evaluate the contexts in which we work. The AmericasBarometer alerts policymakers and international assistance agencies to key challenges. Importantly, the project provides citizens with information about democratic values and experiences in their country, over time and in comparison to other countries.

While the AmericasBarometer is coordinated by LAPOP Lab at Vanderbilt University, it is a collaborative international project. LAPOP consults with researchers across the Americas, local survey teams, USAID, and other project supporters at each stage. These rich discussions increase the relevance and validity of questionnaires; improve sample designs; build and maintain state-of-the-art quality control protocols; and support the development and dissemination of data and reports. As a collaborative project, the AmericasBarometer also builds capacity in public opinion research via knowledge transfers to local teams, student participation in the project, and frequent workshops.

USAID has been the largest supporter of the surveys that form the core of the AmericasBarometer. In addition, each round of the project is supported by numerous other individuals and institutions. USAID is grateful to that network of supporters, the LAPOP team, their outstanding former and current students, the many expert individuals and institutions across the region that contribute to and engage with the project, the local fieldwork teams, and all those who took the time to respond to the survey.

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Vanderbilt University CLACX Latin  
American Images Photography  
Competition 2016

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## UNDERSTANDING THE FIGURES IN THIS REPORT

AmericasBarometer data are based on national samples of respondents drawn from each country; naturally, all samples produce results that contain a margin of error. It is important for the reader to understand that each data point (for example, a country's proportion of citizens who support democracy) has a confidence interval, expressed in terms of a range surrounding that point. Many graphs in this study show a 95% confidence interval that takes into account this sampling variability. When two estimated points have confidence intervals that overlap to a large degree, the difference between the two values is typically not statistically significant; conversely, where two confidence intervals do not overlap, the reader can be confident that those differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Estimates for the 2021 AmericasBarometer are based on weighted data. Weights are calculated by estimating baseline probabilities adjusted for eligibility and non-response. Then we calibrate the weights to 2018/19 AmericasBarometer country samples on gender, education, age, and region to obtain overall weights. Cross-time and cross-country weights are standardized so that each country/year has the same effective sample size. Data for this report are based on a preliminary dataset; analysts may find small differences in point estimates when using later fully processed datasets released by LAPOP.

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# Introduction

By Balford Lewis

This report presents the findings of the 9<sup>th</sup> in a series of biennial cross-national, political culture studies known collectively as the AmericasBarometer. Funded principally by USAID and implemented by LAPOP Lab at Vanderbilt University, these surveys are undertaken with the aim of broadening understanding of the nature and dynamics of fundamental social, political, and ethical concerns that confront the countries of the Americas. This particular report focuses on Jamaica, which has been surveyed in the last eight AmericasBarometer rounds. This study serves to enable broad citizens participation in the design of public policies and programmes. Its data provide an independent, non-partisan, multi-dimensional overview of public opinion on a range of issues, hence providing a basis to address the array of democracy and governance-related problems facing Jamaica and other countries of the region.

Jamaica faces a plethora of social, economic, and political challenges that continue to inhibit its potential for sustained growth, development, and meaningful improvement in quality of life. On the economic front, the formal economy has been virtually stagnant for a number of years, with gross domestic product (GDP) averaging less than 1% annually over the last three decades. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country was, indeed, making significant progress in its economic recovery and social infrastructure development efforts. However, most of these gains have been literally reversed, with GDP falling by an estimated 9.9% in the first year of the pandemic, the largest decline

in the country's history. Exchange rate instability has persisted, with the Jamaican dollar losing 7.4% of its value in 2021, slipping from \$144.41 to \$155.15 against the US dollar. This extended period of economic contraction coupled with the associated curtailing of public expenditure has given rise to a weakened social infrastructure and, in turn, myriad social and political ills.

Most significant among these concerns is the longstanding and worsening crime problem, particularly the alarmingly high incidence of homicides and other violent crimes. This pattern of increasing levels of violence in the society has resulted in a "culture of

anxiety"—manifested in fear not only from the violence itself, but also the "crippling uncertainty" which stems from a lack of confidence in those entities which are responsible for addressing the seemingly intractable problem. Unsurprisingly, as has been repeatedly confirmed by this and similar studies, a substantial proportion of Jamaicans continue to consider crime and violence and the associated insecurity as the most serious national problems.

Notable also is the participation of a growing number of Jamaicans in different forms of transnational organized crime and the expansion of these activities to traditionally law-abiding societal spaces. Improved organization among those involved in activities such as illegal drugs and ammunition trading, lottery scamming, extortion, human trafficking, and other gang-sustained criminalities have made these very lucrative criminal enterprises more viable and accessible. In a context of high unemployment, and widespread underemployment in some sectors, these illicit endeavours have become the career path of choice for an increasing number of young Jamaicans, especially among "unattached youth" who tend to experience high levels of employment even during periods of good overall performance in the national labour market.

Additionally, despite years of a well-publicized anti-corruption campaign, this study continues to report very high levels of corruption among public officials in Jamaica. Signals of increasing corruption permissiveness in some spheres, evidenced by an absence of any sustained public outrage in response to many high-profile corruption scandals, is also quite troubling. To address this issue, Jamaica has undertaken critical legislative projects and measures aimed at strengthening institutions over the years, but observers believe more needs to be done. There have been calls for more vigorous law enforcement to hold violators to account and to deter would-be corrupt actors. On the question of citizen attitudes, it has been suggested that greater civil society participation involving more diverse groups of anticorruption campaigners would help improve the efficacy of messages demanding change and integrity and ensure they transcend prevailing age, class, and educational barriers.

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Chapter 1

# Support for Democracy and Its Alternatives

Oscar Castorena and Adriana Rosario

Colombia, 2021:  
Protesters march  
during a national strike  
against President Ivan  
Duque's government  
(Sebastián Barrios/  
VWPics via AP Images)

The robustness of a democracy depends on the degree to which its citizens' commit to democratic principles of government. According to data from previous rounds of the AmericasBarometer, the Latin America and Caribbean region has experienced a decline in public support for democracy as the best form of government and in satisfaction with what democracies are delivering. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed stress on this comparatively weakened commitment to democracy. This chapter examines current regional trends in citizens' attitudes toward democracy, their commitment to its key principles, and their preferences for alternative political systems.

## Main Findings

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- **Support for democracy has not recovered to levels recorded a decade ago**
- **While citizens are less likely to tolerate a military takeover than they were a decade ago, they are considerably more likely to tolerate an executive who rules without the legislature in times of crisis**
- **Satisfaction with democracy rose slightly, but remains lower than a decade ago**
- **Citizens across the region are willing to sacrifice elections for a system that guarantees income and basic services, but they are less willing to sacrifice freedom of expression**
- **Large majorities across the region prefer direct democracy over electing representatives**
- **Individuals who express a preference for elections, freedom of expression, and elected representatives are more likely to support democracy in the abstract**
- **These preferences are associated with commitment to democracy, with those preferring elections and rule by elected representatives more likely to support democracy**

Research measuring global trends shows that democracy is under threat from a wave of autocratization across the world.<sup>1</sup> And this threat may be compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which provides would-be autocrats with an opportunity to extend their powers in the name of addressing the public health emergency. In this context, it is especially important to understand the public's commitment to democracy. Longstanding theories of democracy and recent empirical research emphasize the link between the public's support for democracy and the durability of democratic government. If the public's commitment to democracy is waning, it is also important to examine what citizens want instead.

The AmericasBarometer asks respondents in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region about

their support for democracy versus alternative forms of government, their tolerance for military coups, and their satisfaction with democracy. These core questions have been included in the questionnaire since 2004, providing a consistent measure of the public's commitment to democracy for over a decade and a half. The data provide insight not only into the effect of recent events such as the pandemic, but also long-term changes in attitudes toward democracy. Supplementing this rich time-series, the 2021 AmericasBarometer survey included several new questions that probe citizens' attitudes about democracy. These include preferences between direct democracy, election of representatives, freedom of expression, guaranteed basic income and services, and rule by experts.

**Chile, 2019:**  
Anti-government  
protesters march  
during a general  
strike that demanded  
improvements in  
education, health care,  
and wages (Rodrigo  
Abd/AP Photo)



## Majorities Support Democracy, but Support Remains Comparatively Low

How strong or weak is citizen support for democracy across the LAC region? Has this support fluctuated over the previous decade? Since its initial 2004 wave, the AmericasBarometer has asked citizens about their commitment to democratic government with the following question:

**Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?**

Responses range from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree). For this analysis, we code answers on the agreement end of the scale (values ranging from five to seven) as support for democracy. As seen in **Figure 1.1**, the proportion of adults in each country who express support for democracy ranges from a low of 46% in Haiti to a high of 80% in Uruguay. In all but four countries (Haiti, Honduras, Peru, and Paraguay), majorities express support for democracy in the abstract.

El Salvador stands out as having the second highest percentage of citizens who support democracy. In the 2018/19 round, El Salvador was firmly in the middle of the distribution, with 59% supporting democracy. This indicates a substantial increase in Salvadoran's commitment to democracy, no doubt a result of the 2019 election of Nayib Bukele, a popular politician who is not affiliated with the country's traditional but unpopular political parties. Meanwhile, Argentina, Costa Rica, and Uruguay have consistently appeared among the top countries in support for democracy.

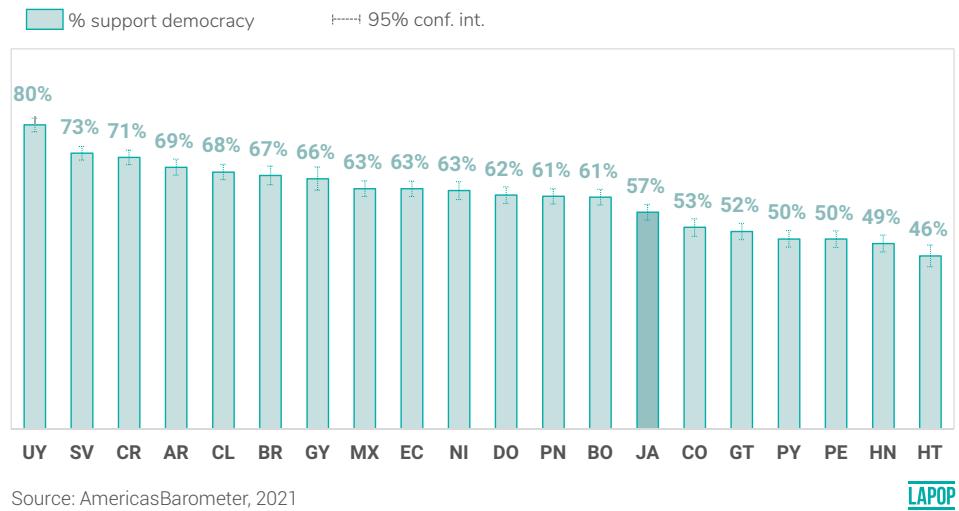
**61%**

On average in the Latin America and Caribbean region, about two-thirds agree that democracy is preferable to any other form of government

o

**Figure 1.1**

**In most LAC countries, majorities express support for democracy**



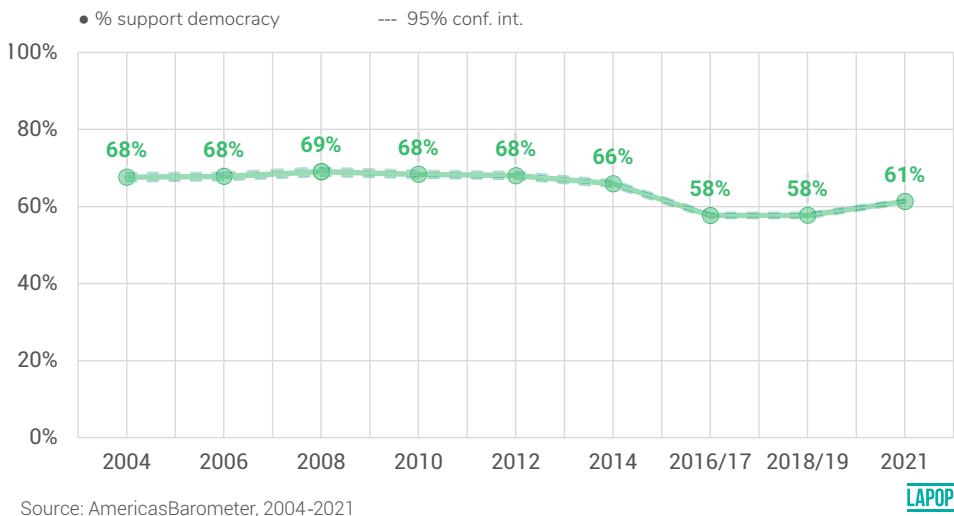
Are public attitudes about democracy in the LAC region following global trends of decline?

**Figure 1.2** shows that, on average, 61% agree that democracy is preferable to any other form of government, a slight increase from 2018/19.<sup>2</sup> But these levels

of support do not reach the highs recorded prior to 2016. Each of these previous waves register statistically significant higher levels of support for democracy. Support for democracy may be rebounding, but it has yet to reach the levels recorded a decade ago.

**Figure 1.2**

**Support for democracy in the LAC region remains lower than a decade ago**



In order to dig deeper into democratic attitudes, the AmericasBarometer asked respondents about alternatives to democratic government under particular scenarios. One of these is a military takeover, clearly an autocratic alternative to government by elected representatives. To assess the conditions under which citizens in the region may tolerate a military coup, the 2021 survey asked the following questions:

**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?**

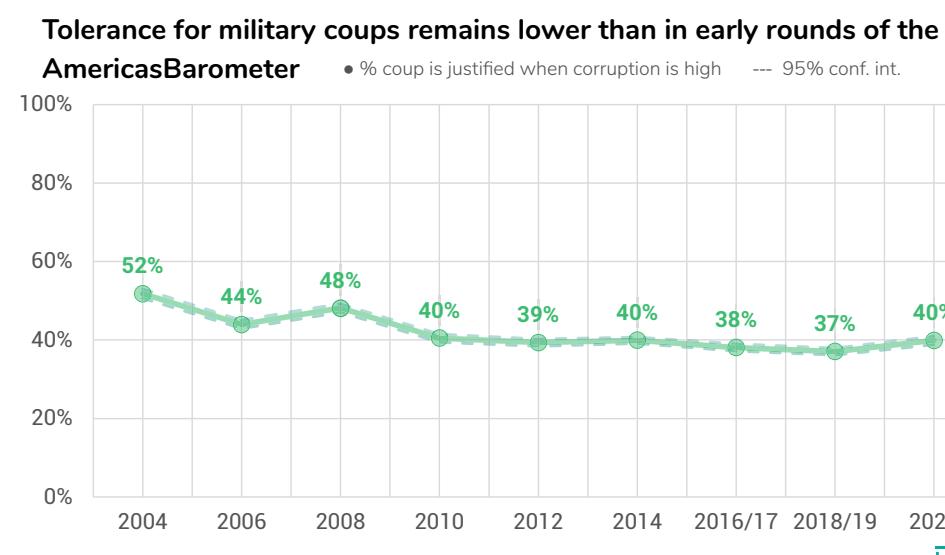
**When there is a lot of corruption.  
(1) It would be justified (2) No, it would not be justified**

**When there is a public health emergency like the coronavirus.**

**(1) It would be justified (2) No, it would not be justified**

Respondents answer in either the affirmative, "a military take-over of the state would be justified" or the negative, "a military take-over of the state would not be justified." **Figure 1.3** shows that the proportion of respondents who say they would tolerate a military coup under conditions of high corruption rose slightly between 2018/19 and 2021. At 40%, this proportion is substantial, but it remains lower than it was just over a decade ago, in the first rounds of the AmericasBarometer.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the cross-time analysis of support for democracy in the abstract, citizens' commitment to this particular tenet of democracy—not tolerating military coups—has remained relatively stable over the last decade and a half.

**Figure 1.3**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2004-2021

**LAPOP**

We see similar overall stability in this attitude at the level of individual countries. **Figure 1.4** shows the proportion that say they would tolerate a military coup under conditions of high corruption in each country. Here the proportions range from 20% (Uruguay) to 52% (Peru). While majorities say

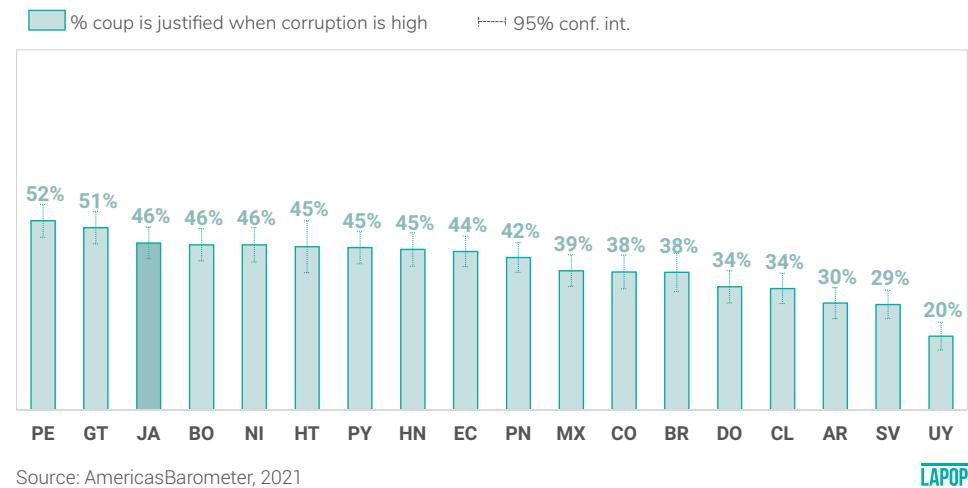
they would tolerate a coup under these conditions in only two countries (Guatemala and Peru), the proportions are still substantial in every country. Overall, the ordering of countries across the LAC region remains very similar to what we observed in the 2018/19 round.

**Figure 1.4**

**In most countries of the LAC region, one-third or more would tolerate a military coup under high corruption**



**The public is less likely to justify a coup in a public health emergency compared to when there is high corruption**

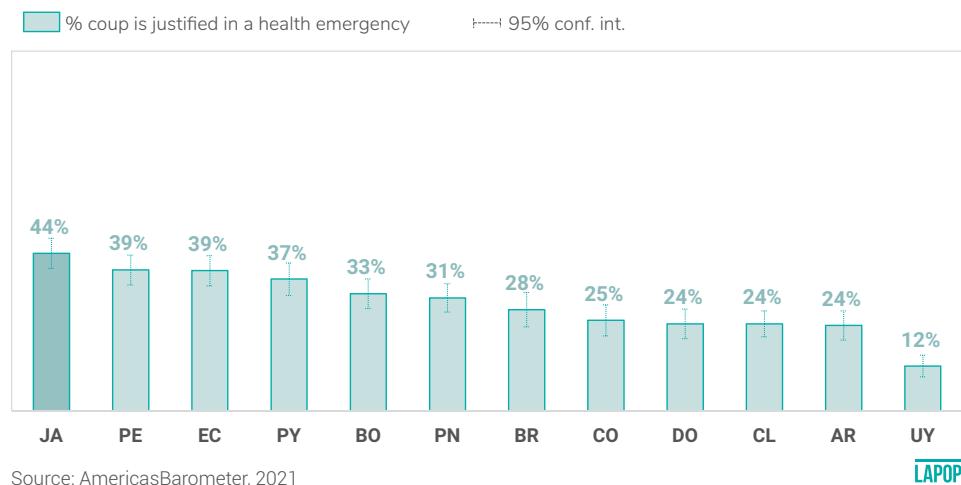


In some countries, the 2021 AmericasBarometer introduced the alternative scenario of a public health emergency to evaluate whether the context of the pandemic affects citizens' views on autocratic alternatives like a military takeover. **Figure 1.5** shows the proportion of respondents in each country where the question was asked who said they would tolerate such a takeover under conditions of a public health emergency. In every country that

included both scenarios, we see that the public is less likely to justify a coup in a public health emergency compared to when there is high corruption. There is no country in which a majority say they would tolerate a coup in a health emergency. As with military coups under high corruption, Uruguay has smallest share of respondents who say they would tolerate a coup under this scenario (12%).

**Figure 1.5**

**One-quarter to one -third across the LAC region would tolerate a coup during a public health emergency**



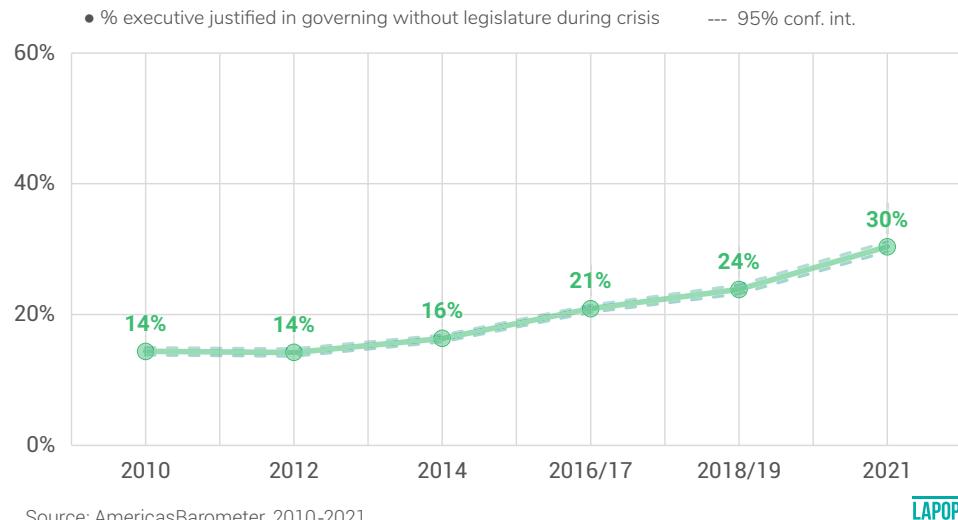
Over the long term, the public in the LAC region has grown less tolerant of the most flagrant form of authoritarianism, military rule. This attitudinal shift is consistent with the fact that actual military takeovers have become a less prominent threat to democracies in the region. Instead, democracies are increasingly under threat from elected leaders who seek to expand their authority beyond constitutional constraints. This is especially problematic for a region like Latin America, where presidential systems can lead to inter-branch conflict between an executive with a popular mandate and other branches of government. The 2021 AmericasBarometer survey included the following question tapping into executive overreach:

**Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the president of the country to close the Congress/Parliament and govern without Congress/Parliament?**

Respondents could answer "yes" or "no." **Figure 1.6** shows that the public in the LAC region has become steadily more tolerant of executive coups since the question was first asked in 2010. In fact, the proportion of individuals tolerating executive coups doubled between 2010 and 2021. This is a sharp contrast to levels of tolerance for military coups, which have been steadier.

**Figure 1.6**

**Tolerance for executive coups continues to rise in the LAC region**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2010-2021

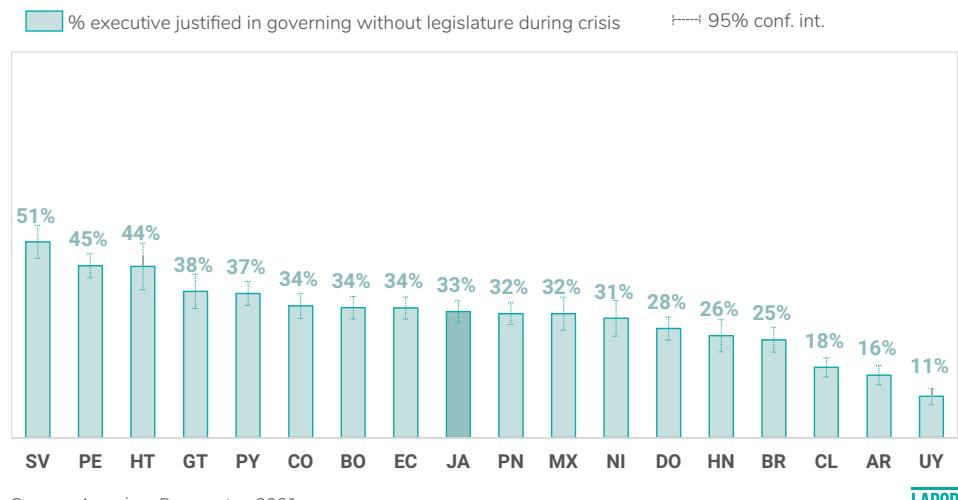
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**Figure 1.7** shows these results for each country, demonstrating much more heterogeneity across countries than tolerance for military takeovers. In terms of tolerance for executive coups, there is a 40-percentage point difference between the most

coup-tolerant country (El Salvador) and the least coup-tolerant (Uruguay). In contrast, the difference between the highest and lowest ranked countries for the military coup under a scenario of high corruption is 32 percentage points.

**Figure 1.7**

**In most countries, a third or less would tolerate an executive coup**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

El Salvador is again notable. While support for democracy surged in El Salvador between 2018/19 and 2021, so did Salvadorans' willingness to tolerate an executive coup—an undemocratic move. Generally, countries with the highest tolerance for executive coups are also those with the highest tolerance for military coups. But here El Salvador is an exception: it is the third least tolerant of military coups (at 29%) and the most tolerant of executive coups (at 51%). This may be partly explained by the enormous popularity of its president. According to the survey, 61% of Salvadorans believe he is doing a very good job. Recent research has indeed found that popular executives can potentially undermine citizens' opposition to anti-democratic executive actions while, at the same time, bolstering satisfaction with democracy.<sup>4</sup>

To further assess attitudes about centralizing power in the executive, the 2021 AmericasBarometer

included a new question measuring citizens' preferences for a strong leader who may bend the rules:

**Having a strong leader in the government, even if the leader bends the rules to get things done. Would you say that it is very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad, or very bad as a form of government for our country?**

**Figure 1.8** shows the proportion that answered "very good" or "good" in each country. Guyana, which was not among the countries asked the military and executive coup questions, has the highest levels of support for a strong leader, but El Salvador is a close second—consistent with the responses about executive coups. Interestingly, Uruguay, whose public is consistently the least tolerant of military and executive coups, is towards the middle of the distribution when it comes to preferring a strong leader who bends the rules to get things done.



**Popular executives can potentially undermine citizens' opposition to anti-democratic executive actions while at the same time bolstering satisfaction with democracy**

### Figure 1.8

**In all but three countries in the LAC region, less than half support a strong leader who bends the rules**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

## Across Most of the Region, Citizens Remain Dissatisfied with Democracy

While individuals may be highly committed to democracy in the abstract, they may not necessarily think the government in their country is living up to democratic ideals. Over the long run, dissatisfaction with how democracy works in practice may erode support for democracy in the abstract. The AmericasBarometer directly asks respondents about their evaluation of democracy with the following question:

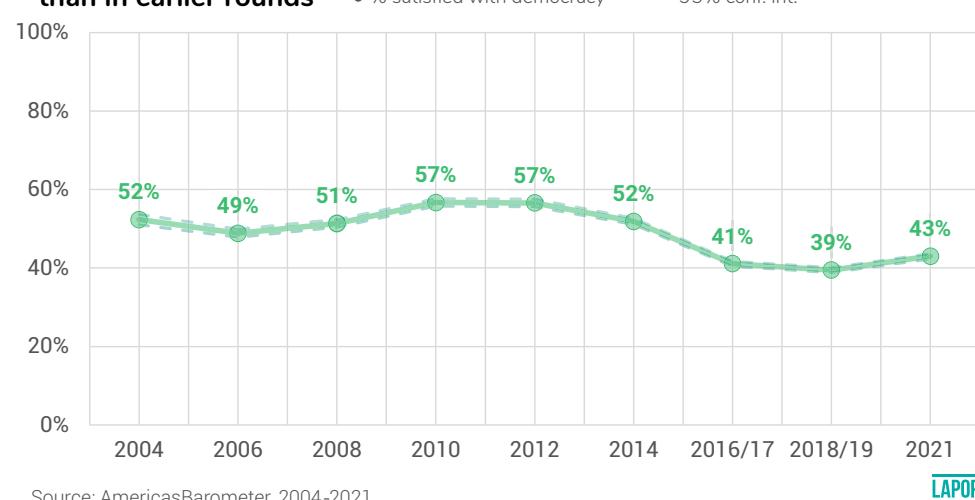
**In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in [country]?**

**Figure 1.9** shows the proportion across the LAC region that said they were either "satisfied" or "very

satisfied" with democracy in each round of the AmericasBarometer. The 2021 round shows a slight increase in satisfaction since 2018/19, although the level of satisfaction is still lower than it was over a decade ago. These trends thus mirror over-time change in support for democracy in the abstract.

**Figure 1.9**

**Despite a recent increase, satisfaction with democracy remains lower than in earlier rounds**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2004-2021

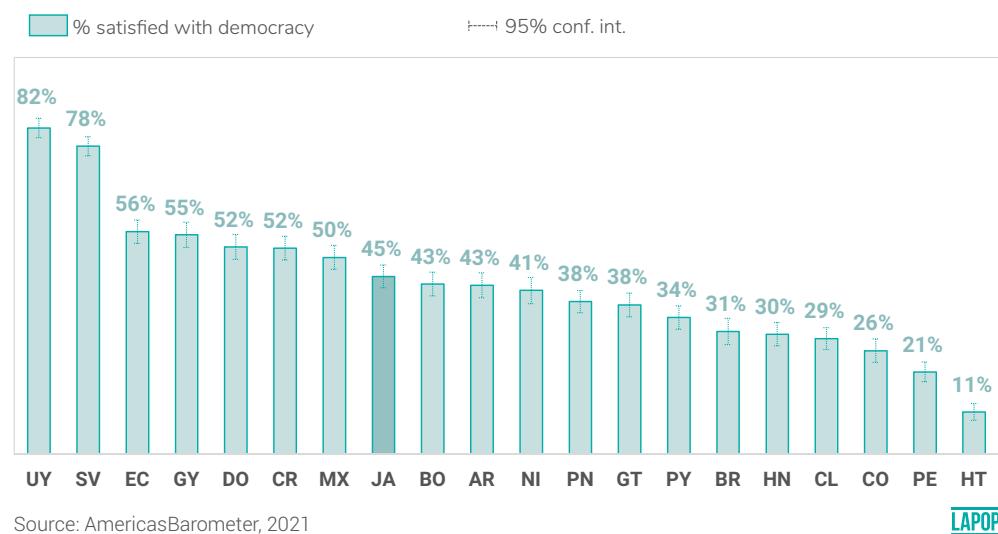
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**Figure 1.10** shows how these levels of satisfaction vary across the countries in the LAC region in 2021. One of the most striking aspects of the figure is the range of variation between countries, going from a low of 11% in Haiti to a high of 82% in

Uruguay. Also notable is that levels of satisfaction are substantially higher in El Salvador and in Uruguay than in other countries. Only majorities in six countries in the region say that they are satisfied with how democracy works in their country.

## Figure 1.10

### In most countries, majorities are dissatisfied with democracy



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP



Colombia, 2021:  
Demonstrators at  
the Plaza Bolívar in  
Bogota protesting  
during a national  
strike against  
national violence  
and government  
measures (Jc.rol199/  
Shutterstock)

## The Public is Only Weakly Committed to Elections and Representative Democracy

**T**o the degree that democratic support and satisfaction remain relatively low across most of the LAC region, what systems of government would the public prefer?

To answer this question, the 2021 AmericasBarometer survey included a new module of questions:

**Which political system seems best for [country]: a system that guarantees access to a basic income and services for all citizens, even if the authorities cannot be elected, or to be able to vote to elect the authorities, even if some people do not have access to a basic income and services?**

**Which political system seems best for [country]: a system that guarantees access to a basic income and services for all citizens, even if they cannot express their political opinions without fear or censorship, or a system in which everybody can express their**

**political opinions without fear or censorship, even if some people do not have access to a basic income and services?**

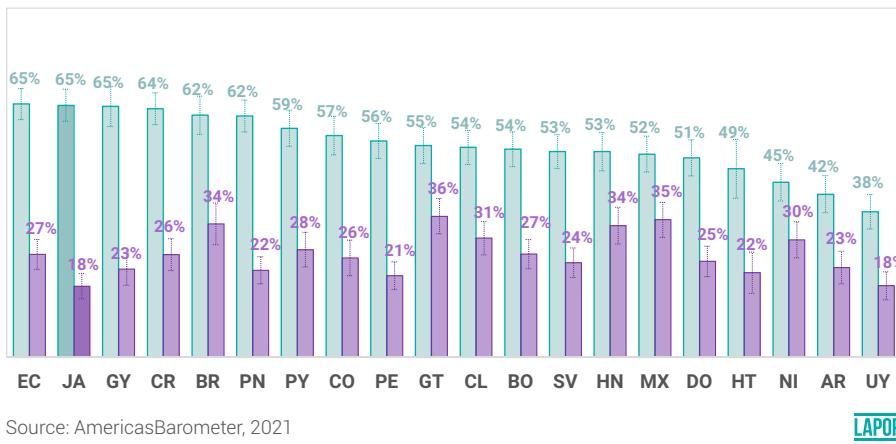
These questions measure the extent to which respondents are willing to sacrifice elections and freedom of expression in exchange for a system that guarantees material wellbeing.

**Figure 1.11** shows the proportion of individuals who said they preferred guaranteed income and services over those political rights. The striking finding in this figure is that *the public is far more willing to sacrifice elections than freedom of expression.*

**Figure 1.11**

**In most countries, majorities prefer a system that guarantees basic income/services over elections but not over freedom of speech**

■ % guaranteed basic income and services even if no elections ■ % guaranteed basic income and services even if no freedom of expression ..... 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

In all but four countries, majorities would be willing to give up holding elections in exchange for guaranteed income and services. In contrast, only a minority in each country is willing to give up freedom of expression for those same guarantees. Interestingly, Haiti appears toward the bottom in both measures. Compared to most other countries, Haitians appear less willing to sacrifice elections and freedom of expression for guaranteed basic income and services, even though they also express high levels of dissatisfaction with their democratic system.

Citizens in the LAC region seem willing to compromise on elections when considering alternative systems of government. This is troubling because a core component

of liberal democracies is the rule of elected representatives. What kinds of governments would citizens in the LAC region prefer if not electoral democracy? To provide further insight, the 2021 AmericasBarometer included two more new questions in a subset of countries:

**In deciding what laws to make, what do you think is best for [country]: should elected representatives of the people decide, or should citizens vote directly to decide each issue?**

**In deciding what laws to make, what do you think is best for [country]: should a group of experts decide, or representatives elected by the people decide?**



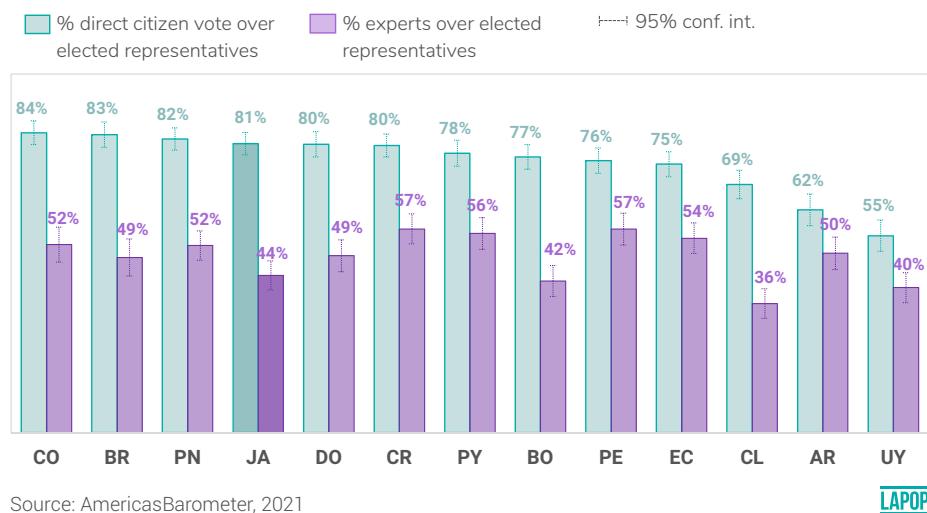
**The public is far more willing to sacrifice elections than freedom of expression**

**Figure 1.12** shows the proportion of individuals who said they prefer either direct democracy or rule by experts over government by elected representatives. Most notable, large majorities in every country where these questions were asked prefer direct democracy, with citizens voting directly on each issue. There

is considerably lower support for rule by a group of experts instead of elected representatives. However, even in this scenario, in half of the countries where this question was asked, a majority of the public expressed a preference for an alternative to representative democracy.

**Figure 1.12**

**Majorities across the LAC region prefer direct democracy, but not rule by experts**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

What do these responses tell us about the public's more general commitment to democracy? One way to find out is to ask whether those individuals who are less committed to elections, freedom of expression, and elected representatives also express lower levels of support for democracy in the abstract. Finding such a correlation would suggest that those who express lower support for democracy may do so because they

see less value in these features of a modern democratic system.

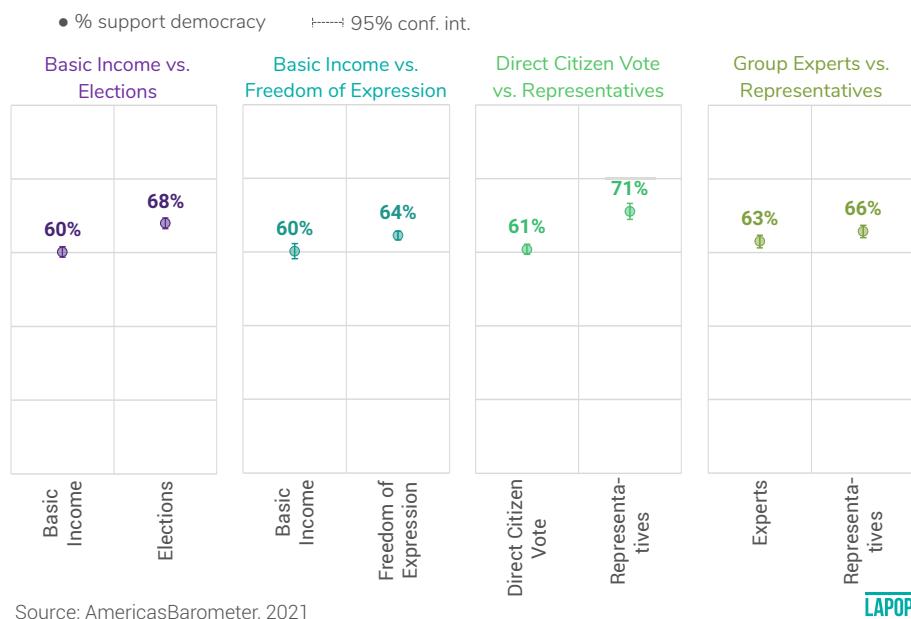
**Figure 1.13** shows how overall support for democracy in the abstract relates to the four tradeoff questions. Those who prefer a system that guarantees basic income and services are less likely to support democracy than those who prefer a system that includes elections or protects freedom of expression. The differences are

statistically significant.<sup>5</sup> For the mass public in the LAC region, there seems to be an association between the concept of democracy on one hand and elections and freedom of expression on the other. To the

extent that citizens value elections and protection from censorship, they are more likely to support democracy over alternative forms of government.

**Figure 1.13**

**Those who prefer elections, freedom of expression, and elected representatives are more likely to support democracy**



**Figure 1.13** also shows that those who believe elected representatives should make the laws are more likely to support democracy in the abstract compared to those who believe laws should be made by direct citizen vote on each issue. This difference is statistically significant.<sup>6</sup> Once again, there appears to be a strong association in the minds of LAC citizens between democracy and representation through elections.

On the other hand, we find no difference in levels of support for democracy in the abstract between citizens who prefer that experts make laws versus those who prefer elected representatives. In this case, the difference we observe is not statistically significant. It appears that attitudes about direct versus representative democracy are more consequential for support for democracy than attitudes about rule by experts versus representative democracy.

## Conclusions: Implications for Citizen Commitment to Democracy

**T**he results from the 2021 AmericasBarometer are not particularly good news for the state of public commitment to electoral democracy in the region. Despite recent gains at the margins, levels of support for and satisfaction with democracy remain lower than they were about a decade ago. And while citizens' tolerance for military coups has remained below the levels recorded a decade ago, their tolerance for executive coups has grown steadily.

The new questions introduced in the 2021 AmericasBarometer reveal that these patterns may stem from discontent with elections and elected representatives. In most countries where the question was asked, majorities are willing to sacrifice elections for a system that guarantees basic income and services. Large majorities in every country prefer that policy issues be decided by direct vote rather than by elected representatives. And those who prefer these alternatives to elections and elected representatives are less likely to say they support democracy over

any alternative form of government. Across the LAC region, people's commitment to democracy seems to be waning because they have become disillusioned with elections and with the legitimacy of their elected representatives.

**Oscar Castorena holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Vanderbilt University and is a statistician at LAPOP Lab.**

**Adriana Rosario is a student at the University of Puerto Rico and was a LAPOP Research Fellow in the summer of 2021.**

### Notes

- 1 Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019.
- 2 We do not observe this increase if we instead plot the mean level of support for democracy. This reflects the fact that, either due to the change in mode (from face-to-face to telephone) or due to true polarization of beliefs, people were more likely to respond with extreme values on the scale (strongly disagree or strongly agree) in 2021.
- 3 The number of countries included in the AmericasBarometer has increased since the initial rounds. Our conclusions in over-time analyses do not change if we focus only on the countries surveyed consistently since 2004.
- 4 Cohen, Smith, Moseley, and Layton. Forthcoming.
- 5 These findings hold when controlling for socioeconomic characteristics.
- 6 These findings hold when controlling for socioeconomic characteristics.



Chile, 2020: Protesters at the Plaza Baquedano in Santiago during a demonstration against inequality (R.M. Nunes/Shutterstock)

## Chapter 2

# Trust in Elections and Electoral Integrity

Ehab Alhosaini and Oscar Castorena

Dominican Republic, 2020: Rocks are used as weights to prevent ballots from flying away while officials count votes during the presidential election (Tatiana Fernandez/AP Photo)



**E**lections are central to democracy, and large-scale modern polities require government by elected representatives. But for elections to be an effective means of selecting governing representatives, citizens need to trust that electoral institutions are unbiased, elections are free and fair, and that the policies they pursue and the political system they uphold are legitimate. This chapter examines how much trust citizens of the Latin America and Caribbean region trust elections in their countries, as well as their perceptions of the integrity of elections.

## Main Findings

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- Trust in elections recovered across the region from 38% in 2018/19 to 42% in 2021, but most people continue to express low trust in their electoral systems
- There is wide variation across countries in terms of beliefs about election integrity: 75% of Uruguayans believe that votes are always counted correctly, but only 18% in Colombia, Guyana, and Jamaica agree
- Across the region, half of the public believes foreign governments sometimes influence elections
- Beliefs about election integrity correlate with overall trust in elections and support for democracy

The legitimacy of elections faces substantial threats in developing democracies like those in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. Irregularities and allegations of vote tampering are widespread, as in the high-profile cases of presidential elections in Bolivia in late 2019 and Peru in early 2021, where losing candidate Keiko Fujimori decried Pedro Castillo's victory as "fraudulent."<sup>1</sup> High levels of violence in the region also threaten the safety of elections in the region, as highlighted by Mexico's recent national elections, where political assassinations had increased by 33% over the prior election.<sup>2</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic added additional stress to electoral systems already facing challenges. National elections were postponed in numerous LAC countries because of restrictions related to the pandemic. Often these postponements were criticized by opposition leaders as an undemocratic power grab by incumbent governments.<sup>3</sup> Participation in these elections also

became far more challenging than normal. In countries with bans on public transportation due to public health concerns, rural voters found it more difficult to reach their polling places. In others, voters concerned about the pandemic preferred to avoid the crowds and lines typically associated with Election Day. In two of the more dramatic cases, turnout declined 16% in the Dominican Republic and a staggering 21% in Jamaica.<sup>4</sup>

The AmericasBarometer provides important insights into how the public in the LAC region views elections. Aside from providing a cross-national and over-time analysis of trust in elections, the 2021 survey includes novel questions that allow us to better understand citizen attitudes towards the conduct of elections in their country. What aspects of the conduct of elections are most consequential for their overall legitimacy? Can deficiencies in the integrity of elections undermine support for the political system more broadly?

**Nicaragua, 2021: A polling official uses indelible ink to mark the thumb of a voter after he cast his ballot during the presidential election on November 7, 2021 (Jorge Torres/Shutterstock)**



# Trust in Elections Increased, but Levels Are Still Low

The AmericasBarometer measures citizens' trust in the electoral process with the following item:

**To what extent do you trust elections in this country? Using any number on a scale from 1, "Not at all" to 7, "A lot"**

Trust in elections is measured via a 1-7 scale. We recode responses into a binary indicator where responses 1-4 are coded as not trusting and 5-7 are coded as trusting elections. **Figure 2.1** shows the proportion of respondents who trust elections

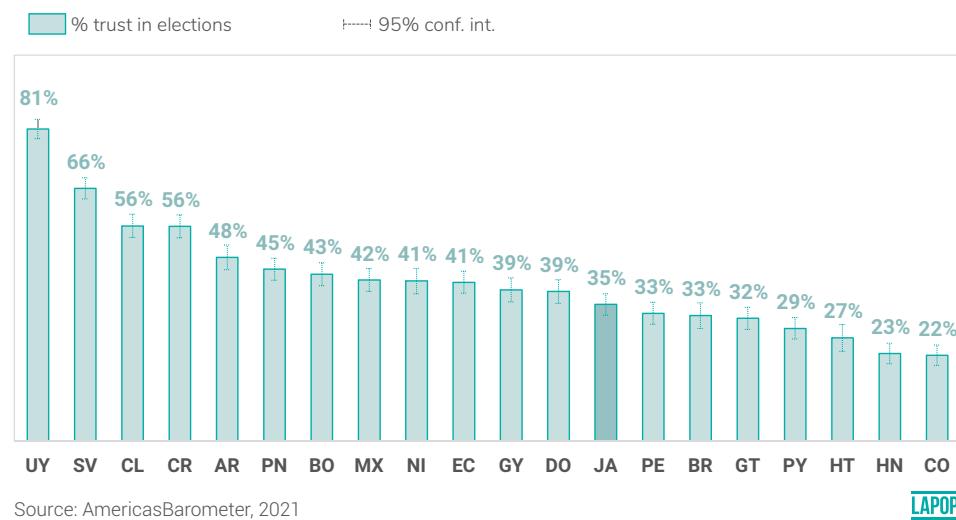
across the countries included in the 2021 round. The figure reveals considerable variation across countries, with a 59 percentage-point gap between the country with the highest level of trust (Uruguay at 81%) and the country with the lowest (Colombia at 22%). A majority of respondents express trust in elections in only 4 out of the 20 countries in the round.



**A majority of respondents express trust in elections in only 4 out of the 20 countries in the round**

**Figure 2.1**

**Trust in elections highest in Uruguay and lowest in Colombia**





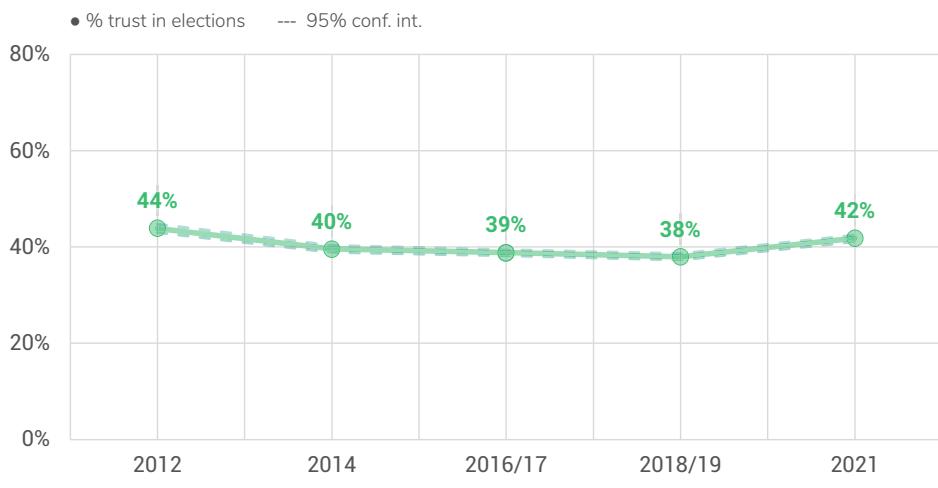
Older citizens  
have more positive  
assessments of their  
electoral systems  
than younger ones

The current levels of trust in elections reflect some change over previous rounds of the AmericasBarometer. **Figure 2.2** shows that while trust in elections was higher on average across the

LAC region in 2012, it declined subsequently and remained stable over multiple rounds. The findings in 2021 reflect something of a rebound in trust in elections from 38% in the 2018/19 round to 42% in 2021.

**Figure 2.2**

**Trust in elections rebounds to over 40% across LAC region in 2021**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2012-2021

LAPOP

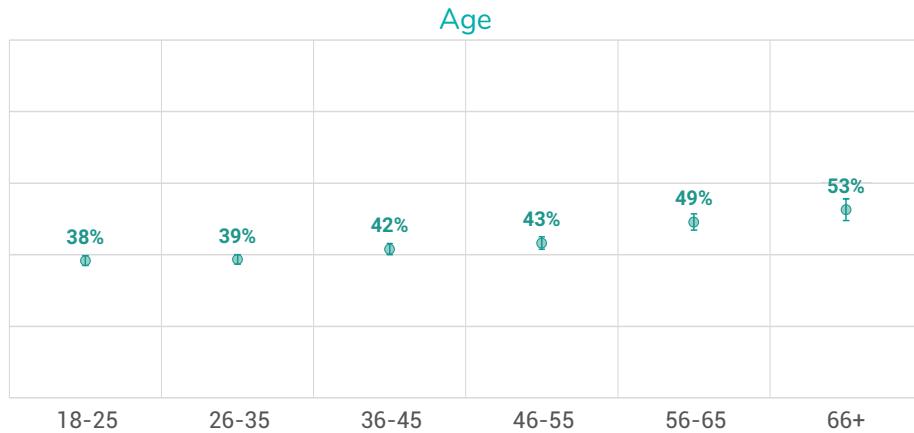
While trust in elections varies across countries, it also varies across individuals in the LAC region. In particular, **Figure 2.3** shows that age is an important predictor of trust in elections, with trust increasing as respondents get older. Across the region, only 38% of 18-25-year-olds express high levels of trust in

elections in their country, but this rises to 53% for respondents who are older than 66. Older citizens have more positive assessments of their electoral systems than younger ones, a finding that is consistent with trends we observed in the 2018/19 round.

**Figure 2.3**

**Older citizens are more likely to express trust in elections**

- % trust in elections
- 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

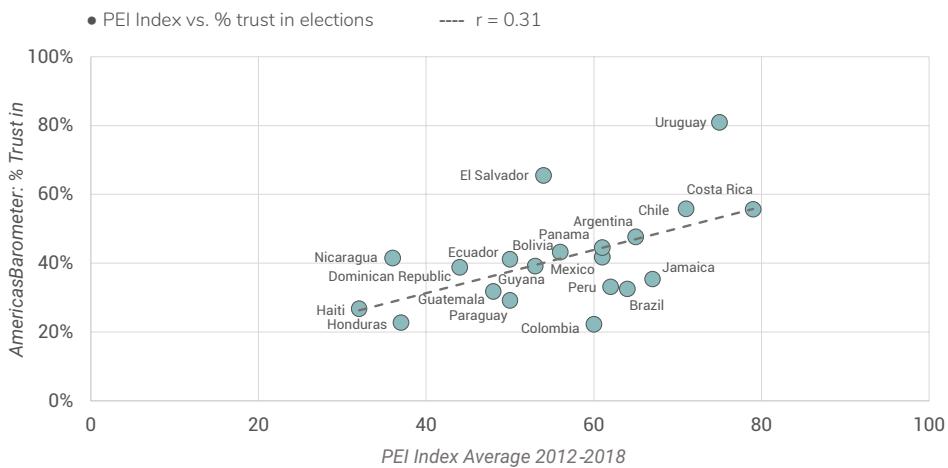
Along with age, we also analyzed the relationship that gender, education, and wealth have with trust in elections. For none of these demographic variables do we find a statistically significant linear relationship with trust in elections. Of the demographic characteristics in the AmericasBarometer, age appears to be the most relevant in predicting an individual's trust in elections.

How do these evaluations by the public compare to expert evaluations of electoral integrity? **Figure 2.4** answers this question by comparing the proportion of respondents who trust elections in each country of

the AmericasBarometer in 2021 and that country's mean score on the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Index between 2012 and 2018. The Electoral Integrity Project creates this index by fielding surveys of experts in electoral processes.<sup>5</sup> Overall, we see that expert assessments correlate strongly with the views of the public, but there are some notable outliers. Whereas Colombians express extremely low levels of trust in their elections, expert assessments are substantially more positive. Conversely, Salvadorans express high levels of trust in their elections despite expert assessments that are less rosy.

**Figure 2.4**

**The public's evaluations of elections correlate with expert assessments**



Source: PEI, 2012-2018; AmericasBarometer, 2021

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Peru, 2020: Man looks over protest posters that depict messages against presidential candidate Keiko Fujimori (Joel Salvador/Shutterstock)

AmericasBarometer results show considerable variation across countries in trust in elections, with few cases in which most citizens express trust in elections. At the same time, levels of trust in elections across the LAC region have rebounded since the 2018/19

round. Consistent with previous findings, age stands out as significant predictor of trust in the elections, with younger respondents expressing more skepticism about the electoral process. Finally, the public's evaluations of elections track expert assessments.



# Views on Election Integrity Track Trust in Elections and Support for Democracy

The 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer included a new set of questions that give a more nuanced picture of the public's views of the electoral process.<sup>5</sup> These questions are the following:

**I will mention some things that can happen during elections and ask you to indicate if they happen in [country]...Votes are counted correctly and fairly. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?**

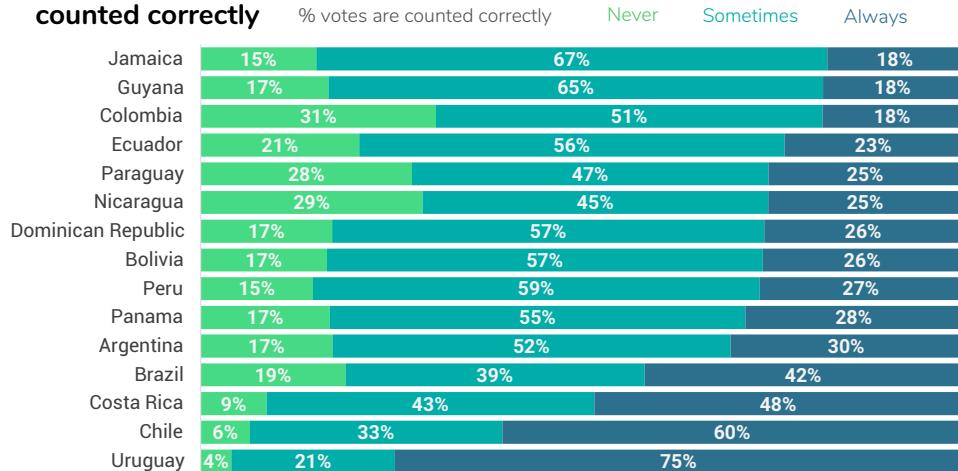
**The rich buy the election results. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?**

**Politicians can find out who each person voted for. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?**

**Some foreign governments may influence the election results of [country]. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?**

**Figure 2.5**

**Only in Uruguay and Chile do majorities believe votes are always counted correctly**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

**Figure 2.5** shows responses to the question about whether votes are counted correctly. Uruguay and Chile show widespread positive evaluations, with 75% and 60% respectively, saying that votes

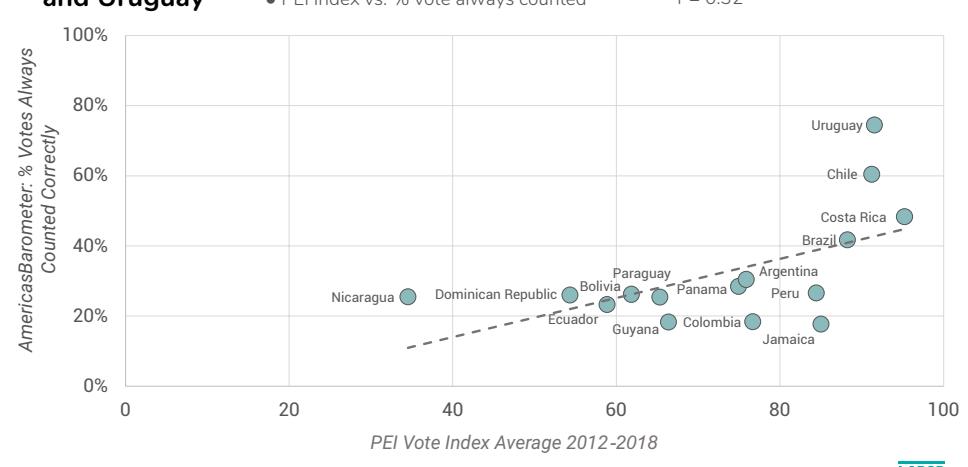
are always counted correctly. In contrast, only 18% of respondents in Guyana, Colombia, and Jamaica believe that votes are always counted correctly in their countries.

In order to provide greater context for the cross-national patterns we observe in **Figure 2.5**, we turn again to data provided by the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity project. Among the individual factors that make up the project's summary index of electoral integrity is an assessment of the vote count, which the PEI project constructs from expert

evaluations of ballot box security, whether results were announced without undue delay, whether votes are counted fairly, and whether international or domestic monitors were restricted. The resulting index ranges from 0 to 100, with higher values denoting higher integrity of the count.

**Figure 2.6**

**Both the public and the experts assess the vote count highly in Chile and Uruguay**



Source: PEI, 2012-2018; AmericasBarometer, 2021

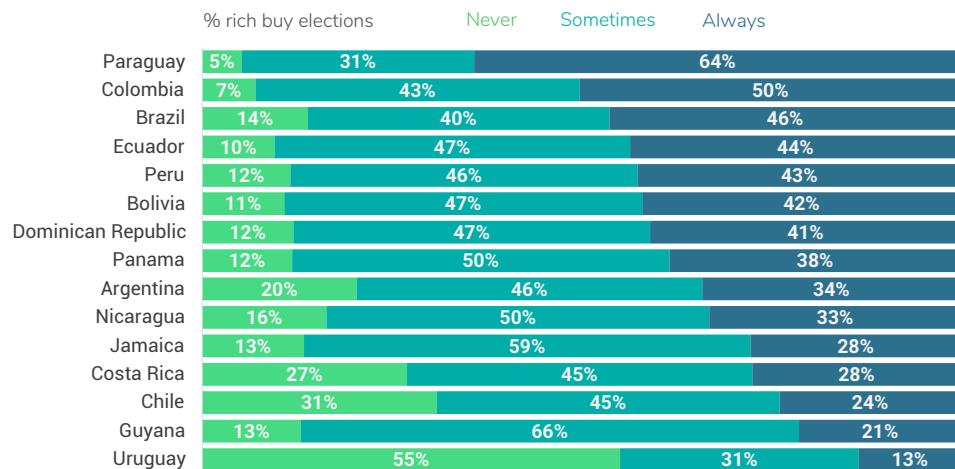
LAPOP

**Figure 2.6** shows the relationship between these expert assessments and the public's evaluation of the counting of votes. Only among the high-performing cases is there agreement between the public and the experts. In Uruguay and Chile (and to a lesser extent, Costa Rica and Brazil) both the public and experts evaluate the counting process highly. These are the only

countries in the LAC region where more than a third of the population believes votes are always counted correctly. For the rest of the cases, there appears to be no correlation between the public's evaluations and expert assessments. In most of these cases, the public is far more skeptical than the experts about the degree to which votes are counted correctly.

**Figure 2.7**

**Nearly two-thirds of Paraguayans believe the rich always buy elections**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

Our second question on election integrity asked respondents the extent to which they thought the rich are able to buy elections in their country. **Figure 2.7** shows that Paraguay stands out in the region, with nearly two-thirds of Paraguayans believing the rich always buy elections. In Colombia, this assessment reaches 50%. In no other country does a majority believe the rich always buy elections,

but majorities in every country but Uruguay believe the rich either sometimes or always buy elections. In only in two countries (Chile and Uruguay) is the share of those saying the rich never buy elections larger than the share that say they always do. Across the LAC region, the large swaths of the public believe that elections are tilted in favor of the rich.

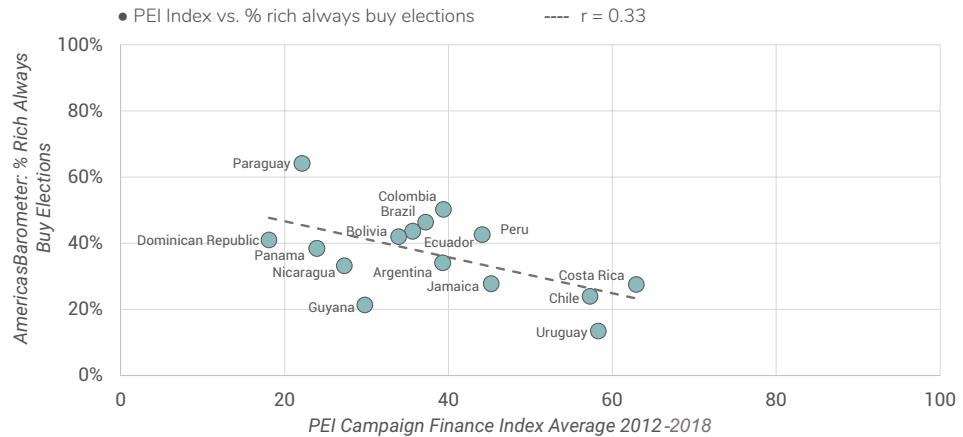


**Majorities in every country but Uruguay believe the rich either sometimes or always buy elections**

o

**Figure 2.8**

**Public beliefs about the influence of the rich correlate with expert assessments of the integrity of campaign finance**



Source: PEI, 2012-2018; AmericasBarometer, 2021

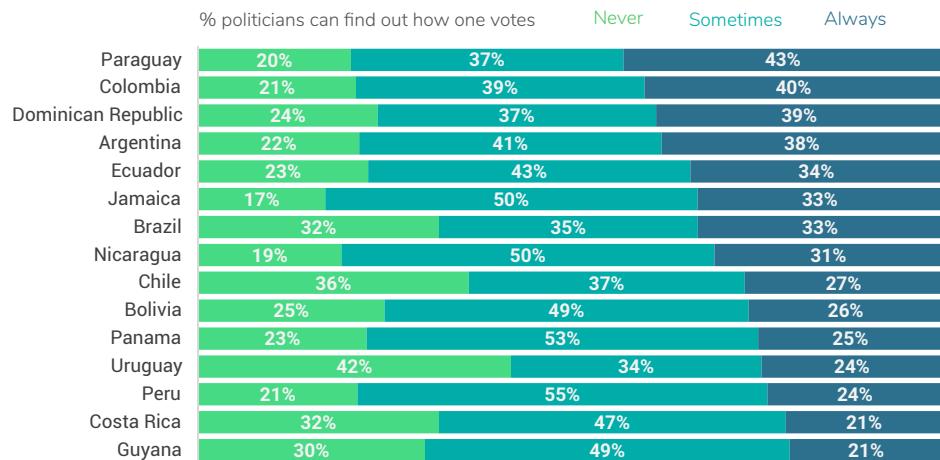
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**Figure 2.8** again compares these results with the assessments of experts. Among the factors that make up the PEI project's summary index of electoral integrity is a set of measures of campaign finance, including expert evaluations of equitable access to public subsidies and political donations, the transparency of financial accounts, the influence of the wealthy in elections, and whether state resources are improperly used for campaigning. **Figure 2.8** shows a striking negative relationship

between the two measures. Countries such as Paraguay, where a high proportion of the public believe the rich always buy elections, also score very low on the index measuring the integrity of campaign finance. Conversely, countries where fewer people believe the rich always buy elections receive high ratings from experts for their campaign finance. These patterns suggest that the method in which campaigns are financed affects citizens' beliefs about election integrity.

**Figure 2.9**

**Majorities across the LAC region express skepticism about ballot secrecy**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

The AmericasBarometer also asked respondents to assess the secrecy of the ballot in their country.

**Figure 2.9** shows the cross-national variation on this question. Here, Paraguay and Colombia again show very negative assessments, with 43% and 40% of respondents, respectively, believing that politicians can always find out how an

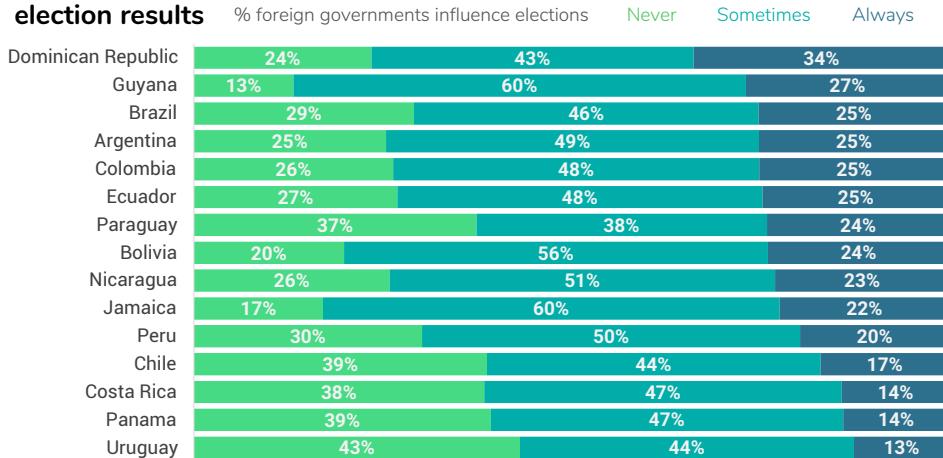
individual votes. In contrast, in Guyana and Costa Rica, only about one in five respondents expressed that sentiment. Strikingly, majorities in every country believe that politicians can at least sometimes find out how an individual votes, pointing to serious public concerns about ballot secrecy.



**Strikingly, majorities in every country believe that politicians can at least sometimes find out how an individual votes, pointing to serious public concerns about ballot secrecy**

**Figure 2.10**

**Large majorities believe foreign governments at least sometimes influence election results**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

Finally, respondents were asked whether they think foreign governments influence elections in their country. **Figure 2.10** shows substantially less variation across countries on this score. A majority of respondents in the LAC region, sometimes large majorities,

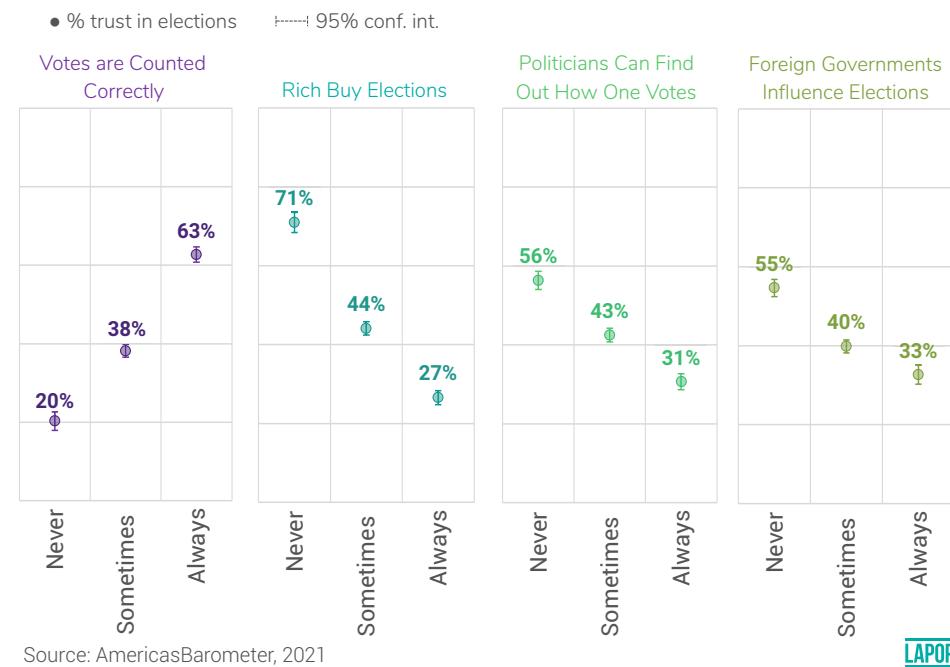
believe that foreign governments sometimes or always influence elections in their country. The rates of those who think this always happens are highest in the Dominican Republic, with 34%, and lowest in Costa Rica (14%), Panama (14%), and Uruguay (13%).

Ecuador, 2021: Presidential candidate Guillermo Lasso during a campaign event in Quito days before the election (Vincent Ricci/Shutterstock)



**Figure 2.11**

**Assessments of election integrity predict overall trust in elections**



Of these evaluations of election integrity, which is most important for overall trust in elections? **Figure 2.11** shows the proportion of respondents who trust elections based on how they answered each of our four electoral integrity questions. All four appear to be correlated with overall trust in elections: those who express more skepticism about the integrity of the vote count and ballot secrecy, those who think the rich buy elections, and those who think foreign governments influence elections more often all express substantially lower levels of overall trust in elections.<sup>6</sup>

Still, there are important differences in the magnitudes of the relationships between these responses. Those who think votes are never counted correctly are 68% less likely to express overall trust in elections

than those who say votes are always counted correctly (a difference of 43 percentage points). Similarly, those who say the rich always buy elections are 62% less likely to trust their elections than those who say the rich never buy elections (a difference of 44 percentage points). In contrast, those who think politicians can always find out an individual's vote or who say foreign governments always influence elections are 45% and 40% less likely to express trust in their elections, respectively, than those who say politicians can never find out how one voted or that foreign governments never influence elections (differences of 25 and 22 percentage points, respectively). Assessments about the vote count and the influence of the rich appear to be especially consequential for citizens' overall trust in their electoral processes.



**Assessments about the vote count and the influence of the rich appear to be especially consequential for citizens' overall trust in their electoral processes**

How do these evaluations of election integrity relate to broader democratic attitudes? Are citizens who are skeptical about the integrity of their electoral process still committed to democratic institutions in principle? To answer this question, we study the relationship between assessment of election integrity and our measure of support for democracy based on the following question:

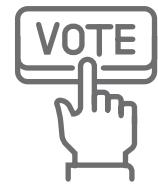
**Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent**

**do you agree or disagree with this statement? With responses ranging from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 7 “Strongly agree”**

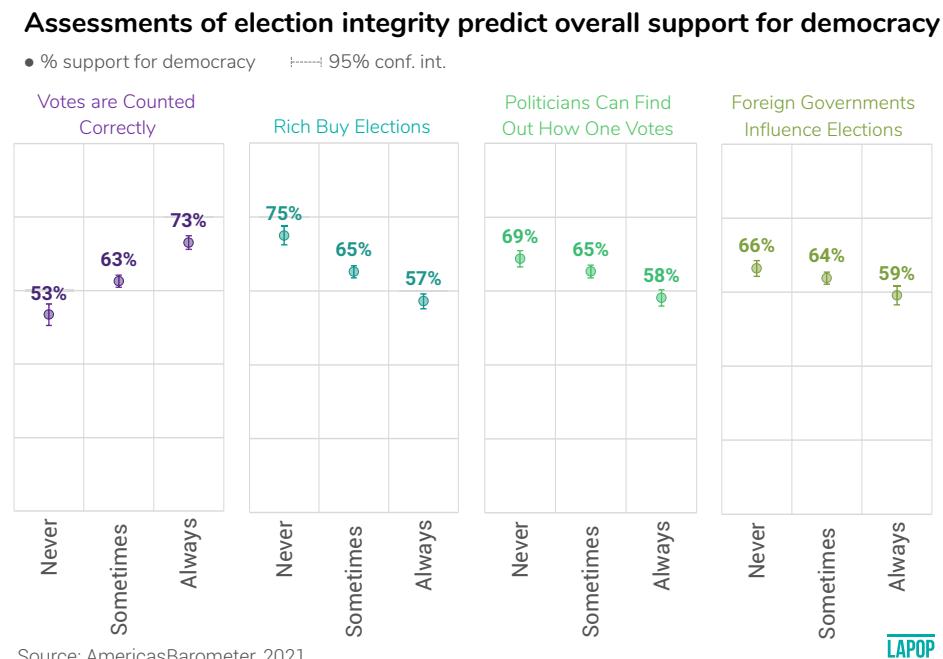
We code responses on the agreement end of the scale (values ranging from five to seven) as support for democracy.

**Figure 2.12** shows the proportion of respondents who support democracy based on how they answered each of our four electoral integrity questions.

**Figure 2.12**



**Beliefs about votes being counted correctly and whether the rich buy elections are more strongly associated with democratic support than the other measures of electoral integrity**



The results in **Figure 2.12** mirror those with regard to trust in elections. In general, citizens in the LAC region who have more negative views of election integrity also express less support for democracy as a principle. Those who express more skepticism about the integrity of the vote count and ballot secrecy, who think the rich buy elections, and who think foreign governments

influence elections more often all express lower levels of support for democracy as a better form of government than the alternatives.<sup>7</sup> As with overall trust in elections, beliefs about votes being counted correctly and whether the rich buy elections are more strongly associated with democratic support than the other measures of electoral integrity.

# Conclusions: Implications for the Legitimacy of Elections

Data from the 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer show that while overall trust in elections has rebounded somewhat in the LAC region, large portions of the public remain skeptical about the integrity of the electoral processes in their country. Moreover, these attitudes about the integrity of elections, which include beliefs about the vote count, ballot secrecy, the influence of the rich, and foreign influence, are consequential for both the legitimacy of elections and support for democracy more generally. Given recent controversies and conflicts over election results across the region, these views of election integrity pose a potential threat for the health of democracy.

At the same time, our findings offer some basis for optimism. We find that beliefs about whether votes are counted correctly and the influence of the rich are most related to trust in elections and support for democracy. These particular

attitudes also correlate with expert assessments about the quality of these processes, showing that public perceptions do reflect tangible policy choices and outcomes in election administration. This is especially the case for the influence of the rich in elections, where we see a clear connection between the integrity of campaign finance and public perceptions. This suggests that concrete policy changes, like those that provide equitable access to campaign resources, may help improve citizens' beliefs about election integrity, their overall trust in elections, and their support for democracy.

*Ehab Alhosaini is a student at Vanderbilt University and was a LAPOP Research Fellow in the summer of 2021.*

*Oscar Castorena holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Vanderbilt University and is a statistician at LAPOP Lab.*

## Notes

- 1 See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/20/peru-elite-election-pedro-castillo-keiko-fujimori>
- 2 See <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/bloody-mexican-election-campaign-exposes-chronic-security-woes-2021-05-23/>
- 3 See <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bolivia-politics-election/bolivia-election-delayed-to-october-as-pandemic-bites-opposition-cries-foul-idUSKCN24O2PY>
- 4 See <https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/en/home/presscenter/director-s-graph-for-thought/the-virus-and-the-votes--how-is-covid-19-changing-voter-turnout-.html>
- 5 Norris and Grömping 2019.
- 6 These findings hold when controlling for socioeconomic characteristics.
- 7 These findings hold when controlling for socioeconomic characteristics.



# Spotlight on Electoral Fairness, Voter Apathy and Democratic Legitimacy

By Balford Lewis

Jamaica's electoral system rests on an uneasy foundation. Factors such as administrative and legislative deficiencies, actual and alleged misconduct at different stages of the electoral process, pre- and post-election violence, and various forms of voter intimidation have converged to compromise election integrity for many years. Noted political scientist and pollster Carl Stone considered many of the problems and accusations of voter irregularities and administrative blunders to have been rooted in the social discontent caused by partisan antagonism. Whatever the causes, the effect of these activities and challenges has been the erosion of trust in the electoral system.

That lack of trust manifests in the form of voter apathy. In September 2020 general elections, voter turnout was only 37%, the lowest in an election since 1983 when the main opposition party boycotted the polls, and significantly lower than the 87% in the 1980 election. The result was a landslide victory for the incumbent, the Jamaica Labour Party, which won in 49 of the 63 seats in the Parliament despite earning the support of only 21% of eligible electors.

A healthy and sustainable democracy is built on a foundation of an active and inclusive citizenship, a key element of this being the popular participation of citizens in the political process, particularly by way the vote. The perennially low voter turnout in national elections in Jamaica over the past decades should therefore be a cause for some anxiety, as voter participation acts a gauge of the degree of 'vibrancy' of a democracy and the legitimacy of government.

In order to improve efficiency and build trust in elections, some substantive legislative, political and structural

changes have been implemented at all levels of the system. In one of its recent reports, the Electoral Commission of Jamaica (EOJ) points to landmark 2016/2017 legislative initiatives – Representation of the People (Amendment) Act (2016) and Election Campaign Finance Regulations (2017) – with the claim that these Acts have made "Jamaica the first country in the Caribbean to have implemented campaign finance legislation and has cemented its position as a leader in electoral reform" to the extent that the country "remains a role model for the region and indeed the rest of the world."<sup>1</sup>

The relatively smooth running of elections over recent decades is evidence that the reforms have, indeed, been instrumental in building some level of efficiency in the country's election machinery. However, public opinion surveys, including this series, continue to report comparatively low levels of public confidence in the integrity of different aspects of the process. Presumably, the restoration of public trust in elections will require more than visible improvements in the conduct of the actual poll.

<sup>1</sup> Electoral Commission of Jamaica. 2017. "Election Campaign Financing: Legislation & Regulations." Available as PDF on <https://oas.org>.



Photo by Victoria Herring,  
Vanderbilt University CLACX Latin  
American Images Photography  
Competition 2017

## Chapter 3

# Rule of Law: Corruption, Crime, and Justice for Gender-Based Violence

Mariana V. Ramírez Bustamante,  
Facundo Salles Kobilanski, and Adam D. Wolsky

Mexico, 2020:  
Protesters march  
against gender-based  
violence in Mexico City  
on International Day  
for the Elimination  
of Violence against  
Women. Erika  
Martínez, speaking  
through a megaphone,  
became an activist after  
authorities refused to  
investigate the sexual  
abuse of her 7-year-old  
daughter (Bénédicte  
Desrus/Sipa via AP  
Images)



Democracy thrives when the public experiences and perceives a robust rule of law. The AmericasBarometer permits a multi-dimensional assessment of the public's view on the rule of law. In this chapter, we focus on (1) experiences with corruption and crime, (2) perceptions of political corruption and neighborhood insecurity, and (3) expectations regarding police and judicial responses to gender-based violence (GBV). The assessment yields a mix of some positive and some concerning results regarding the state of the rule of law in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region.

## Main Findings

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- **More than three in five people in the average LAC country believe that most or all politicians are corrupt.** Those who are more educated are more likely to believe that there is widespread corruption among politicians
- **Corruption victimization by the police remains stable, but bribe solicitation by public officials has increased in 2021 compared to the 2018/19 round.** Women, younger individuals, those with more education, and those who are wealthier are more likely to be victims of bribe solicitation
- **Crime victimization decreased in 2021 compared to 2018/19.** Men, younger, more educated, and wealthier individuals are more likely to be victims of crime
- **Neighborhood insecurity decreased in 2021 compared to 2018/19.** Women are more likely to say they feel unsafe in their neighborhood, as compared to men
- **Perceptions of fair treatment and due process for gender-based violence (GBV) victims are gendered:** women are less likely to agree that GBV perpetrators will be punished. That difference in perceptions persists when accounting for age, education, and wealth
- **Deficiencies in the rule of law shape trust and support for democracy:** those who perceive and experience a failure of institutions are less trusting of those in their community and the national government and are less supportive of democracy

## What is the Rule of Law?

A country with a strong rule of law exhibits laws that allow for accountability (for government and private actors), justice (laws are clear, applied evenly, and protect fundamental rights), transparency (processes are accessible and transparent), and equitable and impartial dispute resolution (justice is swift and ethical). According to the World Justice Project (WJP), these four principles jointly signal to citizens that all experience equal treatment with respect to the provision of law and order.

For decades, researchers have shown that the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region's rule of law tends to be informal and weak: there often exists a gap between the law as it is written and the law as it is abided and enforced. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a modern lens through which to perceive this

distinction, with constitutionally questionable enforcement of strict lockdown measures in some places and vaccine distribution scandals in others. Quite often citizens are left to march through a landscape in which justice is unevenly applied and in which public officials seem distant and unreliable. An inconsistent

**Bolivia, 2020: Former interior minister, Carlos Romero, is escorted by police after a Supreme Court judge ordered he remain in custody. Romero, who served under former President Evo Morales, was arrested on corruption charges (Juan Karita/AP/Shutterstock)**



adherence to rules is likely to shape citizens' views of who benefits from democratic governance and, when those views are negative, may erode satisfaction with and – potentially – support for democracy itself.

When assessing the rule of law from the perspective of citizens' views and experiences, a key question is the extent to which both citizens and public officials abide by formal rules guaranteeing security and justice. Experts on the rule of law advocate for multi-dimensional assessments that are anchored by measures of corruption, security, and justice. The World Justice Project (WJP) takes such an approach<sup>1</sup> and finds considerable variability in the strength of rule of law in the region.<sup>2</sup>

Pre-pandemic change tracked by the WJP found that most countries saw modest improvements in the rule of law score between 2017-2018 and 2020, with the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, and El Salvador making relatively big gains.<sup>3</sup> In the latter case, El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele, elected in 2019, has been controversial in his leadership style but oversaw a reduction in crime, which boosted the country's WJP score. On the other hand, Nicaragua saw a major drop in its score on the rule of law.

A more recent perspective is provided by V-Dem's Pandemic Backsliding Project (PanDem), which tracked violations of rights and executive overreach from March 2020 to June



Peru, 2020: Supporter of ousted President Martín Vizcarra confronts riot police in Lima as officers block protesters from reaching Congress while lawmakers swear in Manuel Merino as interim president (Rodrigo Abd/AP/Shutterstock)



**People who  
experience a failure of  
political institutions  
are less trusting of  
the government and  
less supportive of  
democracy**

2021. Both high-scoring countries on the WJP index, such as Chile and Argentina, and low-scoring countries, such as Ecuador and Honduras, registered at least moderate violations of civil rights by security agents. El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico have recently experienced executive overreach. For example, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, Bukele ordered armed forces in El Salvador to occupy the legislature as a forceful demonstration of support for legislation that would provide millions of dollars to security forces.<sup>4</sup> In Guatemala, Alejandro Giammattei and his legislative allies have purged and/or blocked independent figures in the judiciary.<sup>5</sup>

How does the public perceive the extent to which basic rights are protected in the region in 2021? The AmericasBarometer offers unique insight into the mass public's views

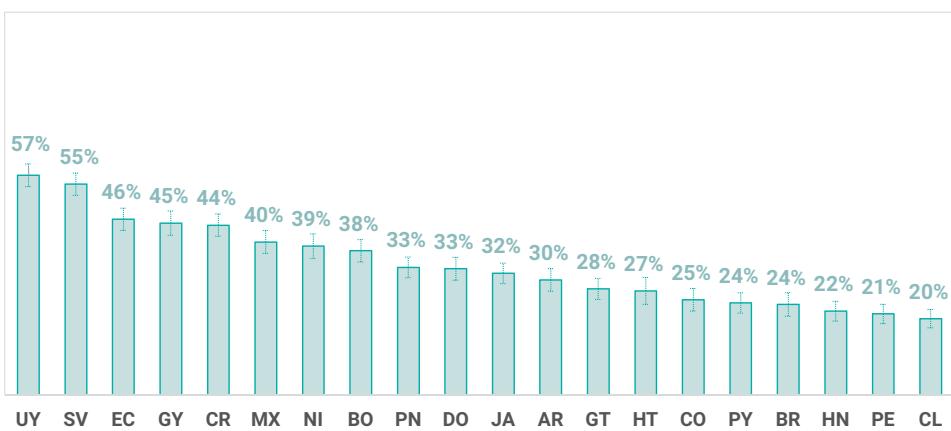
of the application of the rule of law during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer has asked how well individuals feel that their basic rights are protected.

**Figure 3.1** shows the proportion reporting that basic rights are protected across countries in the 2021 AmericasBarometer. There are only two countries in which more than 50% said their basic rights are protected—Uruguay and El Salvador. It is notable that in Chile, a country that ranks quite high in the WJP index, only about one in five say their basic rights are protected, a result that is on par with Peru and Honduras. This discrepancy—between how experts rank the rule of law and citizens' perceptions of how extensively basic rights are protected—underscores the importance of an opinion-based assessment of the rule of law.

### Figure 3.1

**In half of the LAC region, less than 33% report basic rights are protected**

% who believe basic rights are protected 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

In this chapter, we offer a multi-dimensional assessment of the public's view on the rule of law, with a focus on three core dimensions: corruption, crime, and justice. Specifically, we focus on (1) perceptions of and experience with corruption, (2) perceptions of insecurity and crime victimization, and (3) the enforcement and punishment of GBV. Our investigation reveals who in the LAC mass public experiences a rule of law that is more (or less) effective. From a normative perspective, deficiencies in the rule of law are problematic and have

consequences. In that regard, we assess the relationship between citizen reports on corruption, crime, and gender-based violence, on the one hand, and their levels of interpersonal trust, trust in the government to do what is right, and support for democracy, on the other. We find that those who perceive and experience a failure of institutions are less trusting of those in their community, trust the government less, and are less supportive of democracy over other forms of government.

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## Corruption

**C**orruption is pervasive across the LAC region. Many residents have experienced being asked for bribes by public officials in the education sector, in the courts, and by the police.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, high-level corruption scandals have plagued the region, with little heed to level of development: scandals have emerged in relatively poor countries like Guatemala and Haiti and in the more developed Chile and Costa Rica.

This is highlighted by the fallout from 2014 to present day of the "Lava Jato" (Car Wash in English) investigations in Brazil, which uncovered a massive corruption scheme involving the Brazilian construction conglomerate Odebrecht and high-profile politicians in many countries in the LAC region. Equally troubling is the recent shut down of internationally backed corruption commissions across Central America.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in 2020-2021, the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it new opportunities for graft, unfair access to resources (e.g., vaccines), and disregard for official rules (e.g., COVID-19 protocols) by political elites.<sup>8</sup>

Corruption violates the norm of democratic political equality by excluding average citizens from public services of which they are entitled.<sup>9</sup> As such, corruption not only has deleterious economic impacts,<sup>10</sup> but it also holds the potential to reduce trust in the government and institutions.<sup>11</sup> This can create a vicious cycle: as perceptions of corruption reduces trust in political institutions, people become more tolerant of corruption.<sup>12</sup> Direct experience with corruption can weaken both citizens' trust in institutions and their levels of interpersonal trust.<sup>13</sup>



About one in four say  
that all politicians  
in their country are  
involved in corruption

## Most Citizens in LAC Region Believe Political Corruption is Widespread

To what extent does the public perceive corruption among the political class? To answer this, the AmericasBarometer asks the following:

**Thinking of politicians in [country], how many do you believe are involved in corruption?**

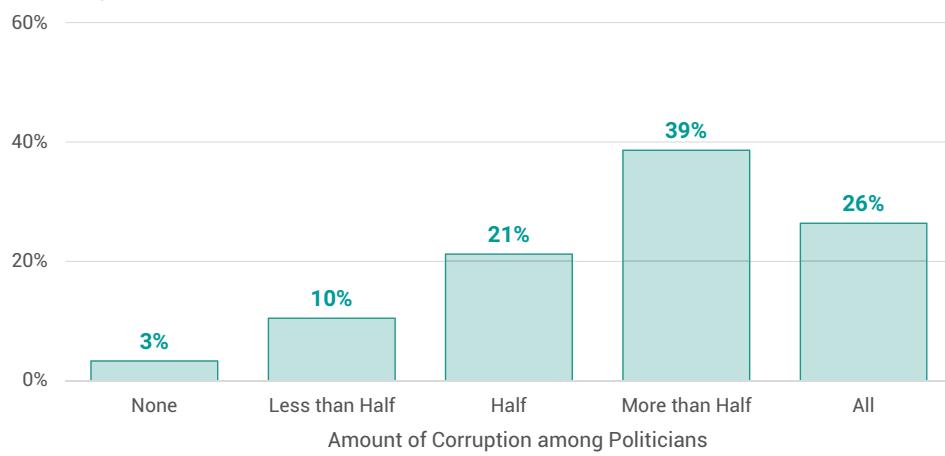
- (1) None
- (2) Less than half of them
- (3) Half of them
- (4) More than half of them
- (5) All

**Figure 3.2** shows the region-average distribution of perceived political corruption. The results are striking: nearly two-thirds of citizens in the LAC region believe that more than half or all politicians are

corrupt. About one in four say that *all* politicians in their country are involved in corruption. Conversely, only 13% say fewer than half or no politicians in their country are corrupt. These levels of perceived corruption have been relatively stable over time. Since the question was first asked in the 2016/17 round, more than three in five citizens in the average country have said that more than half their politicians are corrupt.

**Figure 3.2**

**Nearly two-thirds in the LAC region believe that most politicians are corrupt in 2021**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

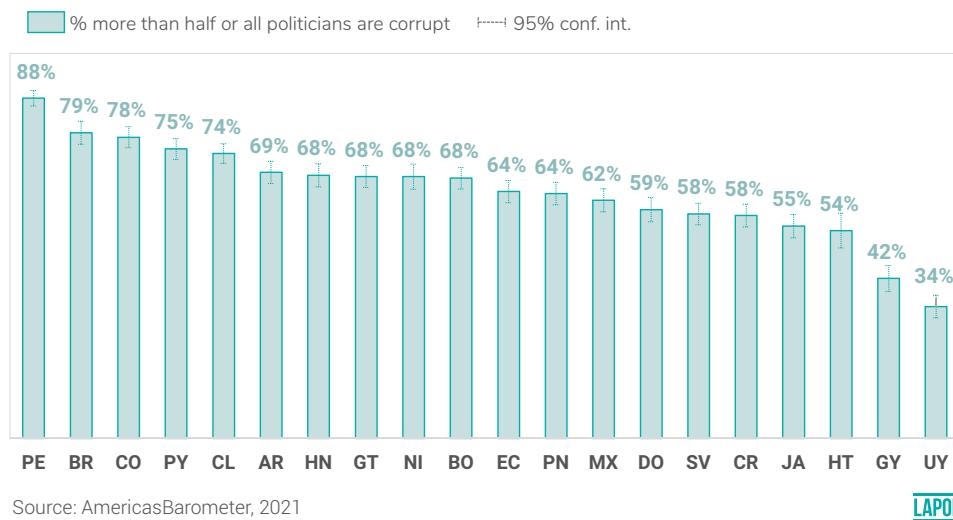
LAPOP

Perceptions of political corruption vary across countries. **Figure 3.3** reports the percentage of those in each country who said more than half or all politicians are corrupt. Peru and Brazil top the list with over four in five saying that more than half or all politicians in their country are corrupt. Both Peru and Brazil have experienced corruption scandals

involving recent ex-presidents and other major political figures, with new cases emerging near or during the 2021 fieldwork for the AmericasBarometer. On the other end of the spectrum is Uruguay, where only just over one in three say that more than half of politicians are corrupt.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 3.3**

**Corruption perceptions are highest in Peru and lowest in Uruguay**



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

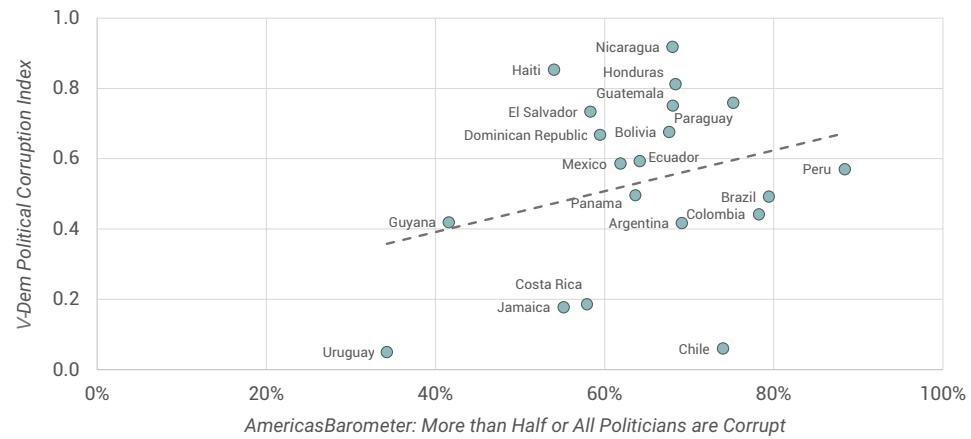
To what extent do perceptions of corruption among the public line up with assessments by experts? The V-Dem project calculates a corruption score for each country based on a survey of experts. **Figure 3.4** shows the relationship between V-Dem's 0-1 score and the percentage of those who believe that more than half or all

politicians in their country are corrupt. Although the correlation is positive, it is relatively weak: in particular, experts assess political corruption to be far lower than citizens report in Chile, Jamaica, and Costa Rica and higher than citizens report in countries such as Nicaragua and, especially, Haiti.

**Figure 3.4**

## The public does not always agree with expert views on political corruption

- % more than half or all politicians are corrupt vs. V-Dem score      ----  $r = 0.08$



Source: V-Dem, 2020; AmericasBarometer, 2021

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Who perceives high levels of corruption among politicians in the region? While there are no differences between men and women in the percentages that believe more than half or all politicians are corrupt, there are significant patterns by education, age, and wealth. **Figure 3.5** shows that the youngest cohort and those who are 56 and older have lower perceptions of political corruption when compared to those who are 26-55. Those who have more

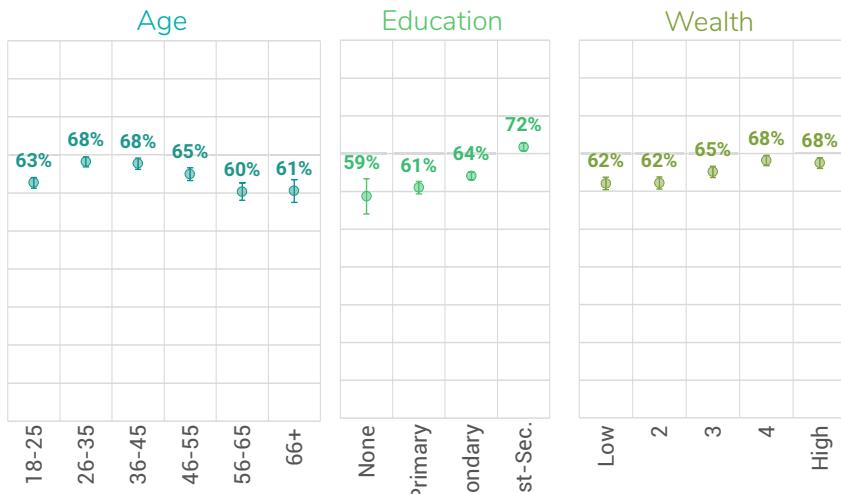
education—who tend to be wealthier and have a higher income—have higher perceptions of corruption among politicians. There is an over 13-percentage point difference between those with at least a post-secondary education as compared to those who have no formal education. The wealthiest respondents are about five percentage points more likely to say more than half or all politicians are corrupt as compared to the least wealthy.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 3.5**

**The less educated, least wealthy, youngest, and oldest have lower perceptions of corruption**

- % more than half or all politicians are corrupt

----- 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

**LAPOP**



Spain, 2020: People from various Latin American countries hold flags as they protest the violation of the rights of indigenous people (Yana Demenko/Shutterstock)

## For the First Time in the AmericasBarometer, the Rate of Experiences with Corruption Victimization by Government Employees Matches that by the Police

**D**ay-to-day, or street-level “petty corruption,” is another deviation from strict adherence to the rule of law. As we have seen in the history of the AmericasBarometer, it is common to hear about instances in which the police or government employees take advantage of their position by soliciting a bribe from a citizen for services to which all are entitled. To measure this form of corruption victimization, the 2021 AmericasBarometer asked respondents if they had been solicited a bribe by the police or by public officials.

**Has a police officer asked you for a bribe in the last twelve months?**  
(0) No (1) Yes

**In the last twelve months, did any government employee ask you for a bribe?** (0) No (1) Yes

**Figure 3.6** displays the percentage of the public that is solicited for a bribe by police (right panel) and/or public officials (left panel).

Across both measures, Mexico has the highest levels of experiences with bribe solicitation while Chile, Uruguay and Brazil have the lowest. In general, corruption victimization by the police is more common than by public officials, although some populations—e.g., those in Mexico, Paraguay, and Guatemala—are about equally likely to be solicited for both types of bribes.<sup>17</sup>

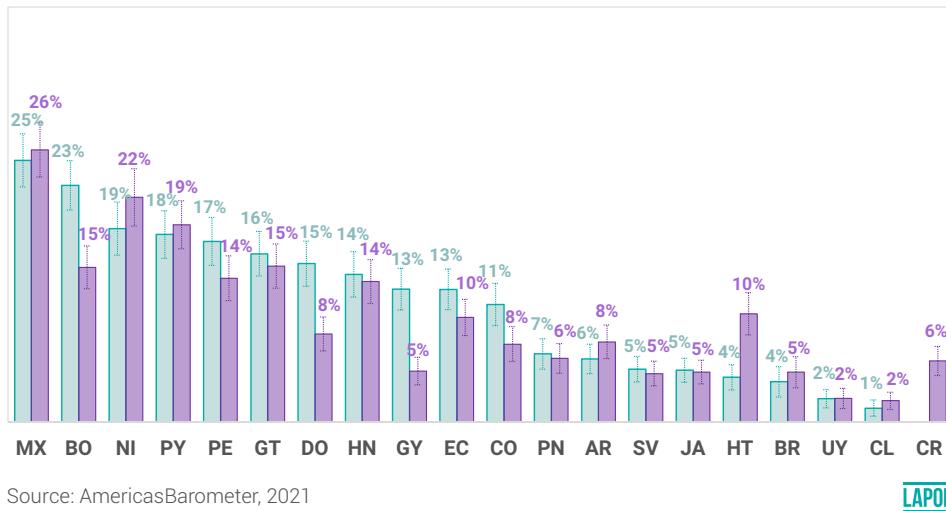
**Mexico, 2021:**  
Mexican Federal  
Police patrol the  
streets in the city  
of Ciudad Juarez  
(Frontpage/  
Shutterstock)



**Figure 3.6**

**Bribe solicitation in 2021 is highest in Mexico and lowest in Chile**

■ % police officer solicited a bribe ■ % public official solicited a bribe ----- 95% conf. int.

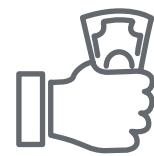


Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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**Figure 3.7** shows that levels of bribe solicitation by police officers have nudged upwards a small amount but generally remained relatively

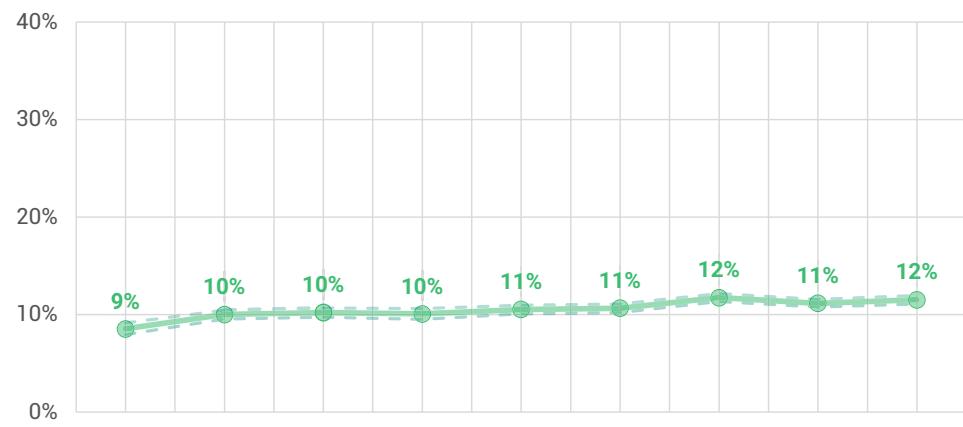
constant: since 2006, between 10 to 12 percent of LAC residents report being solicited for a bribe from police.



**Figure 3.7**

**Bribe solicitation by police in the LAC region has remained steady since 2006**

• % police officer solicited a bribe --- 95% conf. int.



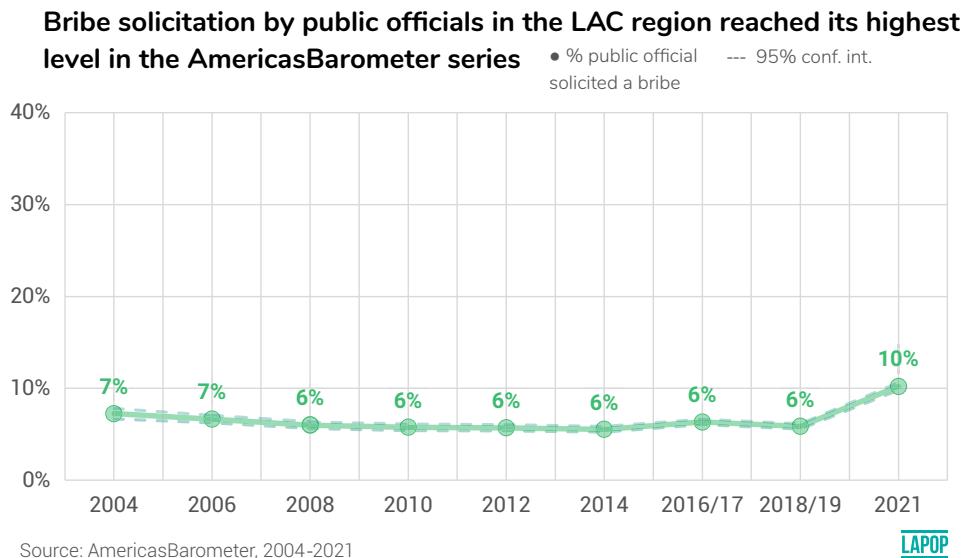
Source: AmericasBarometer, 2004-2021

Since 2006, between 10 and 12 percent of LAC residents report being solicited for a bribe from police

**Figure 3.8** shows that rates of experience with bribe solicitation by public officials have significantly increased in the last two years or so: from 6% to 10%. Between 2004 and 2019 about 5-7% of LAC residents—on average—had suffered bribe victimization by public officials. This number increased to over 10% in 2021. Between the 2018/19 and the 2021 AmericasBarometer, bribe victimization either remained the same or increased in all LAC countries surveyed in both rounds.

The increase was particularly stark in Nicaragua (18 percentage points), Mexico (12 percentage points), and Paraguay (11 percentage points). What accounts for this big rise? The pandemic may provide some answers. For example, Transparency International has highlighted how corruption has infiltrated into the public health domain, with some of those in charge of resources soliciting bribes for COVID-19 tests, treatment, and other health services.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 3.8**



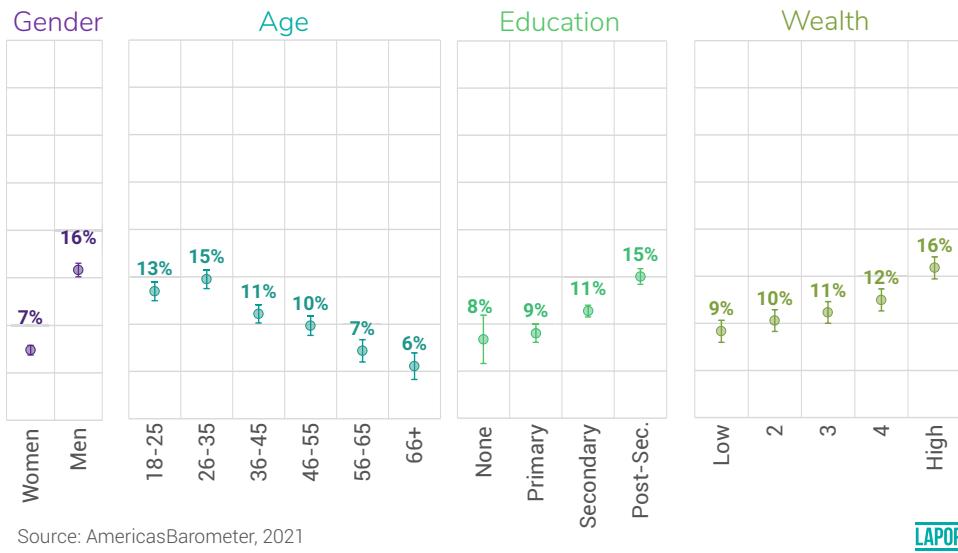
Who is most likely to be solicited for a bribe by the police or a public official? Because the patterns are quite similar for corruption victimization by police and by public officials, **Figure 3.9** plots the demographic and socioeconomic correlates of police bribe solicitation.<sup>19</sup> The figure shows that men, younger age cohorts, better educated individuals, and those who are wealthier are more likely to have been asked for a bribe as compared to their counterparts in those subgroups. The gender gap

is substantial: men are more than twice as likely to be asked for a bribe from the police when compared to women (16% versus 7%).<sup>20</sup> In addition, while around 13-15% of the youngest cohorts were asked for a bribe, only about 6% of those over 65 were. Finally, there is a 7-percentage point gap between those with higher education compared to those with no formal education and a similar difference between the least and most wealthy.

**Figure 3.9**

**Men, younger, better educated, and wealthier individuals are most likely to be victimized by police in the LAC region**

● % police officer solicited a bribe      ----- 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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Are those who have been victimized by corruption more likely to perceive high levels of corruption among politicians in their country? On the one hand, one might expect that “all bad things go together,” such that a system that is corrupt in one realm is similarly corrupt in others. But, on the other hand, these instruments capture distinct concepts: perceptions of high-level political corruption and experiences with street-level bribes. In analyses of the AmericasBarometer 2021 data, we find that—at the aggregate level—there is not much of a correlation. At the individual level, however, there is a non-trivial relationship worthy of more exploration: e.g., victims of police bribery are 14 percentage points more likely to say more than half of politicians are corrupt than those who have not been solicited bribes by police.

The implications for the rule of law for these findings on corruption are mixed. It is encouraging that, compared to the 2018/19 round, there has not been an increase in the percentage of the public that feels that most or all politicians are involved in corruption. Yet, on average, nearly two-thirds continue to see widespread corruption among politicians. Experiences with bribe solicitation by police and public officials continue to mar the rule of law in the region. The jump in bribe solicitation among public officials, to its highest level in the series, is concerning. It is important to know that the most educated are more likely to perceive high levels of corruption and be subjected to bribe solicitation: these dynamics may fuel frustration within this subgroup over a lack of accountability among political elites along with resentment at having to pay bribes in dealings with both police and public officials.

## Crime

**T**he rule of law encompasses the principle of protecting fundamental rights, such as the security of citizens. Hence, we analyze crime victimization and perceptions of insecurity in the LAC region to assess the extent to which the state provides security for its citizens. Increases in crime and violence have been a defining characteristic of the region since the 1980s, and, as a result, fear of crime is high in many countries.<sup>21</sup> In fact, these days, some of the most unsafe countries in the world are located in the LAC region.<sup>22</sup> Crime and violence have direct consequences for quality of life: they take a psychological toll on individuals, they lead to changes in consumer, social, and political behavior, and they reduce average life spans.<sup>23</sup>

Some of the most unsafe countries in the world are located in the Latin America and Caribbean region

At the beginning of the pandemic and lockdowns in 2020, various violent and non-violent crimes appeared to decrease.<sup>24</sup> Lockdowns themselves appeared to contribute to a decrease of crime and violence.<sup>25</sup> However, the drop in violence was neither lasting nor uniform across the region. Further, after an initial decrease in crime, organized criminal factions strengthened in the face of weakened

state capacity.<sup>26,27</sup> Such dynamics would imply that impunity has become more common during the pandemic. The individual level data in the AmericasBarometer provides insights into the current security situation in the LAC region, and also elucidates how things have evolved over time and who is most likely to experience crime or perceive a lack of security.



## On Average Across the LAC Region, One in Five Reports Having Been the Victim of a Crime

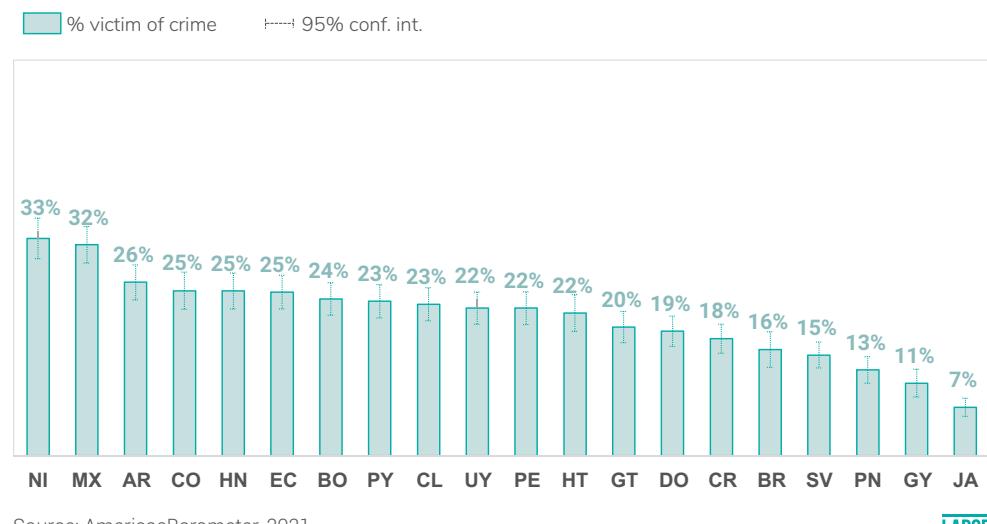
To what extent have individuals in the LAC region been victims of crime? Each round, the AmericasBarometer provides an answer; since 2010, the project has used the following question to assess experiences with crime victimization:

**Now, changing subject, have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, have you been a victim of a robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats or any other type of crime in the past 12 months? (1) Yes (2) No**

**Figure 3.10** displays the percentage of crime victims for each country in 2021. In more than half of the countries, more than 20% of the public is a crime victim. Crime victimization ranges from a low of 7% in Jamaica to a high of 33% in Nicaragua. The percentage of crime victims is the lowest in Jamaica and Guyana and highest in Mexico and Nicaragua.

**Figure 3.10**

**In more than half the LAC region, more than 20% are crime victims**



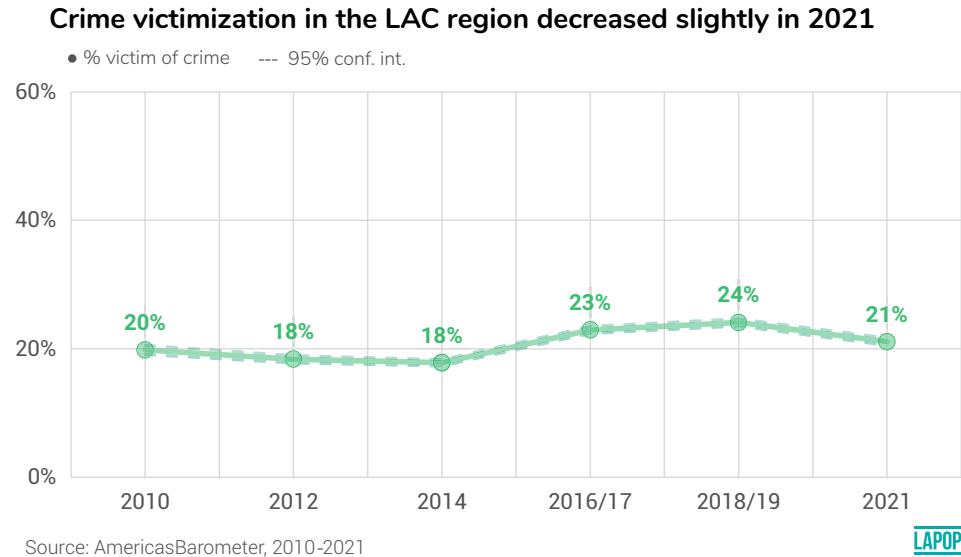
Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

How do rates of experience with crime victimization in 2021 compare to past years? According to **Figure 3.11**, on average across the LAC region, 21% of citizens have been victims of crime in 2021. This represents a statistically significant 3-percentage point decrease in crime victimization

from the 2018/19 survey round. However, the proportion of crime victimization is not lower than the one in 2014 and prior years, which means that crime victimization remains a persistent challenge in the LAC region.

**Figure 3.11**



Crime victimization  
remains a persistent  
challenge in the  
LAC region

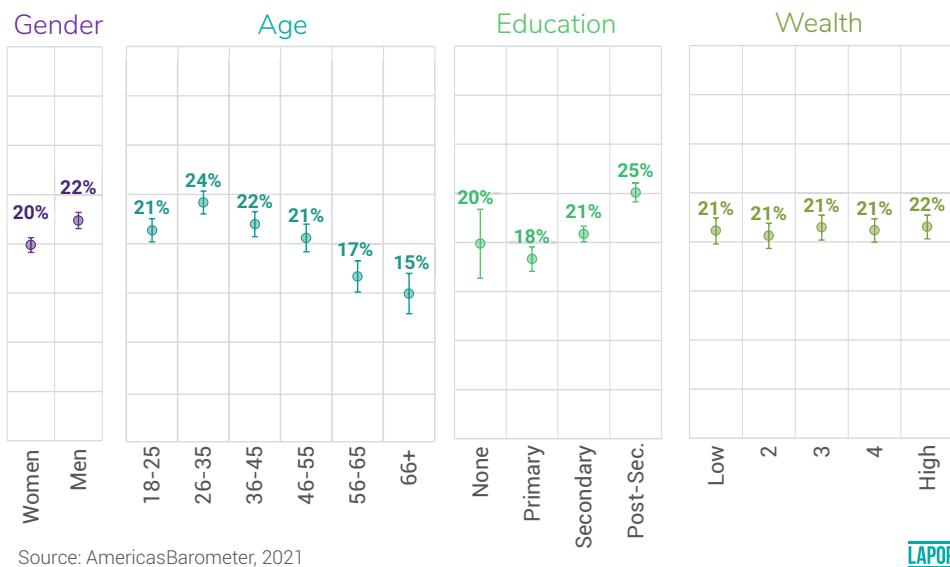
Who is most likely to be a victim of crime? **Figure 3.12** shows that the most educated are more likely to report having been victims of crime than less educated individuals. Men are slightly more likely to express being a victims of crime

than are women. Generally, younger individuals are also more likely to report being victims of crime than are older citizens. Those who are wealthier are marginally more likely to indicate being victims of crime than those who are least wealthy.<sup>28</sup>

**Figure 3.12**

**More educated, men, and younger individuals in the LAC region are the most likely to be crime victims**

● % victim of a crime    ━━━━━ 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

To what extent do individuals in the LAC region feel safe in their neighborhood in 2021? Since its inception, the AmericasBarometer project has used the following question to assess this type of insecurity:

**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?**

**Figure 3.13.** shows the percentage in each country that expresses feeling somewhat or very unsafe in their neighborhood in 2021. Over half feel somewhat or very unsafe in 8 of 18 countries, with about 66% of Haitians saying they feel unsafe in their neighborhood. Two of Haiti's Caribbean neighbors—Guyana and Jamaica—have the lowest levels of perceptions of insecurity in their neighborhood: fewer than one in five Jamaicans and fewer than three in ten Guyanese report feeling unsafe.

**Figure 3.13**

**In most LAC countries, at least two in five say they feel somewhat or very unsafe**  % neighborhood is somewhat or very unsafe  95% conf. int.

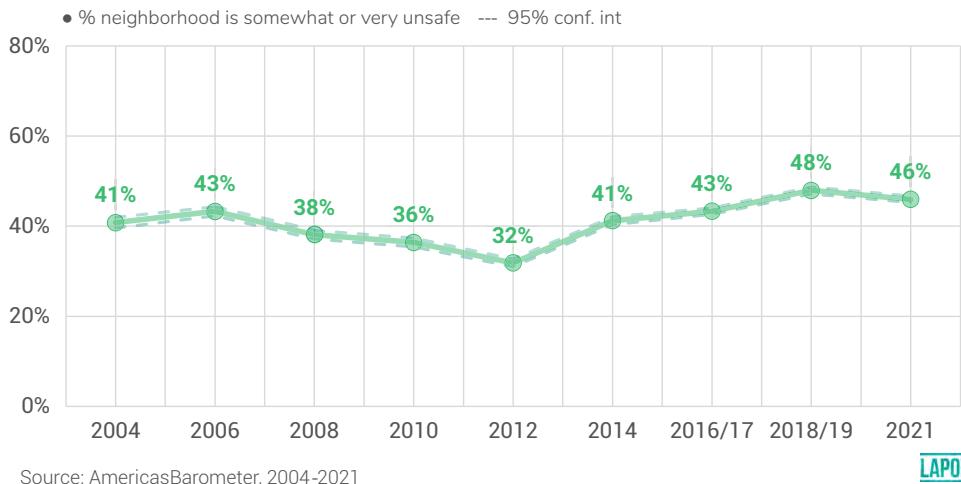


**Figure 3.14** documents changes over time in level of neighborhood insecurity. On average across the LAC region, 46% feel insecure in their neighborhood in 2021. That value for 2021 represents a slight decrease in insecurity from the 2018/19 survey

round; though small, the difference is statically significant. Nevertheless, neighborhood insecurity remains much higher than its nadir in 2012 when fewer than one in three reported they felt unsafe in their neighborhood.

**Figure 3.14**

**Despite a decrease in feelings of insecurity in 2021, nearly half in the LAC region still say they feel insecure in their neighborhood**

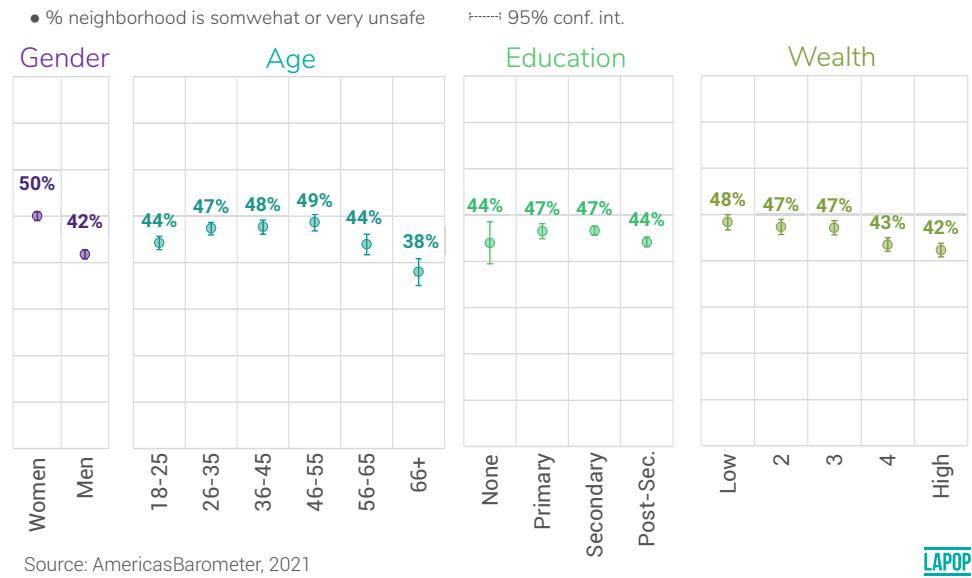


**Figure 3.15** shows that those with post-secondary education and those with no formal education are slightly less likely than those with primary and secondary education to feel insecure in their neighborhood.<sup>29</sup> Further, women report feeling more insecure in their neighborhood compared to men; the gender gap is

8 percentage points. In addition, the least wealthy individuals are almost 6 points more likely to feel unsafe than the wealthiest in the LAC region. Individuals between 26 and 55 years old are slightly more likely to report feeling insecure in their neighborhood than those who are younger or older.

### Figure 3.15

**Those with low levels of education, women, younger, and less wealthy individuals are most likely to say they feel insecure in their neighborhood**



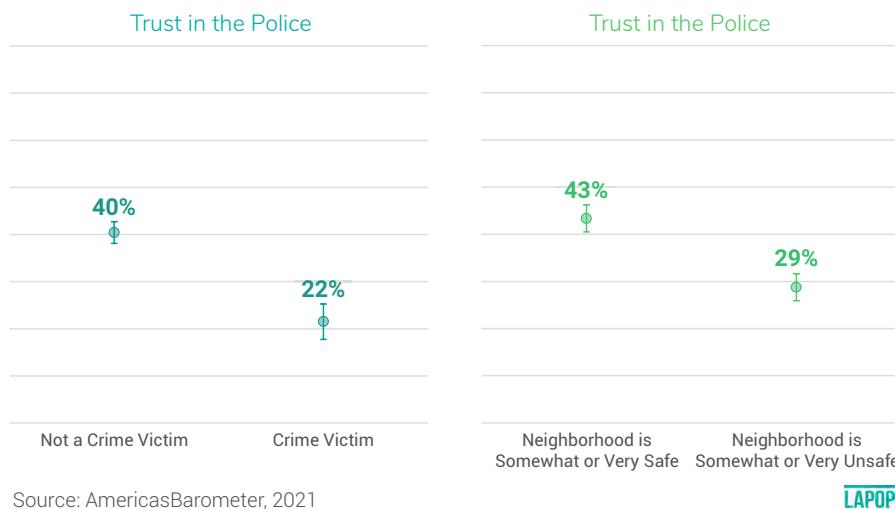
To what extent does crime victimization and neighborhood insecurity relate to trust in institutions? **Figure 3.16** shows how these factors predict trust in a key institution relevant to maintaining

the rule of law—the National Police. The figure shows that both crime victimization and insecurity are associated with lower levels of trust in the police.<sup>30</sup>

**Figure 3.16**

**Victims of crime and those who feel insecure in the LAC region have lower trust in the police**

● % trust in the police    ----- 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

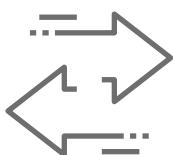
## Justice for GBV Victims

**T**he third pillar in our multi-dimensional assessment of the public's view on the rule of law is justice. Specifically, we look here at beliefs regarding impunity for gender-based violence (GBV) in the LAC region. In this regard, we take an admittedly narrow look at the notion of justice, yet we do so in order to put a focus on a critical issue in the region. Scholars have traced the roots of tolerance for GBV and an underwhelming record of state-led anti-GBV measures to colonial times and authoritarian legacies.<sup>31</sup>

But, moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic—and its associated stressors including economic strain and lockdowns—increased the vulnerability of individuals, especially women, to gender-based violence,<sup>32</sup> making this an important topic to address now.

In recent decades, and spurred on by key efforts in civil society, governments across the region have started to make stronger efforts to combat GBV impunity.<sup>33</sup> Progress has been made, yet there remains a gap between what has been aspirational in terms of goals and what has been realized in authorities' everyday commitment to end GBV.<sup>34</sup>

There remains a gap  
between what has  
been aspirational  
and what has been  
realized in authorities'  
commitment to end  
gender-based violence



## Majorities Across the LAC Region Believe the Police and the Justice System Respond Justly to Incidents of Gender-Based Violence

**A** new battery in the 2021 AmericasBarometer examines perceptions of GBV impunity. In the 2021 round, enumerators presented respondents with the following vignette: "Suppose a woman in your neighborhood was beaten by their partner." Next, the enumerators read two follow-up questions to gauge respondents' level of agreement that 1) the police would take the victim's report seriously and 2) that the judiciary would convict the perpetrator.<sup>35</sup> It merits noting that these questions have not been asked in previous rounds. We therefore focus on cross-country and cross-subgroup comparisons. The wording of these two questions is as follows:

**If the incident was reported, how likely would it be that the police would take it seriously?**

- (1) Very likely
- (2) Somewhat likely
- (3) A little likely
- (4) Not at all likely

**If the case were brought to justice, how likely would the judicial system be to punish the culprit?**

- (1) Very likely
- (2) Somewhat likely
- (3) A little likely
- (4) Not at all likely



**Mexico, 2021:**  
Protesters in Mexico City march against gender-based violence, demanding greater safety and living conditions for women (Eve Orea/Shutterstock)

**Figure 3.17** displays the share of the public in each country that agrees that the police would treat the GBV victim seriously. Assessments of

confidence in the police treating the GBV victim seriously range from 58% of Mexicans to 77% of Salvadorans.

**Figure 3.17**

**Expectations of police addressing GBV impunity are lowest in Peru and Mexico**  % likely that police will take incident seriously  95% conf. Int.

Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

**Figure 3.18** presents the share that agrees a judicial court will punish the person charged with a GBV crime—that is, that justice will be served.

Assessments of confidence in the judiciary treating the GBV victim fairly range from 57% of Peruvians to 84% of Dominicans.

**Figure 3.18**

**Expectations of the judicial system addressing GBV impunity are lowest in Peru and Mexico**  % likely that judicial system will punish culprit  95% conf. int.

Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

Both **Figures 3.17** and **3.18** showcase that expectations of justice for GBV victims are fairly high: in every surveyed LAC country, responses on average surpass 50 percentage points. El Salvador's position in both **Figures 3.17** and **3.18** is noteworthy. El Salvador's commitment to GBV has become more salient in recent years due to the implementation of the *Ciudad Mujer* Program (CM), which has been emulated by the Honduran and Paraguayan governments. Therefore, one hypothesis is that Salvadorans' responses reflect the change that CM centers represent in justice for GBV victims, which are intended to provide a comprehensive attention to GBV victims in close cooperation with the police and the judiciary.<sup>36</sup>

There is considerable variation, however, across and within countries between views of the police and the judicial system with regards to GBV impunity. Dominicans harbor, on average, more confidence in their judiciary than in their police force, potentially reflecting a disconnect between the government's effort

in strengthening the judicial response compared to the police's first-response attention to the GBV victims.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, for Uruguayans it is exactly the opposite; in that country, access to justice for GBV victims is still limited and leniency towards putative GBV aggressors is widespread, especially in Uruguay's hinterland.<sup>38</sup>

Across both **Figures 3.17** and **3.18**, Mexico and Peru consistently rank at the bottom. There appears to be room for comprehensive improvement in how Mexicans and Peruvians perceive their police and judiciary's handling of GBV victims. In Peru, skyrocketing reports of intimate-partner violence during the pandemic suggest that the government ought to review its efforts in counter-GBV measures to foster confidence in the public.<sup>39</sup> In Mexico, President Andrés López Obrador has acknowledged shortcomings in reducing the prevalence of GBV, as the number of femicides rose sharply within the past five years.<sup>40</sup>



**Expectations of justice for gender-based violence victims in Latin America and the Caribbean are fairly high**



Argentina, 2020:  
Woman joins a protest  
in Buenos Aires against  
the government's justice  
reform efforts (Mariana  
Gaspar/Shutterstock)

## Expectations about Justice for GBV Victims are Gendered and Vary by Age and Education

**W**ho is more (or less) likely to perceive a fair and serious treatment for the GBV victim by police and courts? **Figure 3.19** places gender as a key predictor of expectations around the state's handling of a GBV report.

With men as the baseline, the figure shows that women are significantly less likely to expect the GBV victim will be fairly treated by the police (-7 percentage points) and that the courts will bring about due process

by convicting the perpetrator (-4 percentage points). In other words, women in the average LAC country are less likely to agree that the rule of law applies in the realm of justice for GBV victims.<sup>41</sup>

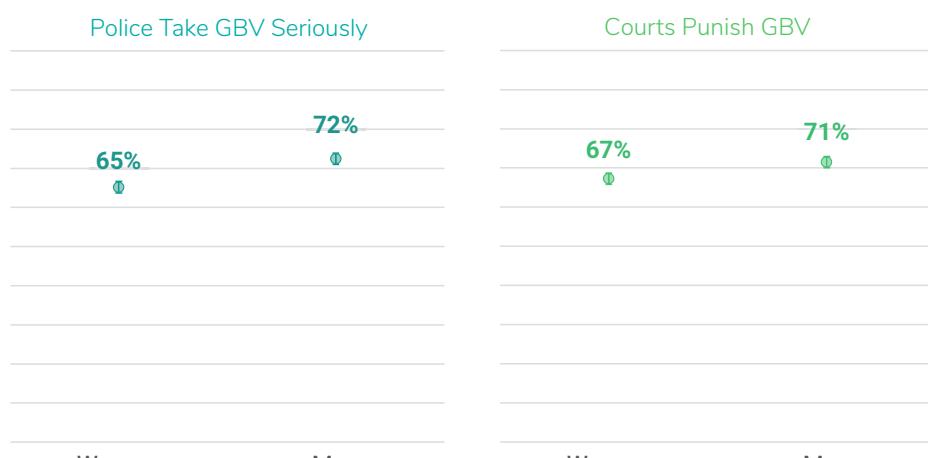
**Figure 3.19**

### Women in the LAC region expect more GBV impunity than men

● % somewhat or very likely      ----- 95% conf. int.



Women are less  
confident than men  
that the rule of law  
is strictly adhered to  
in cases of gender-  
based violence



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

LAPOP

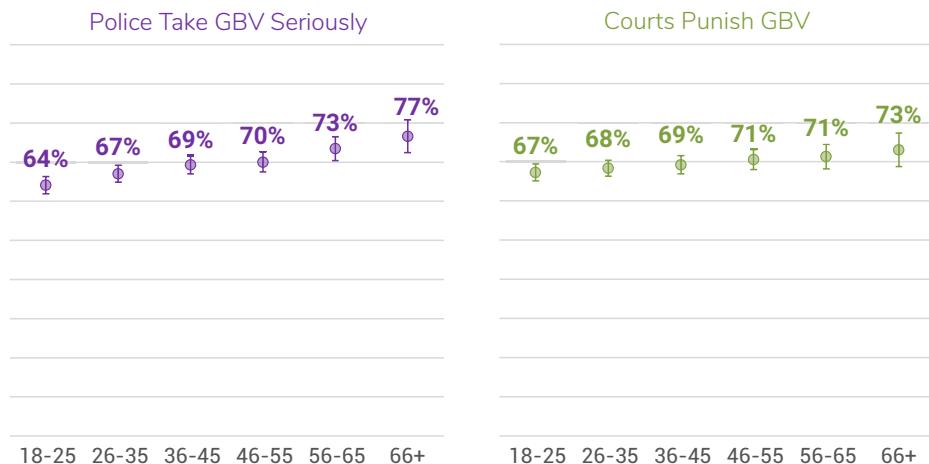
**Figure 3.20** highlights age-based variation in expectations of law-enforcement and due process. The older the age bracket, the more the cohort tends to report that a GBV report will be handled seriously by the state. There are two relevant age gaps. On the one hand, younger

cohorts (18-35) are less likely to agree GBV victims are taken seriously by the police.<sup>42</sup> When it comes to agreeing whether courts will punish the GBV perpetrator, on the other hand, the gap is less pronounced but significantly different between the 46 and older group and their younger counterparts.

**Figure 3.20**

**Younger age cohorts expect more GBV impunity**

- % somewhat or very likely
- 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

**LAPOP**

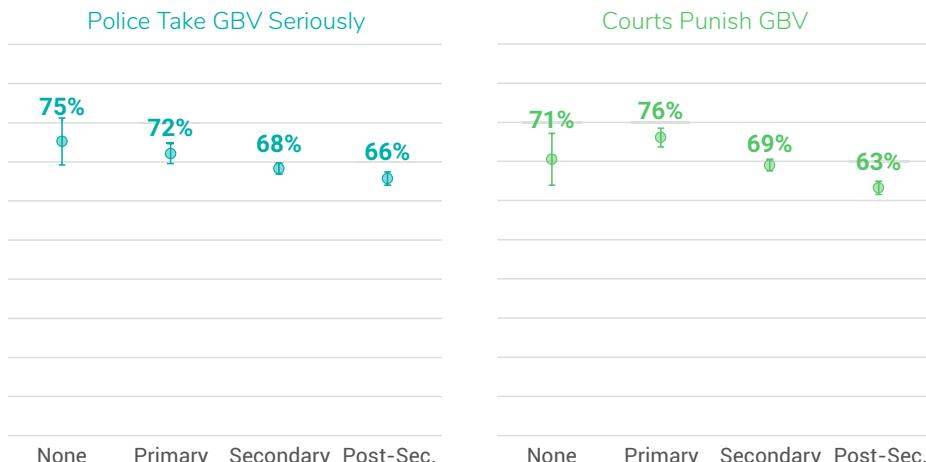
Across levels of educational attainment, **Figure 3.21** shows that the more educated individuals are, the less prone they are to expect that

a GBV victim's case will be handled seriously by the police and punished by the courts.

**Figure 3.21**

**More educated individuals expect higher GBV impunity**

- % somewhat or very likely
- 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

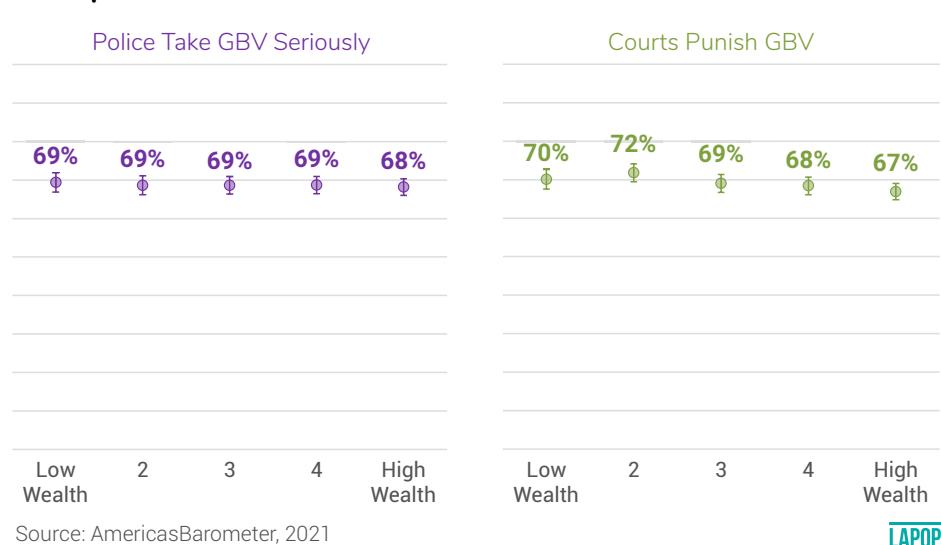
**LAPOP**

Finally, **Figure 3.22** displays that wealth has less predictive leverage over perceptions of GBV impunity. Wealth levels have no discernible impact on people's perceptions of how police tackle GBV impunity. A wealth-based gap between the most

extreme categories of respondents' wealth is only appreciable regarding the judicial system: in comparison to their less wealthy counterparts, the wealthiest people are about 3 percentage points less likely to agree GBV will be punished by the courts.

**Figure 3.22**

**Wealth predicts perceptions of GBV impunity from courts, not from police**



Generating instruments to measure the public's view on the topic of GBV is not an easy feat (e.g., Castro and Riquer 2003; Palermo et al. 2014). That said, the AmericasBarometer 2021 data permit valuable assessments of citizens' views on justice for GBV victims: the extent to which law-enforcement (the police) and the judiciary (the courts) work to tamp down on impunity in this domain. The results show

fairly high levels of confidence in the likelihood that GBV reports are taken seriously and pursued fairly in the courts; there is, of course, room to improve. Further, the 2021 AmericasBarometer reveals that views on GBV and impunity have a distinctly gendered aspect: women in the LAC region are less confident that the rule of law is strictly adhered to in this domain.

# The Public Opinion Consequences of Weak Rule of Law

**E**arlier sections of this chapter have touched on the notion that the public view of the rule of law—with respect to corruption, crime, and justice—matters for the broader nature of public opinion regarding one's community and the political system. When perceptions of government corruption are high, and citizens are forced to pay bribes for services, politicians are unlikely to be held accountable and services become inaccessible for those who do not have the means to pay bribes.

Those who are victims of crime and perceive insecurity in their neighborhood lack access to justice. If citizens do not expect GBV victims to be treated seriously by police and fairly in courts, then GBV perpetrators are more likely to remain unaccountable, and governments fail to protect the civil and human rights of vulnerable sectors of society.

We consider that those who perceive widespread corruption and insecurity, are victims of corruption and crime, and have little faith in institutions of justice to punish GBV may be less likely to trust in others, have lower confidence in the government, and have less support for democracy over other forms of government. To investigate these relationships, we assess how our measures of the rule of law correlate with the following variables.<sup>43</sup>

**And speaking of the people from your community, would you say that people in your community are very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or untrustworthy?**

**How much do you trust the national government to do what is right?**

- (1) A lot (2) Somewhat (3) A little (4) Not at all**

**Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Responses on a scale from 1, "Strongly disagree," to 7 "Strongly agree"**

Interpersonal trust is foundational for the functioning of society, but lack of justice, accountability and transparency can generate distrust between individuals.<sup>44</sup> We find that victims of crime and those who perceive high levels of corruption are somewhat less trusting of others in their community. Yet, neighborhood insecurity has quite a

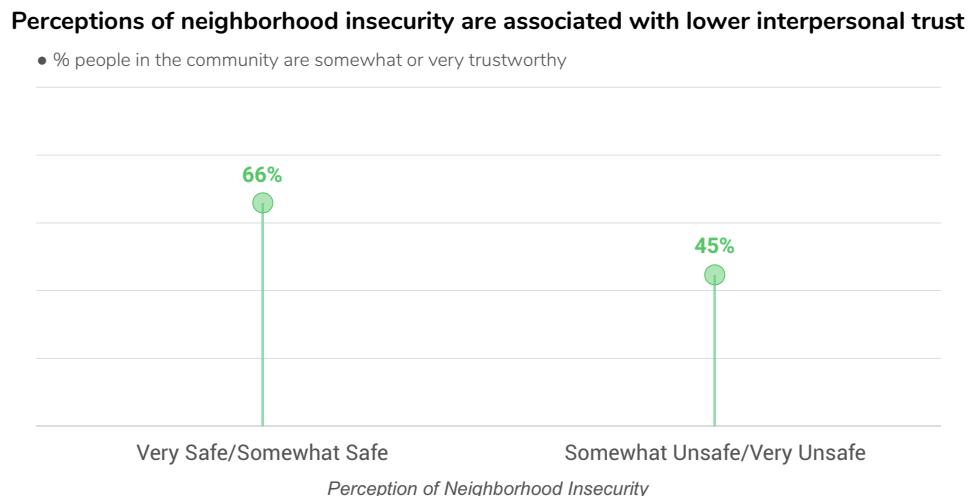
strong relationship with interpersonal trust: there is a 21-percentage point gap between those who feel unsafe and those who feel safe in their neighborhood, as shown by

**Figure 3.23.** Overall, these results suggest that a failure to provide security can be damaging to interpersonal trust in a community.



Failure to provide  
security can be  
damaging to  
interpersonal trust  
in a community

**Figure 3.23**



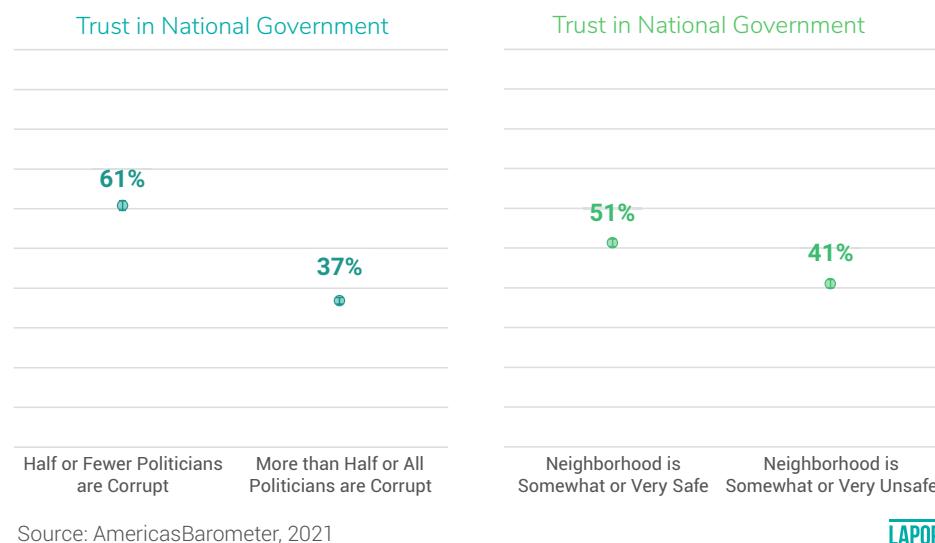
LAPOP

When accountability, transparency, and justice are absent from a society, citizens are less likely to trust the government. We find that victims of corruption and crime are less likely to trust the national government to do the right thing. We find an even stronger relationship for perceptions of corruption and neighborhood insecurity, as shown in **Figure 3.24**.

Those who perceive most politicians as corrupt are 24 percentage points less trusting in the national government compared to those with lower perceptions of corruption. Overall, the data suggest that a lack of implementation of the rule of law at not only at the national level, but also at the local level, can undermine trust in the national government.

**Figure 3.24**

**Perceptions of widespread corruption and insecurity undermine trust in government** • % trust in national government ± 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

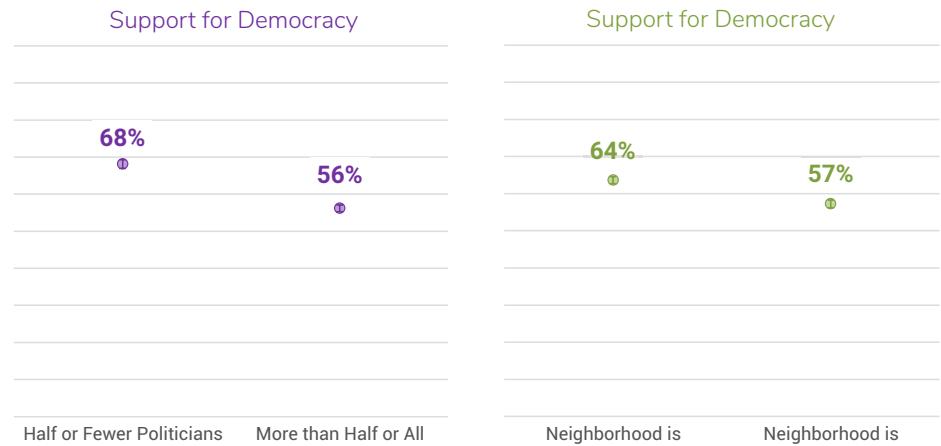
The final analysis shows the relationship between the rule of law and support for democracy in the abstract. **Figure 3.25** demonstrates how perceptions of corruption and insecurity may serve to significantly undermine support for democracy.

Those who perceive that most politicians are corrupt and those who feel their neighborhood is unsafe are about 12 and 7 percentage points, respectively, less likely to agree that democracy is better than any other form of government.

**Figure 3.25**

**Perceptions of corruption and insecurity reduce support for democracy in the LAC region**

● % support democracy as best form of government



Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021

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We also probed how perceptions that a GBV report would be taken seriously by the police and punished by the judicial system are related to these three variables. We find that those who have less faith that the police take GBV seriously and that

the judicial system will punish GBV impunity have less confidence that the government will do the right thing, lower interpersonal trust, and lower support for democracy compared to their counterparts with contrasting views.

## Conclusions: Implications for Democratic Governance

**T**his chapter has offered a multi-dimensional assessment of the rule of law, from the viewpoint of the public in the LAC region. We focus on three dimensions that are a core part of the rule of law concept: corruption, crime, and justice. The assessment yields a mixed report with some positive and some concerning findings.

These results matter because the rule of law is integral to democracy. They also matter because, as we have shown, they have the potential to shape other attitudes that are important to the quality and durability of democracy: interpersonal trust, confidence in state institutions and the government, and—in some cases—support for democracy. Thus, reducing crime and corruption, as well as strengthening justice institutions, will shore up the rule of law, in addition to making democracies function in a more robust and enduring manner. It is worth noting, importantly, that fostering a healthy democracy via attitudes such as interpersonal and institutional trust may in turn be critical to maintaining a robust rule of law. Especially to the degree they likely are mutually reinforcing, it is

crucial to pay attention to the citizens' perspective on the rule of law and the broader set of attitudes that keep the pulse of democracy strong.

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## Notes

- 1 The index is based on expert and public opinion surveys and is made up of eight factors: constraints on government powers, absence of corruption, open government, fundamental rights, order and security, regulatory enforcement, civil justice, and criminal justice.
- 2 In the most recent WJP data, Uruguay, Costa Rica and Chile, three of the countries with the strongest democracies and human development indices, have the highest rule of law scores in the region and are 22nd, 25th, and 26th in the world rankings. At the other end of the spectrum are Honduras, Nicaragua, Bolivia, three countries that have few constraints on government powers and high levels of political corruption.
- 3 Likewise, in the AmericasBarometer there was a big jump in the percentage of those who said their basic rights were protected between the 2018/2019 round and the 2021 round. El Salvador witnessed the biggest increase by far, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador also experienced a boost, but Guatemala did not have a statistically significant increase in those who said basic rights were protected between the two rounds.
- 4 Neuman 2020.
- 5 O'Boyle 2021; Porras 2021.
- 6 Cohen, Lupu, and Zechmeister 2017; Morris and Klesner 2010.
- 7 Papadovassilakis and Robbins 2021.
- 8 Most notably ex-president of Peru Martín Vizcarra and cabinet members both from his administration and that of then President Fernando Sagasti secured early access to vaccines and a Bolivian health minister was arrested for buying ventilators at inflated prices (Alonso and Gedan 2020). Argentina has been at the center of two major COVID-19 scandals: first with news emerging in February 2021 of elites using connections to get early access to COVID-19 vaccines (Heath 2021); and secondly, in August 2021 as photos of First Lady Fabiola Yáñez's maskless birthday party attended by the President himself and others were leaked to media outlets, disobeying his own decree mandating strict lockdown and sheltering-at-home measures in July 2020 (Gillepsie 2021).
- 9 Warren 2004.
- 10 Lagunes, Yang and Castro 2019.
- 11 Mortera-Martínez 2021.
- 12 Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Chang and Chu 2006; Mishler and Rose 2001 Morris and Klesner 2010.
- 13 Seligson 2002, 2006.
- 14 Although Uruguay did experience a high-profile case of corruption with former vice president Raúl Sendic in 2017, Sendic resigned and his political career has not recovered. Compare this to Peru's Keiko Fujimori, who was nearly victorious in the 2021 presidential election despite having been jailed for her connection to the Odebrecht corruption scheme.
- 15 This does not appear to be driven by reported news consumption. Over half of all respondents claimed to follow the news daily, with about 58% of those with higher education compared to 53% of those with primary or less. Those who follow the news daily are *less* likely to say more than half or all politicians are corrupt compared to those who follow the news less often. Nevertheless, the substantive difference is quite small (63.5% versus 65.8%).
- 16 We performed a logistic regression where the dependent variable is coded as 1 if a respondent said more than half/all politicians are involved in corruption and 0 if the respondent said half or fewer are involved in corruption. We include sociodemographic controls—gender, age cohorts, education, and wealth—and country fixed effects. All else equal, both wealth and education remain consistent and statistically significant predictors of corruption perceptions.
- 17 The question about police bribe solicitation was not asked in Costa Rica in 2021.
- 18 Transparency International Corruptions Perceptions Index 2020.
- 19 We performed a logistic regression where the dependent variable is coded as 1 if a respondent was a victim of bribe solicitation and 0 if she was not. We include demographic controls—gender, age cohorts, education, and wealth—and country fixed effects. All else equal, gender, age and education remain significantly associated with corruption victimization.
- 20 Here and in all analyses in this report, the "women" category is more precisely "women/non-binary/other". The 2021 AmericasBarometer included the option for individuals to select non-binary/other in response to the gender question; because there are too few observations to analyze independently, we group those who identify as non-binary/other with women, and our analyses compare that group to men.
- 21 Singer et al. 2020.
- 22 E.g., Müller 2018.
- 23 Soares and Naritomi 2010, p. 23.

24 Moncada and Franco 2021; Muggah and Dudley 2021.

25 Semple and Azam 2020.

26 Muggah and Dule 2021.

27 Transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) have grown stronger in various ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, these criminal groups have provided governance in areas abandoned by the state. In Central America, gangs enforced the government lockdowns and distributed food supplies in their communities. In Mexico, some criminal groups have handed out food to communities under their control. In Brazil, "gangs in various favelas in Rio de Janeiro imposed curfews and social distancing on residents" (Cruz and Fonseca 2021).

28 A logit regression with country fixed effects indicates significant associations between age, gender, wealth, and education with crime victimization, all else equal.

29 A logit regression with country fixed effects indicates significant associations for gender and wealth with perceptions of neighborhood insecurity, all else equal. Age and education are not significantly related to neighborhood insecurity.

30 Results from an OLS regression suggest that crime and feeling insecure in the neighborhood are statistically significant, controlling for sociodemographic factors, such as age, gender, education, and wealth.

31 See, for example, Menjivar and Walsh 2017; Rondón 2003.

32 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>

33 O'Brien and Walsh 2020.

34 Choup 2016; Frías 2013; Htun et al. 2019; Roggeband 2016.

35 The GBV impunity questions were asked only in 8 of the countries. For the analysis, both have been recoded as 100 (1-2 on the 1-4 scale) and 0 (3-4 on the 1-4 scale).

36 See *Informe sobre Estado y Situación de la Violencia contra las Mujeres en El Salvador 2020*, available at <https://www.transparencia.gob.sv/institutions/instituto-salvadoreno-para-el-desarrollo-de-la-mujer/documents/402464/download>

37 See <https://presidencia.gob.do/noticias/presidente-abinader-pone-en-funcionamiento-doce-casas-de-acogida-para-victimas-de>

38 See <https://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/sociedad/violencia-genero-crean-juzgados-tobilleras-fiscalias-especializadas.html>

39 Agüero 2021; Wiener 2021.

40 See <https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/articulos/informacion-sobre-violencia-contra-las-mujeres- incidencia-delictiva-y-llamadas-de-emergencia-9-1-1-febrero-2019>

41 We performed OLS regressions where both dependent variables were recoded to range from 0 (very unlikely) to 100 (very likely). We include demographic controls—gender, age cohorts, education, and wealth—and country fixed effects. All else equal, gender remains a consistent and statistically significant predictor of perceptions of fair and serious treatment for the GBV victim.

42 The minimum voting age in the LAC countries surveyed with these questions is 18 years. There is a less notable but still significant gap between people aged 36-45 and those aged 56+.

43 We ran logistic regressions to uncover the relationship between the rule of law measures and these three variables. The main independent variables are perceptions of corruption, police corruption victimization, perceptions of neighborhood insecurity, and crime victimization. We recoded the three dependent variables into binary variables. For interpersonal trust, 1 equals somewhat/very trustworthy and 0 equals not very trustworthy/untrustworthy. For trustworthiness of the national government, 1 equals a lot/somewhat and 0 equals a little/not at all. Support for democracy is recoded as 1 agree (5-7 on the 1-7 agree-disagree scale), and 0 neutral/disagree (1-4 on the 1-7 scale). All main independent variables are rescaled to binary variables, where 0 represents no victimization or a lower value (i.e., half or fewer politicians are involved in corruption, and the neighborhood is safe) and 1 represents a higher value (i.e., more than half/all politicians are involved in corruption and the neighborhood is unsafe). The regressions also control for gender, age, education, wealth, and country fixed effects.

44 Montinola 2004.



# Spotlight on Corruption in Jamaica

By Balford Lewis

**C**ross-national corruption perception studies by leading international research organizations have been consistent, over the years, in categorizing Jamaica in the ranks of the highly 'corrupt nations' of the Americas. Other reputable studies speak to the development inhibiting effect of this state of affairs. The annual Global Competitiveness Report, for example, repeatedly identifies corruption as the factor cited by potential investors as 'most problematic' in doing business in Jamaica. Yet recent polls by two of the island's leading research outfits reveal that corruption does not usually feature prominently in voting decisions in past elections and is unlikely to be a significant factor in future polls, despite the numerous allegations of large-scale corruption involving senior public officials in the media and before the courts.<sup>1</sup>

Presumably, most Jamaicans fail to appreciate the extent to which corruption directly affects their personal wellbeing. When public funds intended for development are illicitly diverted to sectional interests, it undermines the government's ability to provide basic services in an efficient and equitable manner. Also, corruption hurts the poor disproportionately by distorting markets and undermining institutional efficiency, usually at the expense of the less fortunate.

In Jamaica, where a sizeable segment of the population typically justifies corruption in specified circumstances or is unconcerned about its pervasiveness and its seriously damaging effect on society, the vigilance of the public in its responsibility of keeping public officials accountable is significantly compromised. And the need for institutional strengthening and

increased activism by influential anti-corruption actors and the media become even more critical.

Some notable developments in the past year, in this regard, have been the granting of full independence to the Major Organised Crime & Anti-Corruption Agency (MOCA) as a national crime investigation entity and the passing of regulations to reduce nepotism and cronyism and prioritize merit-based criteria for appointment to public boards. In terms of advocacy, civil society organisations such as National Integrity Action (NIA) and the Crime Consensus and Monitoring Committee (CMOC) have been visibly active in efforts to expose corruption and promote integrity in public affairs. Of note also has been the role of the media in investigating and exposing allegations of major irregularities involving some senior public officials in key government agencies.

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<sup>1</sup> Virtue, Erica. 2021. "Voters not moved by corruption, say top pollsters - Johnson, Anderson say Jamaicans see it as a way of life." The Gleaner. <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20200705/voters-not-moved-corruption-say-top-pollsters-johnson-anderson-say>



LAPOP team photo from  
pretesting in El Salvador  
during the 2018/19 round  
of the AmericasBarometer

Chapter 4

# Crime Victimization, Perceptions of Security, and Democracy in Jamaica

Luke Plutowski

Protester raises their  
fist during a recent  
political demonstration

This chapter explores the perceptions of the people of Jamaica on crime in their country. Crime has consistently been a top issue of concern for citizens and politicians alike. Jamaica suffers from one of the highest murder rates in the world, and authorities have had difficulty containing the expansion of organized crime. These issues could have implications for the health of democracy in the country. To gain a more in-depth understanding of the issue, the 2021 AmericasBarometer asked Jamaican respondents a series of questions about public security.

## Main Findings

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- **Although many Jamaicans worry about crime in their neighborhood and the country more broadly, our indicators point to improvement in citizen security.** According to our estimates, crime victimization and feelings of neighborhood insecurity have dropped since 2019. Jamaica reported the lowest levels of crime victimization and feelings of insecurity out of all countries studied in the 2021 AmericasBarometer
- **Concern about neighborhood gangs has dropped since 2019. In 2021, concern is concentrated in the greater Kingston area**
- **There is an association between security and political attitudes. Those who feel insecure in their neighborhood are less likely to support democracy**
- **Those with highest socioeconomic status continue to disproportionately report crime victimization**

## The issue of crime in Jamaica

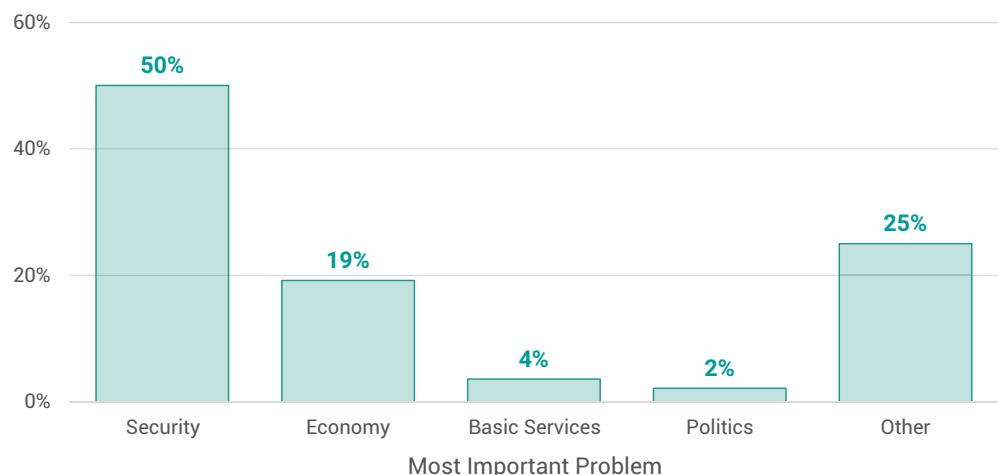
**C**rime has been a persistent issue in Jamaica. According to data published by the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), the country had a homicide rate of 46.5 per 100,000 people in 2020. This represents the highest rate of any country in the Americas.<sup>1</sup> Although official statistics show that crime dropped in 2020, the latest data on homicides suggests the trend may have returned to the wrong direction: as of July 2021, the murder rate has increased 8% over the previous year.<sup>2</sup> The issue has attracted international attention: the U.S. State Department has issued a travel advisory due to crime in Kingston, Montego Bay, and Spanish Town,<sup>3</sup> while Interpol identifies Jamaica as a hub for organized crime in the Caribbean.<sup>4</sup>

Crime remains an area of great concern for Jamaican citizens. According to the 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer, half of Jamaicans identify security as the most important issue facing the country, even as the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic issues pose large, ongoing challenges. In addition to the direct

impact of crime, including the loss of life or property, the issue has broader economic costs. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) estimates that the average cost of crime across the Latin American and Caribbean region is 3 percent of GDP.<sup>5</sup> There are also social repercussions, such as increased fear, leading to decreased quality of life.

**Figure 4.1**

**Half of Jamaicans identify security issues as the most important problem facing the country**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

LAPOP

Crime has become a top concern among politicians in Jamaica. Prime Minister Andrew Holness has gone as far as to say that crime threatens Jamaica's national sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> In 2020, Jamaica's government approved a National Consensus on Crime, which aimed to reduce crime through social and community programs, broad reforms of the JCF, and greater incorporation of the military into domestic crime-fighting measures.<sup>7</sup> The initiative, while an important first step, lacked a detailed plan of action to reach its ambitious goals.<sup>8</sup>

Public opinion research is fundamental to understanding the issue of crime and its ramifications. Official crime statistics may be subject to biases in reporting and do not offer a complete picture of experience with crime at the individual level, including its

psychological effects. Public opinion surveys also play an essential role in informing public policy aimed at preventing crime for several reasons. For one, broad questionnaires allow researchers to assess relationships between crime victimization and other attitudes and behaviors, which offers a more nuanced understanding of the problem and could help identify "root causes". These types of studies also allow policymakers to evaluate public appetite for different types of crime fighting and prevention strategies.

This chapter will first discuss how crime victimization and perceptions of security have changed over time. We then show results related to concern about organized crime. Finally, we discuss the association between (in)security and attitudes about government.

## Although crime remains a top concern for Jamaicans, victimization rates and feelings of insecurity improved in 2021

We start by assessing trends in perceptions of and experience with crime across time in Jamaica.

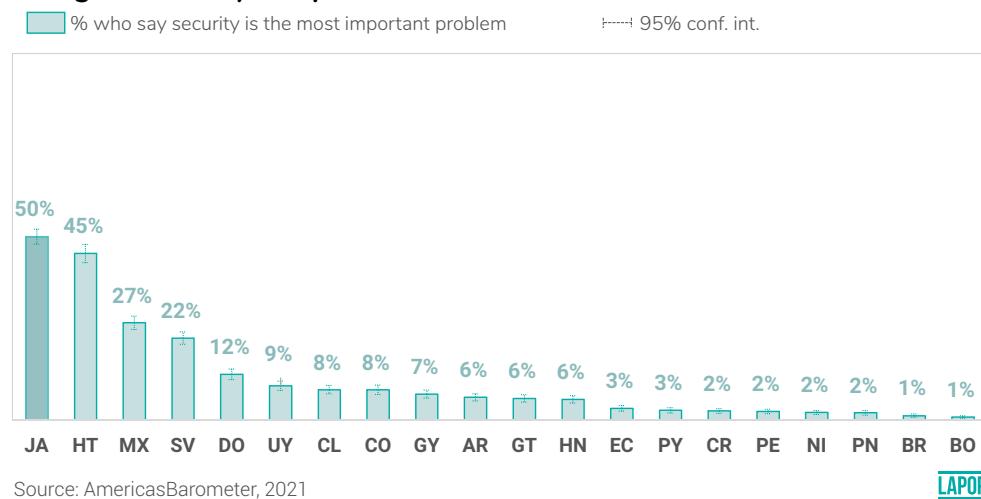
**Figure 4.1** showed that half of all Jamaicans identified security issues (e.g., crime, violence, gangs, kidnappings) as the most serious problem facing the country.

For every one person who reported that the coronavirus was the biggest problem, about four identified crime. Jamaicans also appear to be more concerned about crime than do people in all other countries studied in the 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer. **Figure 4.2** shows the percentage of the population in each country that identified security as the most serious problem; Jamaica

is the highest in the region, with a proportion more than double that of El Salvador and 33 times that of Brazil. This could be driven by differential fears of the coronavirus—Jamaica reported the lowest level of concern out of the entire region<sup>9</sup>—but Jamaica ranked first on this measure in the 2018/19 round as well (and second after El Salvador in 2016/17).

**Figure 4.2**

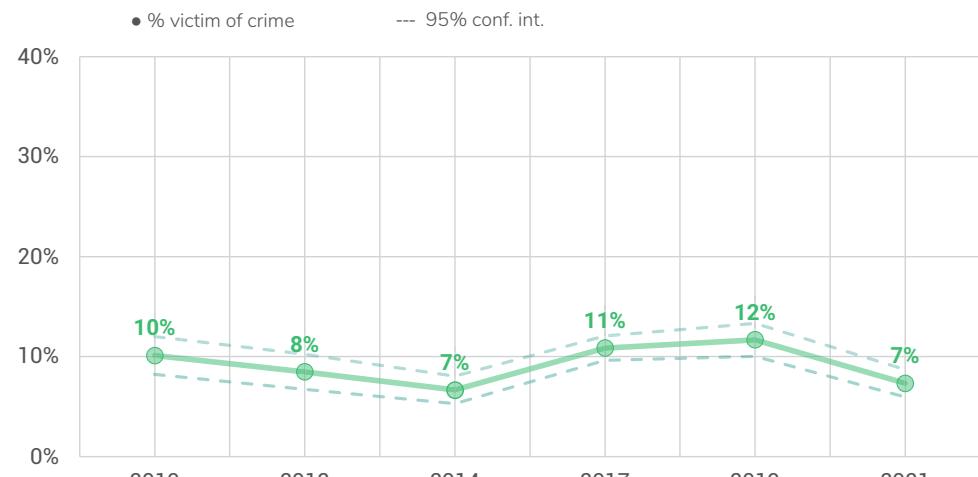
**Jamaicans are most likely to report security as the most important issue facing the country compared to all countries in the AmericasBarometer**



The AmericasBarometer survey has included two central questions on security every round since 2010: the first asks whether the respondent has been a victim of any type of crime in the prior year, and the second assesses the respondents' perceptions of (in)security in their neighborhood. The question texts are to the right, and results for these items are shown in **Figures 4.3** and **4.4**.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, these indicators point to improvements in measures of personal security compared to previous rounds of the survey. Compared to the 2019 round, there were significant decreases in reports of crime victimization (four percentage points) and perceptions of neighborhood insecurity (six percentage points).

**Figure 4.3**

**The rate of crime victimization in Jamaica fell to its lowest level since 2014**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2010-2021

**LAPOP**

**Now, changing the subject, have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, have you been a victim of robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats, or any other type of crime in the past 12 months? (1) Yes (2) No**

**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?**  
**(1) Very safe (2) Somewhat safe**  
**(3) Somewhat unsafe (4) Very unsafe**

**Figure 4.4**

**The share of Jamaicans who feel insecure in their neighborhood dropped to its lowest rate since 2014**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2006-2021

LAPOP

Although crime remains a serious issue in Jamaica, these perceptions actually track with trends in official statistics released by the JCF: the murder rate decreased slightly

between 2019 and 2020, and, while murders are up in 2021, overall crime rates (and more specifically, numbers for rapes, robberies, and break-ins) have dropped since last year.<sup>11</sup>

## Jamaica had the lowest rate of crime victimization and lowest rates of feelings of insecurity in the region in 2021

One other notable finding is that in 2021, Jamaica actually reported the lowest levels of crime victimization and feelings of insecurity out of all countries studied in the AmericasBarometer. The results are shown visually in **Figures 3.10** (p. 55) and **Figure 3.13** (p. 58) in the previous chapter on rule of law. Jamaica has a crime victimization rate of 7%, while the next lowest is Guyana at 11%, compared to the highest rate of 32% in Mexico. Similarly, just 18% of Jamaicans feel insecure in their neighborhood compared to the next-lowest rate of 28% in Guyana, while the rate goes as high as 65% in Haiti. Thus, while Jamaicans are concerned about the issue of crime in a broad sense (as shown in **Figures 4.1** and **4.2**), they appear to be doing relatively well on these two dimensions compared to their neighbors.

That Jamaica reported the lowest level of crime victimization and feelings of insecurity on one hand but a high level of concern with the crime problem on the other, requires some explanation. There are two aspects to this issue: the objective reality of a low victimization rate and the subjective registering of high concern; and, the seemingly more puzzling contrast between the two subjectivities of high concern with crime and low insecurity.

The high concern but low actual victimization pattern may be understood in terms of the structure of crime victimization. Jamaica tends to have low rates of property crimes, but relatively higher incidence of violent crime. The latter tends to have a high impact on the economy and on various aspects of daily life. Extortion rackets, common in the commercial districts and in construction, are highly visible to commuters who use public transportation. Moreover, concerns with violent crime are ever present in the media and in the national debates on crime control policy. Some of these crimes can be quite shocking – for

example, when they involve daylight mass killings, children as victims, or beheadings. Such spectacular events are taken as evidence of an "out of control" crime problem that the police force is unable to manage. In short, they convey stories of criminal power and state weakness. These elements of the situation generate concern, even though most Jamaicans do not feel victimized themselves.

That overall concern about crime does not seem to garner feelings of insecurity may have to do with the settings in which these crimes occur. While stories of crime may lead Jamaicans to be concerned with the situation in the country generally, they may not believe crime to be a problem in the familiar setting of their own neighborhood. People may not feel personally vulnerable to crime, or they may feel they have measures of social support to deal with crime within their communities. As will be discussed below, this feature is a saving factor for Jamaica; neighborhood insecurity tends to shake people's confidence in the very system of democracy.

## Jamaicans with post-secondary education are more likely to self-report crime victimization

**C**rime victimization and perceptions of security appear to be relatively even across demographic groups (age, gender, region, and socioeconomic status).

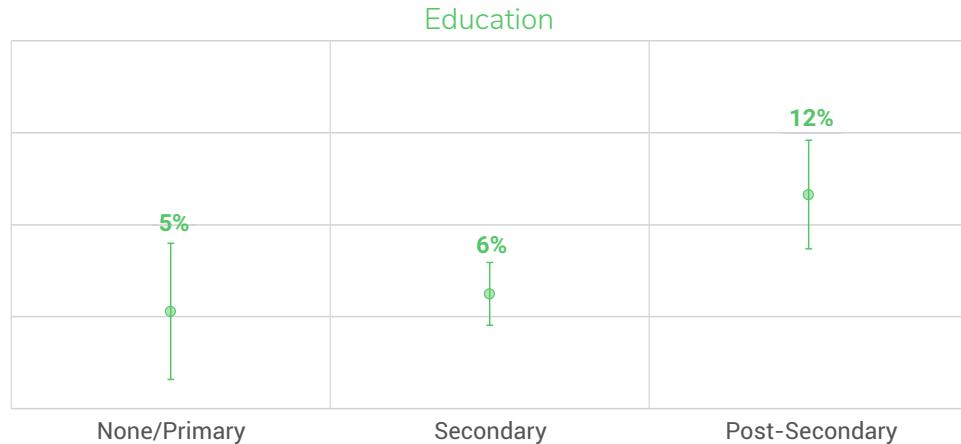
There are two exceptions: women appear to be more fearful of crime than men (see chapter on gender-based violence for further exploration). It also appears that those with at least some postsecondary education are more likely to report being a victim of a crime compared to the lower education groups (see **Figure 4.5**).

The same pattern has held for every round of the AmericasBarometer since 2014 (there were no differences by education level in 2010 and 2012). This is consistent with research which finds that observable wealth has a positive (albeit nonlinear) association with risk of property crime victimization.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 4.5**

**The highly educated are most likely to self-report crime victimization**

● % victim of crime      ----- 95% conf. int.



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

LAPOP

## Reports of the presence of gangs in neighborhoods decreased in 2021

**O**ne particular area of concern with respect to criminality is the presence of gangs. Horace Levy of the University of the West Indies, in a technical report on youth and organized crime, writes that "organized crime could exert an extremely dangerous level of influence on and pose a threat to the state."<sup>13</sup>

The AmericasBarometer included an item on the 2021 survey assessing the extent to which people in Jamaica feel their neighborhood is affected by gangs (see question text below). **Figure 4.6** displays the results of this item. Just under one in four Jamaicans (23%) believe their neighborhood is affected by gangs "a lot" or "somewhat". This represents a six-percentage point drop compared to 2017, the last time this item was asked in Jamaica. There is significant regional variation in perceptions of gangs, as shown in **Figure 4.7**. Worry

is particularly high in the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA), where the proportion of the population reporting that their neighborhood is affected by gangs is nearly double that of the other regions (32% in KMA, 17% elsewhere).

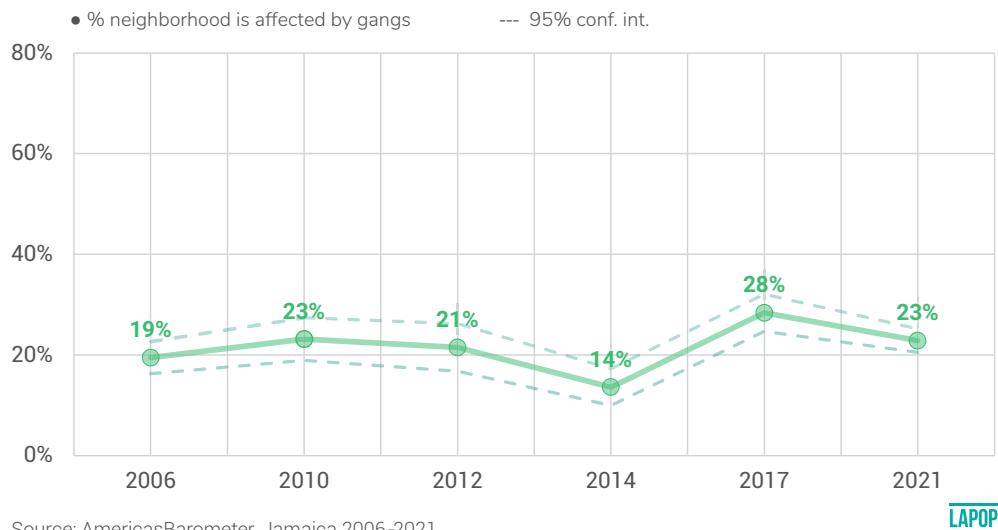
That fewer Jamaicans reported that their neighborhoods were affected by gangs this year is unsurprising. Since 2017, and in particular during the period of data collection for this report, the government had imposed a series of states of emergency in the areas of the country that are

marked by high gang presence and high homicide rates. These states of emergency permitted a strong military presence in these areas and led to the mass detention of large numbers of gang-involved youth. These measures at least had the effect of disrupting and suspending gang activity.

To what extent do you think your neighbourhood is affected by gangs?  
Would you say a lot, somewhat, a little or none? (1) A lot (2) Somewhat (3) Little (4) None

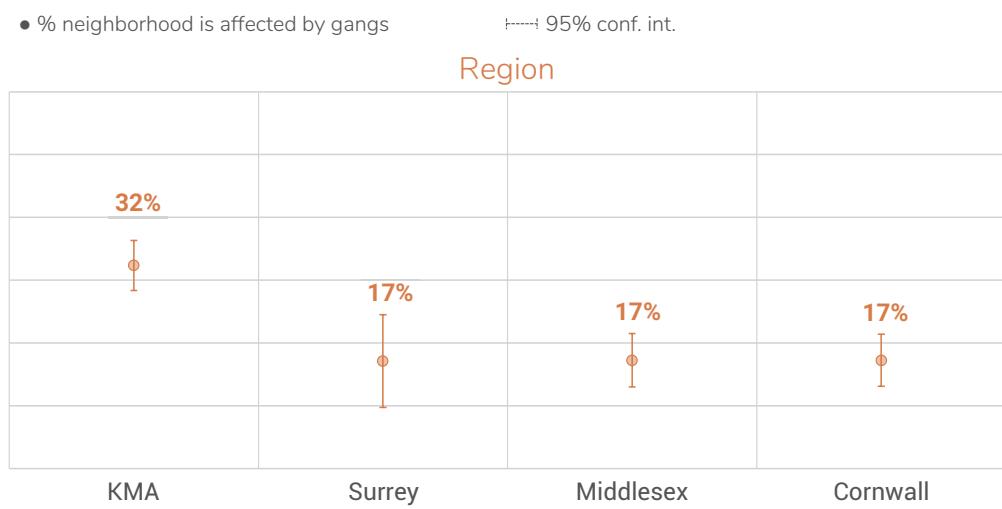
**Figure 4.6**

**Perceptions of gang presence in neighborhoods fell in 2021**



**Figure 4.7**

**Kingston residents report highest presence of gangs in neighborhoods**



## Perceptions of insecurity, rather than direct experiences with crime, are linked with lower trust in the government and lower support for democracy

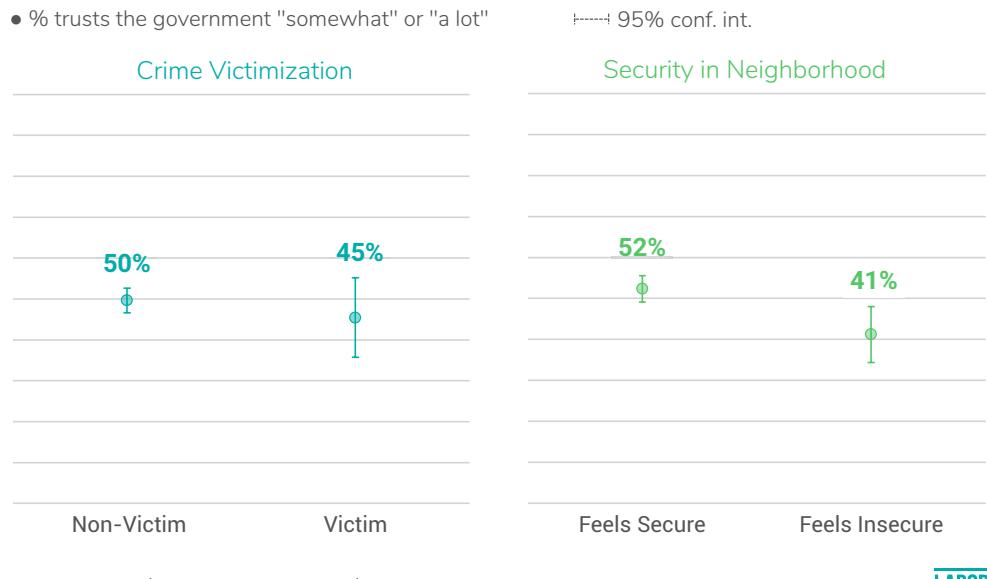
**A**cademic research has found a close link between crime victimization and political attitudes. Evidence from the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region suggests that individual experiences with crime can motivate political participation and perhaps influence voting choices.<sup>14</sup> Other research within LAC countries finds that victimization can have effects on broader attitudes as well, including decreased satisfaction with democracy and increased support for authoritarianism.<sup>15</sup>

Is it the case in Jamaica that being a victim of a crime affects one's attitudes toward government? To investigate this, we can examine the association between our measures of personal security and respondents' level of trust in government "to do what is right" (full text shown below). In **Figure 4.8**, we show the estimated percentage of Jamaicans who trust the government "a lot" or "somewhat", broken down by the measures of victimization and perception of neighborhood security. Those who were a victim of a crime in the past year are slightly less trusting than non-victims, though this

difference is not statistically significant. On the other hand, those who feel insecure in their neighborhood are significantly less trusting of the national government than those who feel secure. The difference between these groups is 11 percentage points. This significant difference holds even when placed into a linear regression model that predicts trust (on its original 4-point scale) with the measure of feeling of security along with control variables including gender, age, education level, wealth, and region of residence.

**Figure 4.8**

**Those who feel insecure are less trusting of government**



A similar pattern holds when examining an alternative measure of support for democracy as a political system. We ask respondents the extent to which they believe, on 1-7 scale, that democracy is better than any other form of government.

**Figure 4.9** shows the percentage that support democracy (i.e., give an answer of 5-7), broken down by crime victimhood (left) and perception of neighborhood security (right). There are no significant differences between those who have and have not been a victim of a crime in the past year on support for democracy. Victims are slightly less supportive of democracy, but the standard error for this estimate is rather large.

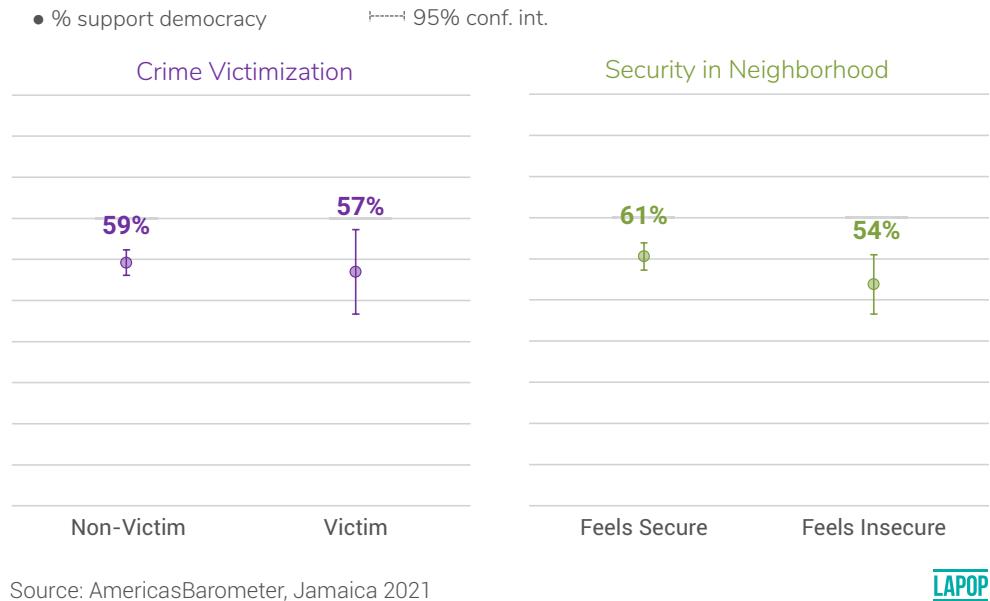
On the other hand, there is a difference based on perceptions of

security: those who feel insecure support democracy less than those who feel secure, by a margin of seven percentage points. This difference is statistically significant at the  $p<0.1$  level. The difference between the two groups is significant at the  $p<0.05$  level when using averages of the support for democracy variable on its original 1-7 scale (not shown). Again, the significant difference holds in a model that regresses support for democracy (1-7 scale) on feeling of insecurity along with the respondents' gender, age, education level, income, and region of residence. Thus, the evidence here seems to suggest that the *perception* or feeling of security predicts attitudes about democracy better than actual experiences.

**LAPOP**

**Figure 4.9**

**Those who feel insecure are less likely to support democracy**



## Conclusion

**C**hildren is a key concern for Jamaicans. Half of all citizens identify personal security as the top issue facing the country, even more than the COVID-19 pandemic, economic hardship, and political issues like corruption. This represents the highest share out of all countries studied in the 2021 AmericasBarometer. Nearly one in five Jamaicans feels insecure in their neighborhood, and our estimates indicate that one in fourteen has been a victim of a crime in the past year. Almost a quarter of the Jamaican people, and more than a third of those in Kingston, feel that gangs have at least some influence in their neighborhood.

Yet, indicators of experiences with and perceptions of crime have both improved since 2019. Though the drops have not been extreme, significantly fewer people in 2021 were a victim of a crime, feel insecure in their neighborhood, and believe gangs play a role in their neighborhood. Additionally, crime victimization and feelings of insecurity are lowest in Jamaica out of all countries studied in this round of the AmericasBarometer.

This is positive news. However, these findings should be treated with caution. Academic research has indicated that crime has decreased worldwide as a result of the lockdown measures implemented to contain COVID-19.<sup>16</sup> Official statistics on violent crime from the JCF also indicate that murders are up in 2021. This is to say that there is no guarantee that these indicators are a sign of things to come.

The results of this survey also provide implications for the political effects of crime. In contrast to previous literature, we do not find evidence that crime victimization is associated with a significant drop in support for democracy or trust in government. However, the perception or feeling of insecurity does have a relationship with these political attitudes. Future research should account for both actual experiences with crime and worry about prospective crime. Further,

policymakers and activists working on programs to combat crime would be wise to take into account both actual crime rates as well as public confidence about the state of crime in the country.

***Luke Plutowski is senior statistician at LAPOP Lab at Vanderbilt University. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Illinois.***

## Notes

- 1 Asmann and Jones 2021.
- 2 Williams 2021.
- 3 See Department of State's page on travel to Jamaica here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/jamaica-travel-advisory.html>
- 4 See Interpol's profile of Jamaica here: <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/Member-countries/Americas/JAMAICA>
- 5 Jaitman and Keefer 2017.
- 6 Ferguson 2021.
- 7 Asmann 2021.
- 8 Reitano et al. 2021.
- 9 Data collection took place between late May and July 2021, when COVID cases in Jamaica were quite low (relative to previous months within Jamaica and compared to case numbers in neighboring countries in the same timeframe)
- 10 For AOJ11, we plot the estimated percentage of the population that feels "insecure" or "very insecure" in their neighborhood.
- 11 The JCF regularly publishes crime statistics here: <https://jcf.gov.jm/stats/>
- 12 Justus and Kassouf 2013.
- 13 Levy 2012.
- 14 Bateson 2012; Berens and Dallendorfer 2019.
- 15 Bateson 2012; Ceobanu et al. 2011; Visconti 2020.
- 16 Nivette et al. 2021.



# Spotlight on Gangs and the Problem of Violent Crimes in Jamaica

By Balford Lewis

Jamaica has earned for itself the unenviable reputation of being one of the foremost "high crime" societies of the world. For over a decade, the country has been repeatedly ranked among nations with the highest per capita murder rate, achieving a first-place ranking in 2005 with its 1674 homicides or 64.1 per 100,000 inhabitants. Over the last six years, this rate has ranged from mid-40s to mid-50s annually, some of the highest rates in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Jamaicans are understandably preoccupied with this unrelenting wave of homicides and other categories of violent crimes. This study reports that, despite constraints associated with COVID-19, economic hard times, and the myriad of other problems facing the country, 50% of those surveyed identified safety and security-related fears as their foremost major national concern.

Indeed, the Jamaican crime problem is not new. In the 1980s, gangs affiliated to major political parties started to evolve into powerful organized criminal networks, participating in drug smuggling and money laundering, and more recently, in lottery scamming and extortion. Associated with the illicit narcotic trade has been a growth in the trafficking in illegal weapons, used to arm the community-based gangs. The police and crime experts have attributed the persisting high rates of violent crimes primarily to the activities of these gangs. Data from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) show that there are about 380 gangs operating in Jamaica in 2021, of which 262 are considered "active".

The authorities have responded with measures aimed "to restore a sense of security ... and strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies to effectively deal with the problem violent crime."<sup>2</sup> The passing of anti-gang legislation, namely The Criminal Justice (Suppression of Criminal Organisations) (Amendment) Act of 2021, with provisions expanding prosecutable activities in which criminal organisations are engaged, providing clearer rules of sentencing, and trial procedures that protect the identity of witnesses is noteworthy. The Law Reform (Zones of Special Operations) (Special Security and Community Development Measures) Act (2017) has given police and military commanders special powers to cordon areas, impose curfews, and search and arrest violence producers, while at the same time attending to the social and economic welfare of crime-ridden communities. The use of on-again, off-again State of Public Emergency under the Emergency Power Act as a crime suppression measure has stirred much controversy, with some questioning the constitutionality of its operation and its efficacy.

1 Official crime statistics are published by the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) here: <https://jcf.gov.jm/stats/>

2 Jamaica Information Service. 2021. "Anti-Gang Law to be Reviewed." <https://jis.gov.jm/anti-gang-law-to-be-reviewed/>

Photo by Georgia Fletcher,  
Vanderbilt University CLACX Latin  
American Images Photography  
Competition 2019



Chapter 5

# Attitudes toward Gender-Based Violence in Jamaica

Luke Plutowski



**G**ender-based violence is an all-too-common problem worldwide and in Jamaica especially. Estimates suggest that over one in four Jamaican women has been assaulted by an intimate partner in their lifetime, and the pandemic has only caused this number to grow. It is important to understand public opinion on the issue, as social norms and popular beliefs can contribute to or help combat such violence. This chapter presents findings from the AmericasBarometer survey on gender-based violence in Jamaica.

## Main Findings

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- Women generally feel more insecure in their neighborhood than men do, despite reporting fewer incidents of crime victimization in the past year
- Jamaicans overwhelmingly believe that a man does not have a right to use violence against his partner
- More than two in five Jamaicans believe that domestic violence is a private matter that should be handled within the couple
- About two-thirds of the Jamaican public thinks that, if reported, a case of intimate partner violence would be taken seriously, and that the judicial system would punish the culprit. Women tend to be less confident than men that such violence would be taken seriously

Gender-based violence (GBV), or harmful acts directed at an individual based on their sex or gender identity, has become a top priority for many governments and international organizations over the past decade. Additionally, gender-based violence disproportionately affects women and girls. The UN reports that GBV is a human rights violation that affects women across all sociodemographic backgrounds in all parts of the world and causes traumatic health and psychological consequences.<sup>1</sup> The World Bank reports that one in three women will be affected by GBV in their lifetime, including physical or sexual violence, femicide, or genital mutilation.<sup>2</sup>

Gender-based violence is, unfortunately, quite prevalent in Jamaican society. One in four Jamaican women has been physically assaulted by a male partner, and an equal number have been sexually abused by men who are not their partners.<sup>3</sup> Professor Opal Palmer Adisa of the University of the West Indies reports that the problem has only grown since the pandemic began.<sup>4</sup> The World Bank calls violence against women the “Shadow Pandemic”, with data showing that as much as 39% of women in Jamaica will suffer some type of abuse (physical, sexual, economic, or emotional) by their intimate partner in their lifetime. Data compiled from the UN in 2017 also suggests that Jamaica has the second highest number of femicides (murder of women and girls) in the world, with a rate of 11 out of 100,000 women each year.

Academic literature on GBV (and/or intimate partner violence, or IPV) in Jamaica and the Caribbean has several foci. Some studies simply seek to establish reliable estimates of the prevalence of violence, given the reporting biases associated with official statistics.<sup>5</sup> Other works propose and test interventions aimed at curbing the problem.<sup>6</sup> One of the biggest areas of study is the risk factors related to GBV. Some research finds that Jamaican women most likely to be victimized by IPV are young, poor, and in partnerships with controlling men.<sup>7</sup> Other work from Jamaica identifies factors such as history of violence in childhood, controlling behaviors, alcohol use, socioeconomic status, age, social norms surrounding violence, and geography as correlates of domestic violence.<sup>8</sup>

Separately but relatedly, some studies have examined the factors that lead to acceptance or condemnation of GBV by the judicial system or society at large. Research from low- and middle-income countries has shown that justification of IPV in the abstract is closely related to actual incidence of IPV.<sup>9</sup> In the United States, research suggests that law officers are more likely to take incidents of IPV seriously when the perpetrator is a heterosexual male and that victims of male perpetrators are considered more credible.<sup>10</sup> In the LAC region, acceptance of IPV is tied to individual factors such as gender, rural residence, and socioeconomic status, but also to contextual factors such as fertility rate, poverty, and gender equality. More intangible

characteristics, such as *machismo* culture, traditional gender roles, and Christian norms may also contribute to GBV.<sup>12</sup> These cultural mores discourage women and bystanders from seeking help.<sup>13</sup>

The 2021 AmericasBarometer included a set of questions related to GBV. The items assessed in this chapter focus mostly on the question of public opinion toward acts of violence against women.<sup>14</sup> We present findings on the beliefs of Jamaican people about the

acceptability of partner violence, where the onus of responsibility to resolve domestic violence lies, and the ability of the judicial system to deal with cases of GBV. Throughout, we assess differences in these attitudes between men and women (along with any other relevant demographic characteristics). Some studies have found that women are more accepting of IPV than men,<sup>15</sup> so it may be wise to tailor different strategies for each gender in order to address the problem.

## Women tend to feel more insecure than men, though they are not victimized at a higher rate

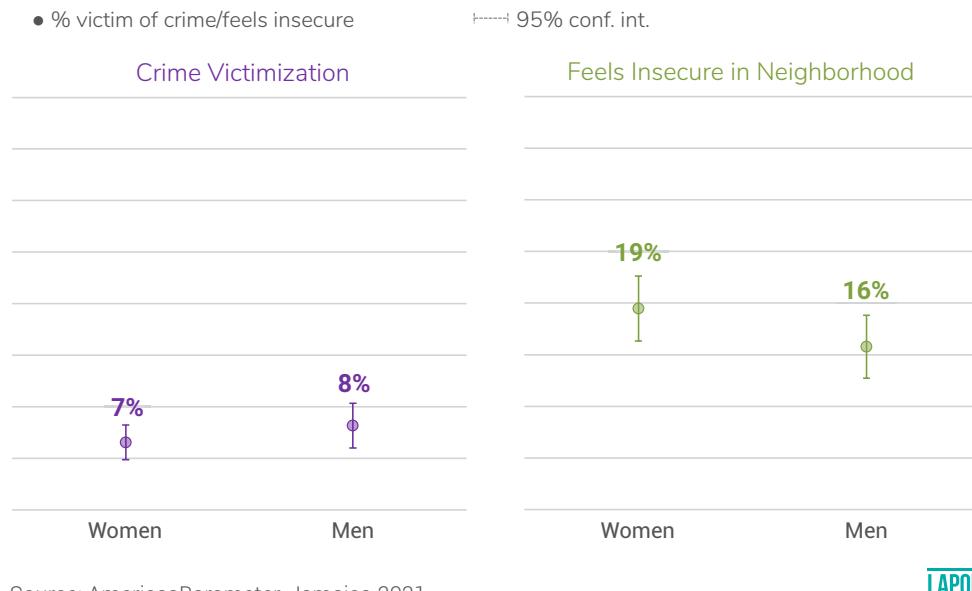
In the previous chapter, we presented results of questions related to the level of crime victimization among Jamaican citizens, along with perceptions of security in their neighborhood. The discussion of gender-based violence begins here because there are important gendered differences on these items which illuminate the scope of the issue.

**Figure 5.1** shows, on the left, the percentage of Jamaicans who report being a victim of a crime in the past year, and, on the right, the percentage of Jamaicans who believe their neighborhood is “insecure” or “very insecure”. Both measures are split by gender. The findings reveal that

women are more likely, by about four percentage points, to feel insecure in their neighborhood (difference of means  $p$ -value  $< 0.1$ ). This is despite the fact that women are slightly less likely to report being a victim of a crime (difference of means not significant).

**Figure 5.1**

**Women report less crime victimization but higher levels of insecurity**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

**LAPOP**

A recent study of Jamaican women found that women's disproportionate fear of crime is overwhelmingly driven by heightened perceived vulnerability to rape.<sup>16</sup> This highlights why gender-based violence is a particularly pernicious issue; merely imagining the possibility of it poses psychological consequences that go

beyond general fear of other types of crimes. This demonstrates why crime fighting strategies should account for gendered differences in experience with crimes; to create a society where all feel safe, it is important that law enforcement, policymakers, and activists specially address GBV.

## Jamaicans overwhelmingly reject the idea that a man has a right to use physical violence against his partner, but views about whether instances of violence should be handled privately are mixed

Violence against women and girls in the Caribbean is both a criminal justice and public health problem.<sup>17</sup> The first step for addressing such a large problem is for the society to agree there is a problem in the first place. As other studies have found,<sup>18</sup> some Jamaicans believe that domestic violence can be justified in certain circumstances. Further, even if many agree that domestic violence is wrong, they may not see it as a crime or a problem for public health.

To better understand the attitudes of Jamaican citizens toward intimate partner violence, we included two questions on the 2021 AmericasBarometer that assess attitudes about IPV. We first asked whether a man has a right to use physical violence against his partner, and second, whether domestic violence is a private matter that should be handled within the couple (see full question text below). The results of these questions are shown in **Figure 5.2**.

I am going to read some statements about relationships of couples and I am going to ask you to indicate whether you agree or disagree.

**A man has a right to discipline his partner with physical violence.**

**Do you:**

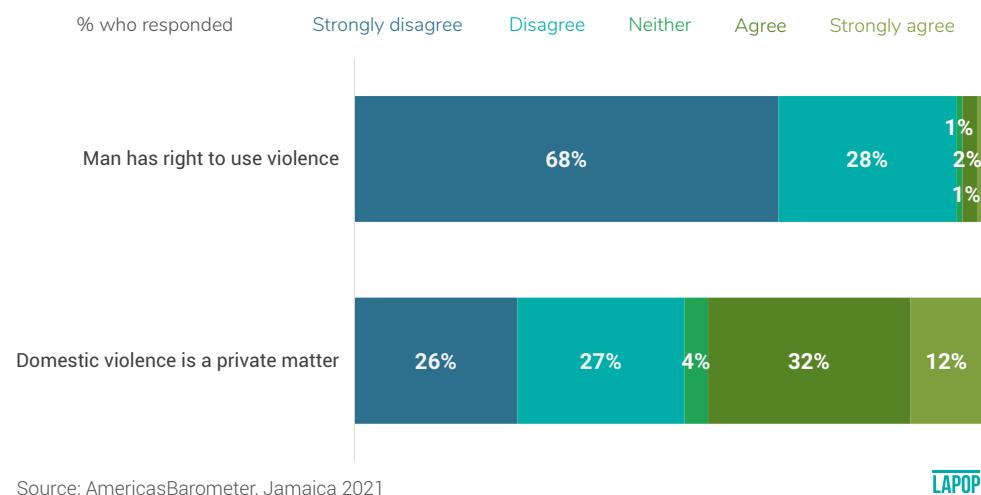
**(1) Strongly agree (2) Agree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Disagree (5) Strongly disagree**

**Physical violence between members of a couple is a private matter and should be handled by the couple or close family. Do you:**

**(1) Strongly agree (2) Agree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Disagree (5) Strongly disagree**

**Figure 5.2**

**While most disagree that men have a right to use violence, many believe domestic violence is a private matter**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

LAPOP

Jamaicans overwhelmingly reject the idea that a man has a right to use physical violence against his partner, with nearly 96% disagreement. This is consistent with previous findings; Bott et al. (2012) reported that the share of the population who condones domestic violence in at least some circumstances was lowest in Jamaica out of the 12 countries studied, at 2.9% (compared to 3% in the 2021 AmericasBarometer). Non-response on the AmericasBarometer item is quite low at 1.5%, as is the number of responses in the neutral category (1.1%). Taken together, the results indicate that Jamaicans feel quite strongly against IPV.

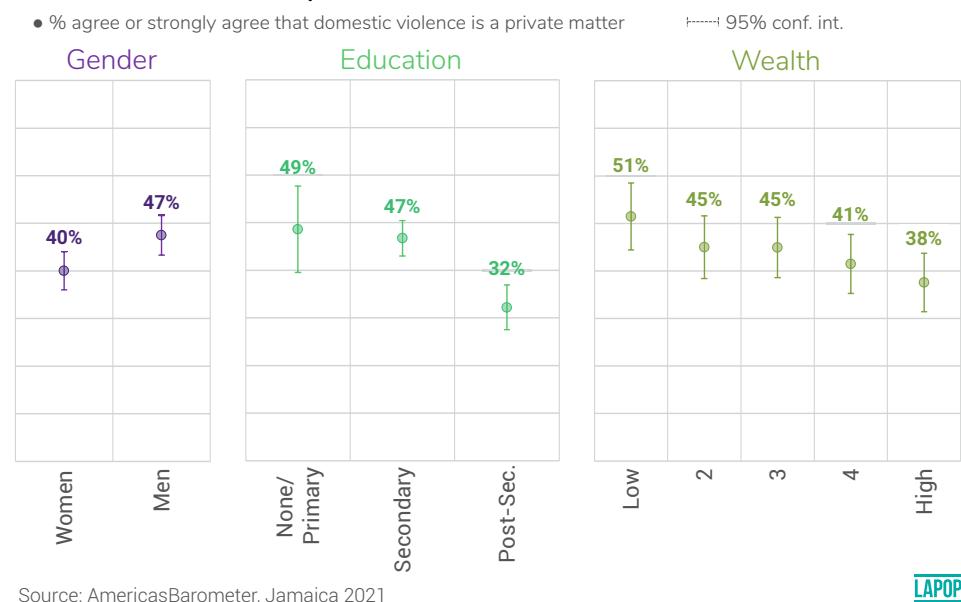
While the majority (53%) disagree that IPV is a private matter, there is a sizable minority (44%) that agrees that incidents of partner violence should be handled within the family. Non-response is also considerably higher at 7%, as are responses in the neutral category (4%). Thus, while the vast majority agree that physical

violence is wrong, not all agree that it is a public issue.

We assess whether the belief that domestic violence is a private matter varies by common demographic characteristics, including gender, age, education, wealth, and region of residence. There are significant differences for three of these factors: gender, education, and wealth. As displayed in **Figure 5.3**, men are more likely than women to agree that domestic violence is private. It also shows that those who reached a post-secondary level of education and those who are relatively more wealthy are much less likely to believe that domestic violence is private. These differences hold in a regression model with all demographic variables included. Contrary to some literature which suggests that acceptance of IPV is more common among young people<sup>19</sup> and those in rural areas,<sup>20</sup> we do not find significant differences by region of residence or age.

**Figure 5.3**

**Men and those with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to see domestic violence as a private matter**



**Jamaicans tend to believe that the justice system will properly handle cases of violence against women**

To combat the issue of gender-based violence, citizens need to have trust that there are institutions capable of handling incidents once they are reported. How much confidence do Jamaicans have in the ability of the justice system to properly handle cases of GBV? To help answer this question, the 2021 AmericasBarometer included a set of items on institutional responses to GBV. The two relevant questions, shown below, ask how likely it is that a reported case of IPV would be taken seriously by police and punished by the judicial system.

**Suppose a woman in your community or neighborhood was beaten by their partner. If the incident was reported, how likely would it be that the police would take it seriously?**

(1) Very likely (2) Somewhat likely  
(3) A little likely (4) Not at all likely

**If the case were brought to justice, how likely would the judicial system be to punish the culprit?**

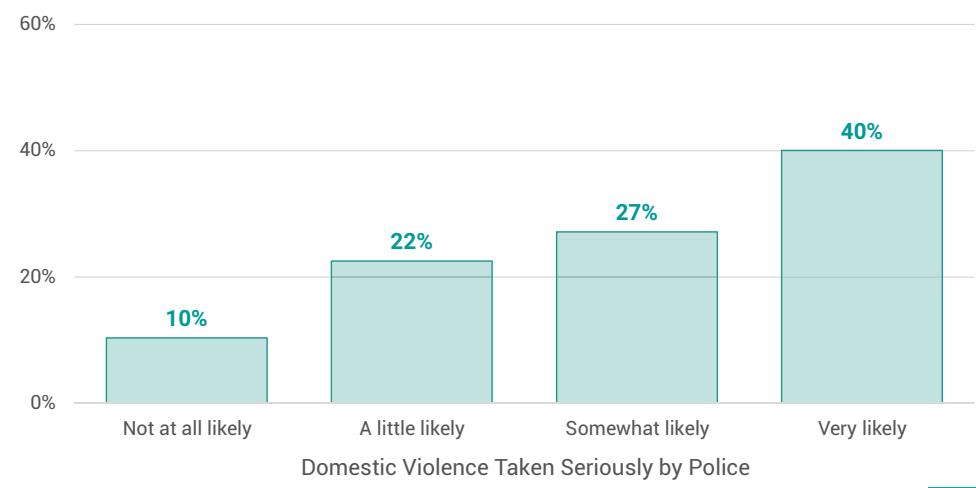
(1) Very likely (2) Somewhat likely  
(3) A little likely (4) Not at all likely

**Figures 5.4** and **5.5** show the distributions of responses to these questions in our survey. The answers to each question mirror one another. Most Jamaicans believe that it is "somewhat" or "very" likely that domestic violence would be

taken seriously by police (67%) and the perpetrator would be punished by the judicial system (70%). Nevertheless, this leaves sizable minorities who have little or no faith in the judicial system to deal with cases of IPV.

**Figure 5.4**

**Most believe that domestic violence will be taken seriously by police**

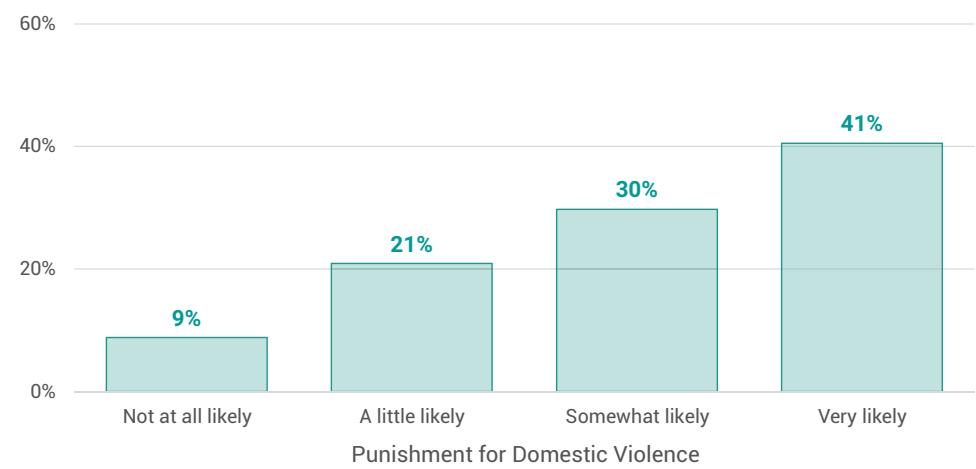


Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

LAPOP

**Figure 5.5**

**Most believe the judicial system is likely to punish perpetrators of GBV**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

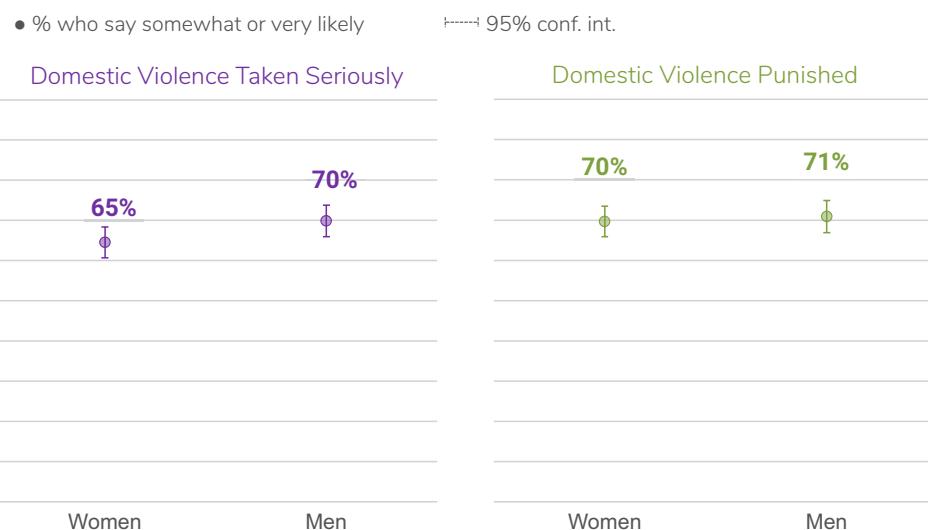
LAPOP

# Men and older Jamaicans are more confident in the justice system's response to violence against women than women and younger adults

Some groups are particularly trusting of the police and judicial system when it comes to cases of IPV. As **Figure 5.6** shows, men are more likely to believe that domestic violence would be taken seriously by police (70% of men versus 65% of women, a small but statistically significant difference).<sup>21</sup> Both men and women are about equally likely to believe perpetrators of domestic violence would be punished if the case were brought to justice. There are also differences in these beliefs by age cohort (**Figure 5.7**). Older Jamaicans are significantly more trusting of the police and the judicial system than younger individuals; more than three quarters (77%) of those 50 years of age or older believe that a culprit would be punished if a case of IPV was brought to the judicial system. Age remains a strong predictor of both dependent variables in a regression model with wealth, education, region, and gender included as covariates.

**Figure 5.6**

## Men are more likely to believe IPV will be taken seriously

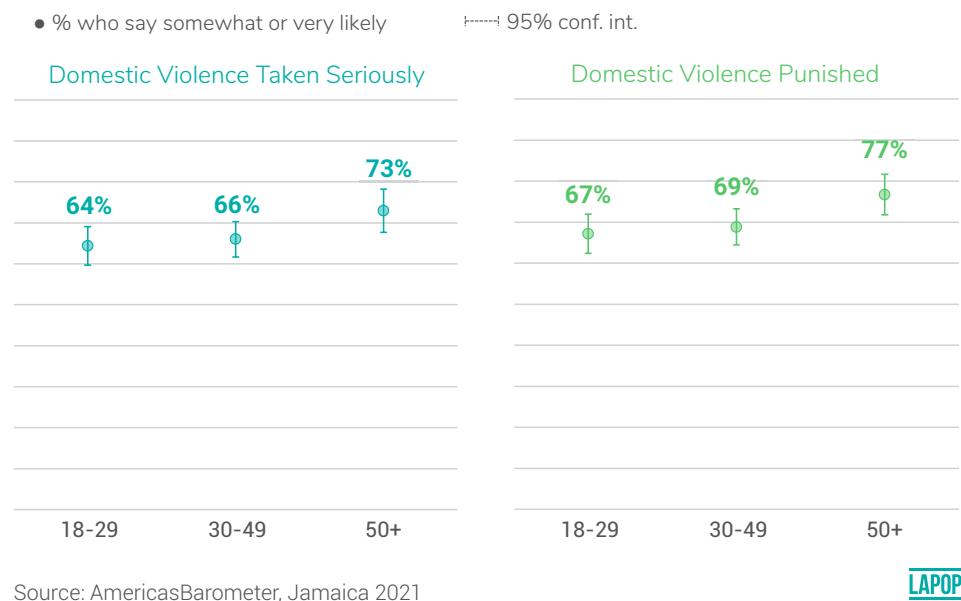


Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

LAPOP

**Figure 5.7**

**Older adults are more likely to believe IPV will be taken seriously**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

**LAPOP**

There are two rather interesting findings of non-significance. In contrast to the vast differences between education levels in beliefs about domestic violence being a private matter (Figure 5.3), there are no significant differences between education groups in their belief that domestic violence would be taken seriously by police or punished by the judicial system. Those who have reached post-secondary education have slightly higher levels of trust than those with no or primary education (about three and a half percentage points on both measures), but the standard errors of the two groups overlap quite heavily. This non-finding is surprising because those in the highest education category are significantly less trusting than the lower education groups on our measures of general trust in the national police and

neighborhood police, along with trust in the political system to protect basic rights.<sup>22</sup>

The other notable finding is that there is no association between the measures of trust in institutional responses to GBV and the belief that GBV is a private matter. One might expect that those who see GBV as a serious matter of public concern would also be cynical about the current ability of law enforcement to respond to such incidents. The reverse could also be true; those who have no trust in the state's handling of GBV cases might then believe that such violence should instead be handled by the couple's family. Nevertheless, there is no difference between those who do and do not believe domestic violence is a private matter in evaluations of the likelihood of a case being taken seriously and punished.

## Conclusion

**G**ender-based violence is a persistent and serious issue that affects women in every country around the world, and Jamaica is no exception. To properly treat the epidemic of partner violence in a democracy like Jamaica's, the public needs to agree that there is a problem, agree that the state has a responsibility to act on the problem, and have faith that, if reported, there are adequate means for recourse. The AmericasBarometer sheds light on each of these questions.

The results of our study show that Jamaicans overwhelmingly reject the idea that men have a right to use physical violence against their partners. However, views are more mixed about whether such cases of intimate partner violence are private matters that should be handled within the family. On a positive note, most Jamaicans believe that, if a case of GBV were brought to the police or the justice system, the victim would be taken seriously, and the perpetrator would be punished. Importantly, men are more likely to believe that domestic violence is a private matter and that the authorities would take the issue seriously were it brought to their attention.

Policymakers and activists working to combat GBV in Jamaica should pay particular attention to where Jamaicans believe the burden of responsibility is to respond to incidents of violence. Cultural attitudes which

either tacitly accept or encourage violence can lead to a chilling effect that prevents victims and bystanders from reporting incidents to authorities.<sup>23</sup> Thus, even if the judicial system were to work exactly as it should when dealing with cases of GBV, the problem could still persist if it is believed to be a "family matter". It is also especially important to consider gendered differences in beliefs about the proper handling of domestic violence. Our results point to the fact that women are less confident that authorities would take such cases of violence seriously, which could make them less likely to report them, ultimately making the problem more difficult to combat.

***Luke Plutowski is senior statistician at LAPOP Lab at Vanderbilt University. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Illinois.***

## Notes

- 1 See information and data from the UN Population Fund here: <https://www.unfpa.org/gender-based-violence> as well as from the UN Refugee Agency here: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/gender-based-violence.html>
- 2 World Bank 2019.
- 3 Serju 2021.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Palermo, Bleck, and Peterman 2014.
- 6 Morrison, Ellsberg, and Bott 2016; Muturi and Donald 2006.
- 7 Priestley 2014.
- 8 Smith 2016.
- 9 Sardinha and Catalán 2018.
- 10 Russell 2018.
- 11 Bucheli and Rossi 2019.
- 12 Flake and Forste 2006; Kimelblatt 2016; Perkins 2019.
- 13 Bott et al. 2012.
- 14 In our 2021 telephone survey, gender is self-reported by respondents. This is a change from previous rounds of the AmericasBarometer, in which enumerators recorded each respondent's gender. In 2021, we allowed enumerators to mark an "other" option if a respondent reported something other than male/man or female/woman. There were 12 such cases. Because this is too few observations with which to conduct separate analyses, we group these cases with the female respondents. Thus, the two categories we analyze are more accurately described as "male" and "non-male".
- 15 Bucheli and Rossi 2019; Sardinha and Catalán 2018.
- 16 Bailey 2021.
- 17 DeShong and Haynes 2016.
- 18 For example, see Bott et al. 2012.
- 19 Waltermauer 2012.
- 20 Bucheli and Rossi 2019.
- 21 This difference does not hold in a regression model with other covariates included (wealth, education, region, and age).
- 22 Full question wordings for these items are: B18. "To what extent do you trust the National Police?"; JAMB18A. "To what extent do you trust the police in your neighborhood?"; and "B3. To what extent do you think that citizens' basic rights are well protected by the political system of Jamaica?". The highest education group was also more trusting of the justice system on average compared to the lowest education group, but the p-value for this difference was just above 0.1.
- 23 Bott et al. 2012.



# Spotlight on the Scourge of Intimate Partner Violence in Jamaica

By Balford Lewis

**G**ender-based violence (GBV), and violence against women and girls (VAWG) in particular, continues to be an urgent citizen insecurity challenge in the Caribbean. Research shows that physical violence, perpetrated by an intimate male partner, features in the relationship of some 25% of women in Jamaica,<sup>1</sup> with some victims being as young as 15 years old.<sup>2</sup> The increasing rate at which these incidents of intimate partner violence (IPV) end in murder and sometimes in murder-suicide underscores the need for more targeted interventions to address this often-hidden form of violence.

The increasing prevalence of intimate partner femicide (IPF)—the killing of women by their current or former intimate partners—is an even more concerning dimension of the problem of GBV. Studies examining vulnerabilities for this category of murders in Jamaica revealed that perpetrators are often jealous, vengeful, overly possessive, and clinically depressed male partners, some markedly older than their victims. The growing consensus is that IPF must be viewed and treated not only a social and criminal justice problem but also as a serious public health issue.

In response to the United Nations' appeal for governments worldwide to initiate efforts to directly address the problem of IPV, the Institute for

Gender & Development Studies at The University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona has been partnering with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in developing relevant legislations and policies as part of an overall campaign to end violence against women and girls in Jamaica. The project seeks, *inter alia*, to engage civil society, government, the private sector, and the media in a national campaign to eliminate GBV. Indeed, a thorough understanding of the nature and extent of the problem is critical for the success of any such intervention. The pillar of the aforementioned project that speaks to “improved quality, accuracy, and availability of data on violence against women and girls” is therefore a crucial design imperative that must be robustly implemented.

<sup>1</sup> UN Women. 2016. Annual Report 2016–2017. <https://annualreport.unwomen.org/en/2017>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State. 2021. 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Jamaica. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/jamaica/>

<sup>3</sup> Serju, Christopher. 2021. “Violence against women an urgent national problem.” The Gleaner. <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20210127/violence-against-women-urgent-national-problem>

Chapter 6

# Public Attitudes toward Citizen- Police Relations in Jamaica

Luke Plutowski



Relations between police and local communities in Jamaica have been strained in recent years. The 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer included several items related to this topic to more properly understand the dynamics of public opinion about police and identify sources of mistrust. These items provide a baseline on which to judge change in trust in police over time and provide a gauge of the public's receptivity to closer ties between police and the communities they serve.

## Main Findings

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- **Only about one in three Jamaicans trusts the national police, consistent with recent years.** Trust is higher when we ask about the police in the respondents' *neighborhood*
- **Trust in the police is highest among older people, women, and those with lower education**
- **The vast majority of Jamaicans believe that closer cooperation between citizens and police on community programs would help reduce crime, and most indicate that they would be willing to participate in such programs**
- **Those who are most willing to engage with police are older, male, less educated, and from Surrey.** They also tend to be less fearful of gangs, more trusting of police and their neighbors, and more likely to believe that cooperation between citizens and police helps to stop crime
- **Almost all Jamaicans believe that punishment for crimes should increase in order to deter them. Most also agree that employers discriminate against people with criminal records**

A healthy democracy requires citizens to trust law enforcement institutions. A public that believes their police force to be ineffective or harmful will not call on or provide information to law enforcement and, in some cases, may be emboldened to commit criminal acts. A policing institution that appropriately enforces the laws approved by the people strengthens democracy by preserving the rights of the citizenry and enhancing the public's sense of security.

The relationship between police and citizens in Jamaica has been problematic in recent years. Police have struggled to maintain order amidst rising crime rates, leading to feelings of insecurity and a distrust of the police among the general public. At the same time, Jamaican police forces have been accused of human rights violations and, especially, a disregard for due process rights. Erika Guevara-Rosas, the director of the Americas division of Amnesty International, stated that "Jamaica's shocking culture of fear and violence is allowing police officers to get away with hundreds of unlawful killings every year. Shocking injustice is the norm."<sup>1</sup> Following the killing of George Floyd in the United States in May 2020, Jamaicans took to the streets to protest racially-charged police abuses worldwide and within Jamaica.<sup>2</sup> The killing of Susan Bogle by security forces in August Town, St. Andrew led to renewed calls for police reform, particularly in underserved inner-city communities where violence and police killings are most common.<sup>3</sup>

Over the years, there have been a number of attempts to reform the police and improve the relationship between law enforcement and the public. In 2004, the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce released guidelines on police-citizen relations, detailing rights, duties, and responsibilities of both sides.<sup>4</sup> The Jamaica Constabulary Force then prioritized a shift toward community-based policing (CBP), beginning with its 2005-2008 Corporate Strategy Plan.<sup>5</sup> These efforts have been backed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), who worked together with the JCF to test and create guidelines for implementation of community policing.<sup>6</sup> The JCF's Corporate Plan for 2015-2018 continued to emphasize public confidence in the police, community participation, and transparency and accountability as part of its key objectives.<sup>7</sup> Most recently, the JCF reaffirmed its commitment to "Policing with the Community" as a focal point in the 2019 National Consensus on Crime, which called for more effective social programs, structural reform within the JCF, and more active community involvement in policing efforts.<sup>8</sup>

Academic research from within and outside Jamaica demonstrates that procedural justice, the idea of prioritizing fairness and respect in interactions between legal authorities and the public, is a highly effective method for increasing public confidence in the police.<sup>9</sup> Other studies indicate that community-oriented policing

approaches can enhance police legitimacy and, in turn, willingness of the public to cooperate and participate in policing programs.<sup>10</sup>

Barriers remain to improving trust in police among the Jamaican people. Thus far, efforts at implementing community policing in Jamaica have been geographically limited and produced mixed results.<sup>11</sup> The National Consensus on Crime, while providing a framework for reform, lacked a detailed plan of action

to reach its ambitious goals.<sup>12</sup> It also called for greater cooperation between the police force and the military. While the military is relatively well regarded in Jamaica,<sup>13</sup> its focus on order and control could impede community policing, which emphasizes partnership and consent.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, crime remains high in Jamaica, and recent protests have placed police brutality and killings under the microscope, two factors which add to the challenge of legitimacy.

## A third of Jamaicans say they have trust in the National Police

We start by assessing how trust in police among Jamaicans has changed over recent years. The AmericasBarometer has included a simple question asking the extent to which the respondent trusts the “National Police” (on a 1-7 scale) in every survey round since 2006. New in the 2021 round is a similar question that assesses trust in the police in the respondent’s *neighborhood*. The full question texts are below.

**I will ask you to answer the following questions using a number on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 means NOT AT ALL and 7 means A LOT. If your opinion is between not at all and a lot, you would choose an intermediate score...To what extent do you trust the National Police?**

**To what extent do you trust the police in your neighborhood?**

**Figure 6.1** shows how trust in the national police has changed over time since the first AmericasBarometer study in Jamaica since 2006. The 1-7 variable is recoded such that anyone who answers 5-7 is considered to have trust in the police. Throughout the whole series, trust has remained well below 50%, with a minimum of 20% in 2010. In 2021, one in three Jamaicans trusts the national police, which represents a (non-significant) increase from 2019.

**Figure 6.1**

**Trust in national police has remained stable at low levels**

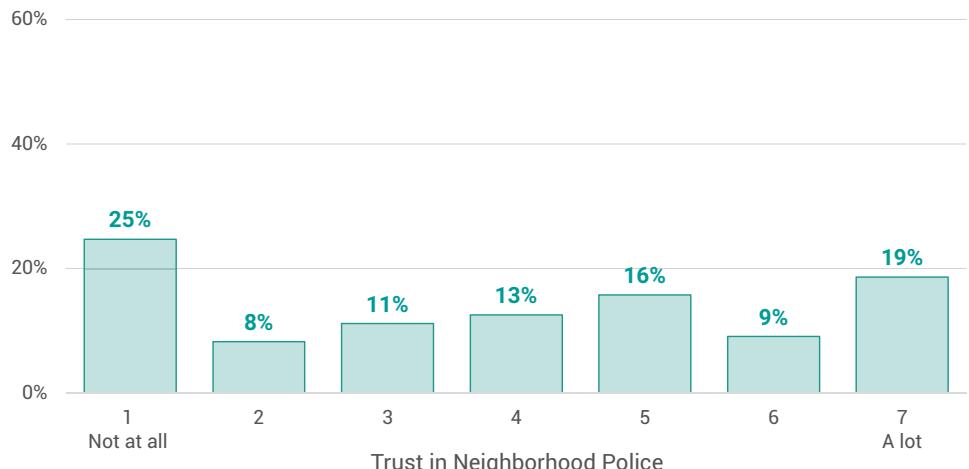


Jamaicans tend to trust their neighborhood police more than the national police

**F**igures 6.2 and 6.3 display the distribution of trust in community and national police in 2021. There is a diversity in opinions about local police: The two most common answers are the extreme ends of the scale, indicating no trust at all and a lot of trust. In contrast, views of the national police are not as polarized, with very few who indicate that they are very trusting. Only 11% trust them "a lot", which was the least popular answer. Comparing the two figures, we see that Jamaicans are more trusting of the police in their neighborhood compared to the national police; 43% gave an answer of 5-7 on the neighborhood measure, compared to 33% at the national level. This provides at least some indication that familiarity breeds trust between citizens and communities.

**Figure 6.2**

**Trust in neighborhood police is mixed in 2021**

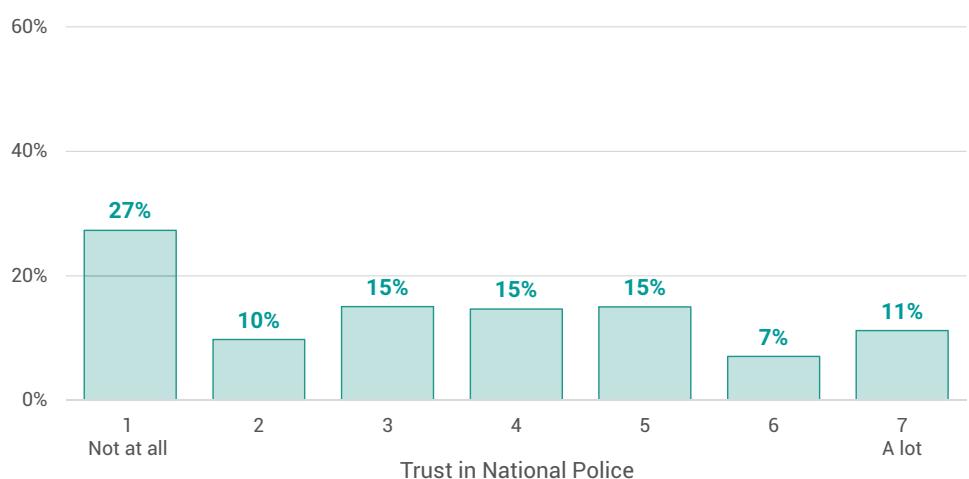


Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

LAPOP

**Figure 6.3**

**Most Jamaicans distrust national police in 2021**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

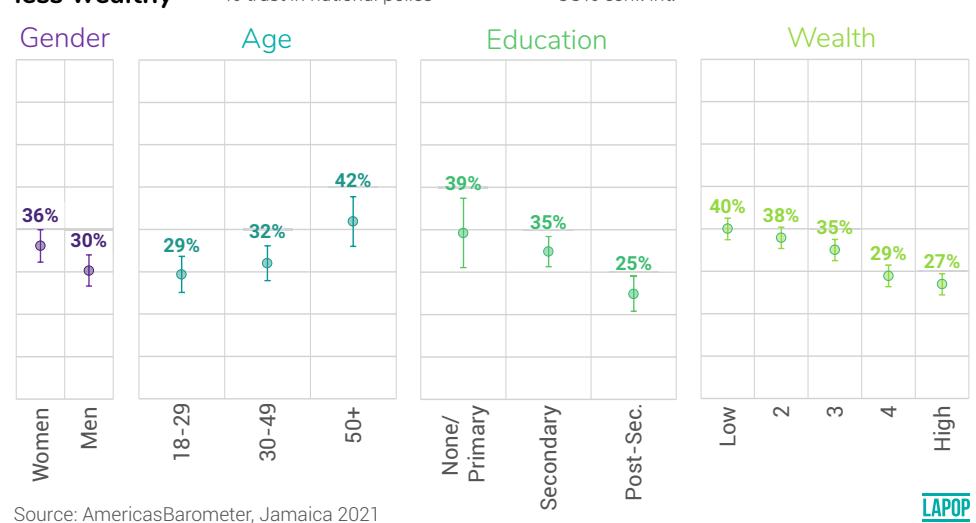
LAPOP

Trust in the police is not uniform. **Figure 6.4** reveals that there is significant variation in trust in the national police by age, gender, education and wealth. People who are relatively trusting of the

police tend to be older (50 years of age or more), female, and have lower socioeconomic status (lower educational attainment and lower relative wealth).

**Figure 6.4**

**People who trust the police tend to be older, women, less educated, and less wealthy** • % trust in national police



**There is a desire for stronger police-community relations, with a majority of Jamaicans saying this would help reduce crime and that they are willing to work with police**

The AmericasBarometer included two items that gauge public appetite for closer ties between police and the communities they serve. The first question asks whether a close relationship between police and the respondent's community would help reduce crime, and the second asks if the respondent would be willing to participate in a government programme aimed at that end. The full question texts are below.

**Do you think that a closer working relationship between police and persons in your community could help reduce crime, or would that make no difference?**

**(1) Yes, would help a lot (2) Yes, would help somewhat (3) No, would not help, make no difference**

**Suppose a government programme were developed for this purpose. Would you be willing to work closely with the police on community projects to fight crime, or would you feel hesitant to do that?**

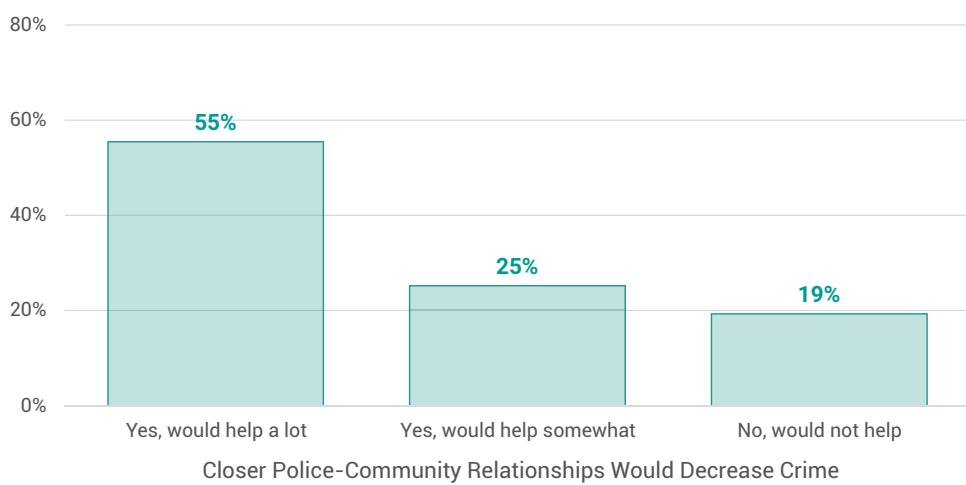
**(1) Very willing (2) Willing (3) Somewhat hesitant (4) Very hesitant**

**Figure 6.5** shows the distribution of responses on the first item in 2021, along with a line graph showing how this compares to previous years in which the question was asked

**(Figure 6.6).** Only about one in five (19%) say that closer ties would not help to reduce crime. Most (55%) say that a closer working relationship would help reduce crime "a lot". This is roughly in line with findings from previous years. Slightly fewer people believe that closer ties would help "a lot" compared to 2017, though this drop is not statistically significant. Thus, there is still a desire for better police-community relations.

**Figure 6.5**

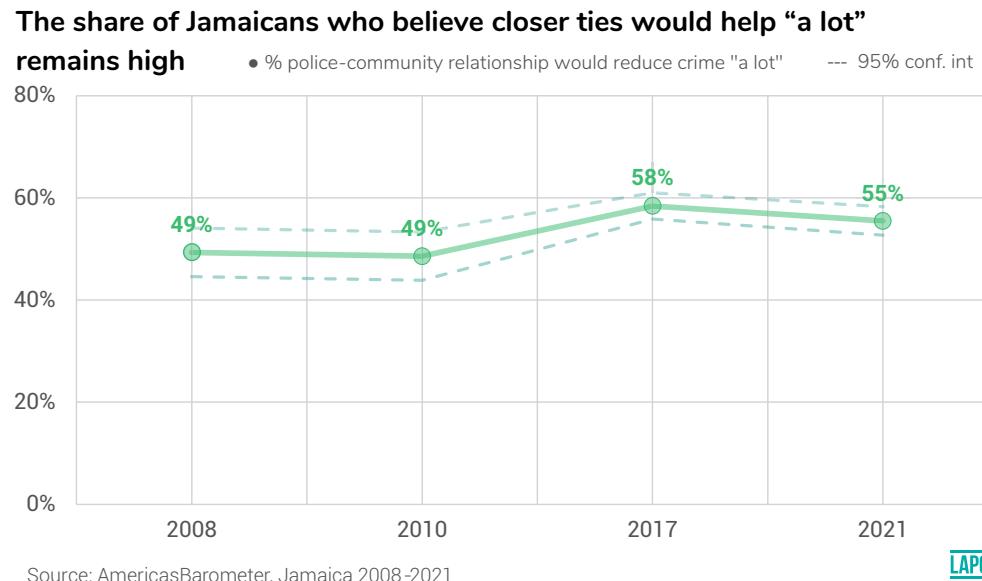
**Most Jamaicans think closer police-community relationships would help decrease crime**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

**LAPOP**

**Figure 6.6**

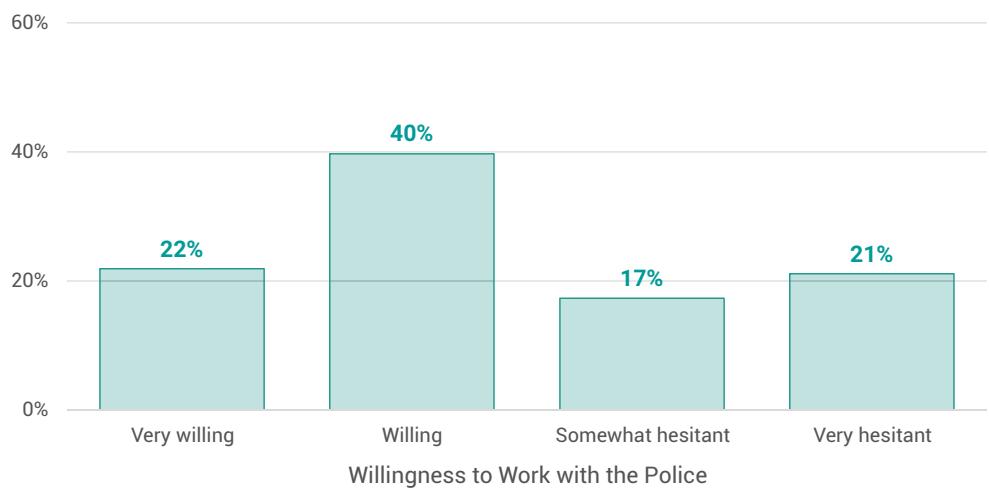


**Figures 6.7 and 6.8** display the results of the second question in a similar manner. In 2021, most Jamaicans reported that they would be willing to work with police on community projects to help fight crime. Enthusiasm is not particularly high, however. Two in five (40%) stated they would be “willing” to

help, but only about half that number were “very willing” (22%). Again, the percentage of the population that reported being “willing” or “very willing” to participate slightly declined in 2021, but the change was not statistically significant. Jamaicans’ willingness to work with police remains high.

**Figure 6.7**

**Most citizens are willing to work with police on anti-crime projects**

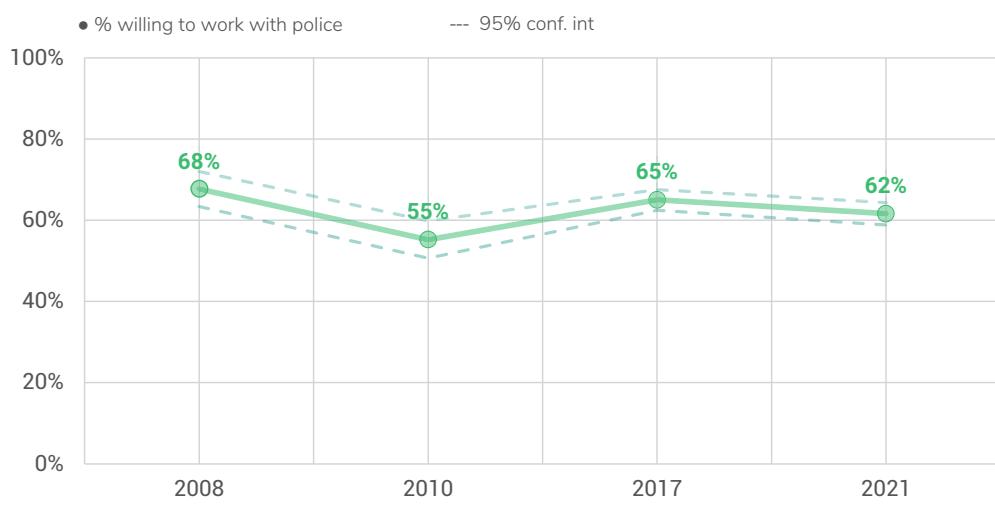


Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

LAPOP

**Figure 6.8**

**Willingness to work with police remains high in 2021**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2008-2021

LAPOP

## Jamaicans who want to work with police tend to be older and male, have lower educational attainment and less fear of gangs, trust police and neighbors, and believe cooperation is effective

There is significant variation in the profiles of those who are willing to work with police on community projects.

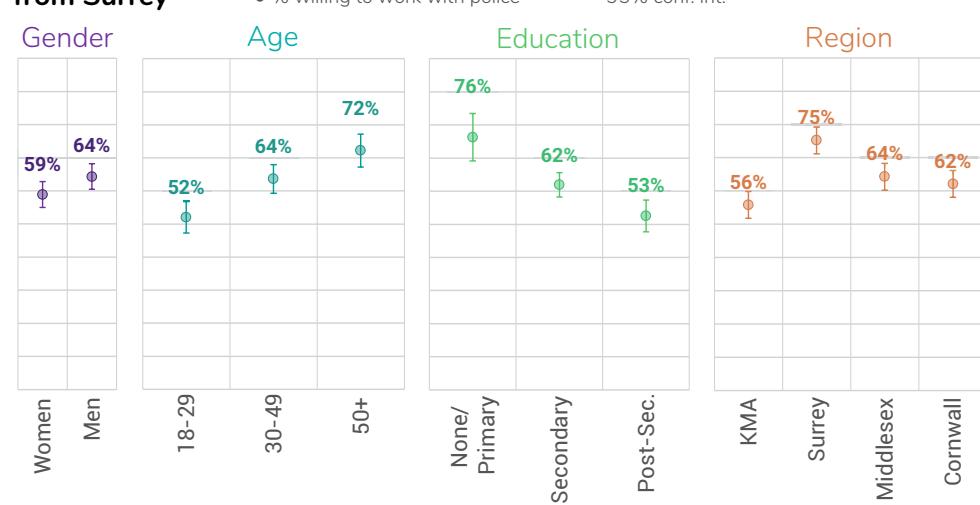
**Figure 6.9** displays the percentage of the population who report that they are “willing” or “very willing” to work with police, broken down by a number of different variables (all of which have at least one significant pairwise difference between categories).

First, there is a strong age effect; those who are 50 or older are more than twenty percentage points more likely to work with police than those who are 18-29. The proportion of males who are willing to work with police is five percentage points higher than that of females. People with lower educational attainment are much more willing to work with police than more highly educated individuals. Finally, those in Surrey

are more likely to report willingness to work with police than people from other regions of Jamaica, especially Kingston. When all four variables are included in a regression model predicting willingness to cooperate (on its original 4-point scale), the education effect becomes insignificant, and people from Kingston appear significantly less willing than those from other regions.

**Figure 6.9**

**Those most willing to work with police are older, men, less educated, and from Surrey**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

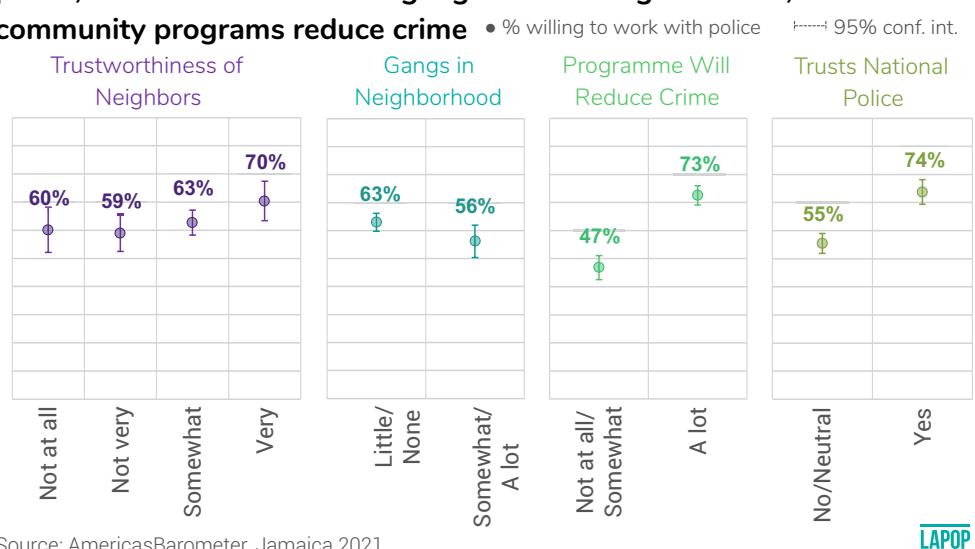
LAPOP

People who report that they are unwilling to work with police may do so for a number of reasons. They may not care about the issue of crime, they may think such collaboration would be ineffective, or they may hold fear or distrust of the police. **Figure 6.10** sheds light on some of these possibilities. Similar to **Figure 6.8**, it shows the percentage of people who are willing to work with police, separated by categories based on other stated attitudes. The figure

reveals that those who are most willing to work with police are “very trusting” of their neighbors, are not particularly worried about gangs in their neighborhood, believe that collaboration between citizens and police would help reduce crime “a lot”, and trust the national police. The result regarding gangs is somewhat surprising, although this seems to be a regional effect; people from Kingston are less trusting of police but live near most gang activity.

**Figure 6.10**

**Those most willing to work with police trust their neighbors and the police, are less worried about gangs in their neighborhood, and believe community programs reduce crime**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

When all variables are included in a regression model, only belief that the programme will be effective, trust in national police, gender, and region remain significant predictors. Thus, citizens must see the police as legitimate and strongly believe in their programming before they are willing to cooperate with them. Women appear to be less willing to work with police on community projects, in line with findings

from the previous chapter on gender-based violence which show gendered differences in attitudes about crime and security. Finally, the dynamics of police-citizen relations in Kingston appear to be different than the rest of the country, which suggests that strategies for crime fighting and boosting cooperation with law enforcement need to be geographically tailored.

## Jamaicans overwhelmingly want more severe punishment of criminals, but they also believe that criminals face discrimination

**O**ne source of distrust among the public toward police and the judicial system more broadly could be linked to how Jamaicans perceive the treatment of criminals.

For example, some may believe that too many people who commit crimes go unpunished. At the opposite end of the spectrum, some may believe that the judicial system is too harsh toward those who are accused or convicted of crimes. To investigate this possibility, the 2021 AmericasBarometer asked two questions related to beliefs about how criminals are treated in Jamaica. Both assessed the extent to which respondents agree with a statement on a 1-7 scale. The first statement was that punishment of criminals should increase to deter crime, and the second was that employers discriminate against people with criminal records (see question to the right).

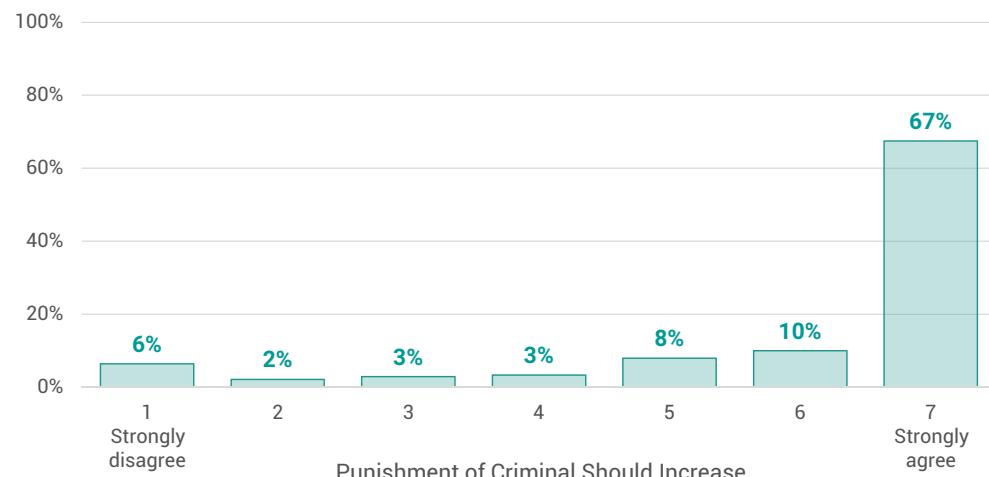
**I'm going to read some statements. Please tell me your opinion using a scale from 1, which means "strongly disagree" to 7, which means "strongly agree". You can use any number between 1 and 7.**

**To reduce crime in a country like ours, punishment of criminals must be increased. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?**

**Employers discriminate against people with past criminal behavior. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?**

**Figure 6.11**

**Most Jamaicans strongly agree that punishment for crimes should increase**

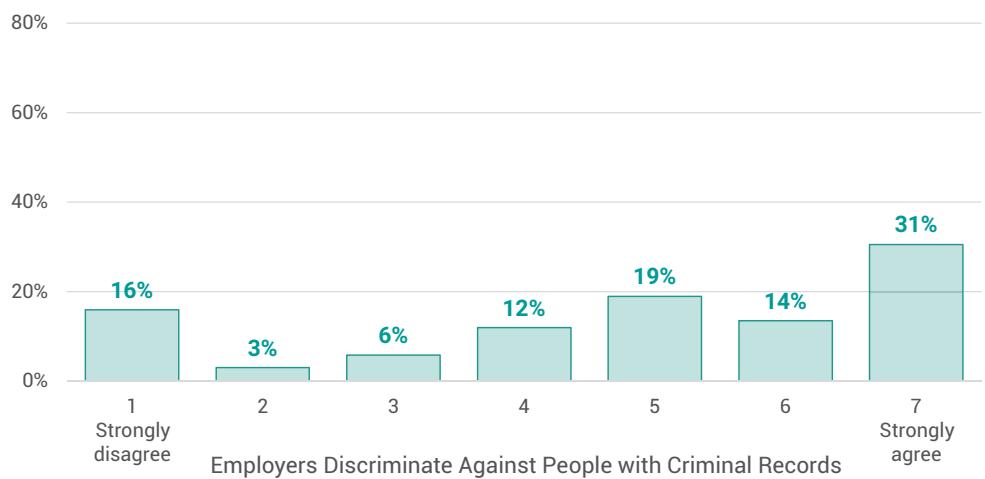


Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

LAPOP

**Figure 6.12**

**Most Jamaicans agree that people with criminal records face discrimination**



Source: AmericasBarometer, Jamaica 2021

LAPOP

**Figures 6.11 and 6.12** show the results of each question. Jamaicans overwhelmingly believe that criminal punishments should increase, with over two-thirds (67%) reporting that they "strongly agree". Only around one in ten (11%) disagreed that punishments should increase. Interestingly, most (63%) also agreed that employers discriminate against people with criminal records. Just over three in ten (31%) reported that they "strongly agree" with the statement, which was the most

common response. The results seem to suggest that Jamaicans simultaneously think that criminals are treated too lightly and unfairly. The findings make more sense with literature which posits that public opinion about crime policy in the Caribbean must be understood as multidimensional.<sup>15</sup> Though punishment and rehabilitation are often treated as two ends of a spectrum, public attitudes generally favor both punitiveness and progressiveness.

## Conclusion

Improving public opinion toward the police has been a top priority for the Jamaican government. Yet, citizen-police relations have been strained. Results from the 2021 AmericasBarometer survey in Jamaica reveal that only about a third of Jamaicans trust the national police. Trust in neighborhood police is not much higher. This could be related to the so far slow movement on major reforms within the Jamaican Constabulary Force (JCF) and the high crime rates across the country.

On the positive side, the Jamaican people remain willing to work alongside with police and participate in programs aimed at curbing crime. The survey results indicate that the public believes a closer relationship with the police would help reduce crime. These results dovetail with academic research showing that procedural justice is a sure-fire means of boosting police legitimacy. Policymakers and activists who want to improve trust in police should prioritize citizen involvement in crime-fighting measures.

Attitudes about police vary quite significantly, suggesting that policies and programs on crime and police legitimacy need to be nuanced. The results indicate that lack of trust in police and their programming can prevent citizens from cooperating with law enforcement. This could cause a vicious cycle in which citizens and police are hesitant to interact due to a lack of trust, leading to further deterioration of relationships between police and local communities. Further, women, while more trusting of police than men, are less willing to work with them on community projects. The reasons for this differential willingness is unclear

and deserves further study. Finally, people from the Kingston area are much more distrusting of the police and unwilling to work with them compared to residents of other regions. Policymakers who craft programs to enhance trust in police should pay attention to the particular issues surrounding the relationship between citizens and law enforcement in Kingston.

Public opinion about crime policy in Jamaica is complex. Our findings indicate that Jamaicans overwhelmingly want more severe punishment of criminals, but they also believe that criminals are discriminated against. Future research should investigate this seeming paradox further to better understand the ideal mix of punitive and rehabilitative measures for the Jamaican context. This could help lawmakers strike the very delicate balance between enforcing strict discipline and encouraging successful re-entry into society.

*Luke Plutowski is senior statistician at LAPOP Lab at Vanderbilt University. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Illinois.*

## Notes

- 1 Laville 2016.
- 2 Chappell 2020a.
- 3 Chappell 2020b.
- 4 Jamaica Information Service 2004.
- 5 Jamaica Information Service 2005.
- 6 Jamaica Constabulary Force 2008.
- 7 Jamaica Constabulary Force 2015.
- 8 See full text of the Consensus here: <https://www.psoj.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Jamaicas-National-Consensus-on-Crime-The-Agreement-Final-1.pdf>
- 9 Hinds 2007; Murphy, Mazerolle, and Bennett 2014; Pryce and Grant 2020; Van Damme 2017.
- 10 Crowl 2017; Peyton, Sierra-Arévalo, and Rand 2019.
- 11 Reitano et al. 2021.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Harriott et al. 2020.
- 14 Chambers 2014.
- 15 Maguire and Johnson 2015.



# Spotlight on Citizens' Involvement in Neighbourhood Security in Jamaica

By Balford Lewis

**T**he conflictual nature of police-citizen relations in Jamaica have persisted over many years despite multiple well-publicized initiatives aimed at reducing tension and mistrust between the police and the communities they serve as a means of controlling crime.<sup>1</sup> At the policy level, the National Crime Prevention Strategic Plan (2007-2011) emphasizes the goal of fostering a more cooperative police-citizen relationship in efforts to enhance citizen safety and security. In its Corporate Strategy (2005-2008), The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) signalled its support for and a commitment to this element of the plan with a visible shift towards community-based policing (CBP), an approach that has since been publicly endorsed by successive commissioners of police.

Crime control is indeed a 'shared responsibility', but it is the police who are ultimately responsible for pursuing measures to ensure public order and citizen security. The unrelenting high rate of serious crime and the prevailing sense of insecurity in Jamaica highlight the failure of the police to deliver in regard to that obligation. Some CBP initiatives may have been useful in reducing resentment and mistrust of the police and in turn improving relationships and access to intelligence. However, they do not address, in a sustainable way, the underlying social and economic conditions of communities that lead to crime and violence.

The infrequently used Law Reform (Zones of Special Operations) Special Security and Community Development Measures Act (2017), commonly referred to as ZOSO, is being promoted as the policy measure that will facilitate a more holistic approach to crime control; one that will not only make provisions for "preserving the rule of law, upholding public order and citizen security, and safeguarding the human rights,"<sup>2</sup> but will also seek to facilitate community development through social interventions involving active citizen participation.

<sup>1</sup> Mclean, John, Anthony Harriott, Elizabeth Ward, John Buchanan, and Roopa Karia. 2008. Jamaica – Community-Based Policing Assessment. JCF and USAID. [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/Pnadt846.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadt846.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See text of law here: [https://japarliament.gov.jm/attachments/article/339/The%20Law%20Reform%20\(Zones%20of%20Special%20Operations\)%20\(Special%20Security%20and%20Community%20Development%20Measures\)%20Act,%202017.pdf](https://japarliament.gov.jm/attachments/article/339/The%20Law%20Reform%20(Zones%20of%20Special%20Operations)%20(Special%20Security%20and%20Community%20Development%20Measures)%20Act,%202017.pdf)

Photo by María Paula Mello,  
Vanderbilt University CLACX Latin  
American Images Photography  
Competition 2017



# AmericasBarometer Data and Reports at a Glance

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## Data



The AmericasBarometer datasets feature a common core set of questions that has been asked from 2004 to present day. In addition, LAPOP has datasets that date back to the 1970s. Data files are free and publicly available for download [here](#).

Users can also access AmericasBarometer data through our

**Data Playground.** This data analysis tool is free and interactive. It is particularly useful for those individuals unfamiliar with advanced statistical software programs. Users can analyze AmericasBarometer data through tabulations of a single variable, cross-country comparisons on a map, and cross-tabulations of two variables.

## Reports



LAPOP produces numerous reports on the AmericasBarometer and other projects. Our goal is to provide analysis and evidence for scholars and practitioners on public opinion and democratic governance.

*Insights* reports are short briefs produced by students, network affiliates, our researchers, and our faculty. The series is used by journalists, policymakers, and scholars.

Standard *Insights* engage social science research and AmericasBarometer data to develop and assess theories regarding links between public opinion and democracy.

*Topical Insights* use project data to provide evidence and context on a current event.

*Methodological Insights* offer windows into our cutting-edge approaches, report on our innovations, and engage scholars who work at the survey research frontier.

*Global Insights* introduce findings from LAPOP-affiliated research outside the Americas.

*Spotlights* present quick snapshots of AmericasBarometer questions across countries, time, and subgroups.

Subscribe to receive *Insights* reports for free by emailing [insight@mail.americasbarometer.org](mailto:insight@mail.americasbarometer.org).

Country reports are book length, contain more extensive analyses, and are organized thematically to address findings relevant to democratic governance, strengthening, and stability. They include a focus on topics that stakeholders, especially USAID Missions, identify as important in the local context.

The following AmericasBarometer datasets (■) and reports\* (●) are available for free download on our website ([www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop)):

|                                | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | 2014 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2021 |
|--------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|---------|---------|------|
| Regional                       | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Mexico                         | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Guatemala                      | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| El Salvador                    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Honduras                       | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Nicaragua                      | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Costa Rica                     | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Panama                         | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Colombia                       | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Ecuador                        | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Bolivia                        | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Peru                           |      | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Paraguay                       |      | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Chile                          |      | ●    |      | ●    | ●    | ●    |         |         |      |
| Uruguay                        |      |      | ●    | ●    | ●    |      |         |         |      |
| Brazil                         |      |      |      | ●    |      |      |         |         |      |
| Venezuela                      |      | ●    | ●    |      |      |      |         |         |      |
| Argentina                      |      |      |      | ●    | ●    |      |         |         |      |
| Dominican Republic             | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    |         | ●       | ●    |
| Haiti                          |      | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    |         |         |      |
| Jamaica                        |      | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●       | ●       | ●    |
| Guyana                         |      | ●    | ●    |      |      |      |         |         |      |
| Trinidad & Tobago              |      |      |      | ●    |      |      |         |         |      |
| Belize                         |      |      |      |      |      |      |         |         |      |
| Suriname                       |      |      |      |      | ●    |      |         |         |      |
| Bahamas                        |      |      |      |      |      |      |         |         |      |
| Barbados                       |      |      |      |      |      |      |         |         |      |
| Grenada                        |      |      |      |      |      |      | ●       |         |      |
| St. Lucia                      |      |      |      |      |      |      |         |         |      |
| Dominica                       |      |      |      |      |      |      |         |         |      |
| Antigua and Barbuda            |      |      |      |      |      |      |         |         |      |
| St. Vincent and the Grenadines |      |      |      |      |      |      |         |         |      |
| St. Kitts and Nevis            |      |      |      |      |      |      |         |         |      |
| United States                  |      |      |      |      |      |      |         |         |      |
| Canada                         |      |      |      |      |      |      |         |         |      |

\*2021 AmericasBarometer country reports will be available in early 2022

# Survey Methodology for the 2021 AmericasBarometer

The AmericasBarometer is a multinational, multiregional, and multicultural (3MC) survey of voting-age citizens or permanent residents in North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. The project uses a standardized core questionnaire to interview respondents selected through nationally representative probability samples. Traditionally, surveys in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC region) have been 45-minute face-to-face (FtF) interviews with a minimum of 1,500 individuals selected through area probability sampling. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the LAPOP Lab switched the data collection mode in the LAC region from FtF to computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI).

**Sampling.** The sampling frame for the 2021 LAC-region surveys consists of mobile phone numbers. This decision was reached following an analysis of household coverage of mobile phones (~90% in the average LAC country, according to the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer), percent of landline only households (~28% on average), and a cost/benefit analysis of calling both. Mobile phone numbers were called using a random-digit dialing (RDD) approach to generate nationally representative samples. In cases of unanswered calls, each number selected into the sample was called at least five times to minimize nonresponse errors.

**Weights.** The weighting scheme includes four stages. First, we compute base weights to compensate for unequal selection probabilities (e.g., some voting-age individuals have access to multiple

mobile phones). Second, we compute weights to adjust for non-sampling errors from differential nonresponse rates gleaned from disposition code records that follow AAPOR's response rate guidelines. Third, we align the sample estimates with population benchmarks; to maximize the validity of cross-time comparisons and overcome challenges due to out-of-date or unavailable census data, we use the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer to generate these benchmarks. Fourth, we merge all weights together into a final raked weight.

**Questionnaire Design.** To avoid high rates of interview break-offs, phone surveys require instruments that are comparatively shorter than FtF surveys. The AmericasBarometer 2021 questionnaire consists of a split-sample questionnaire design with an overall length of about 25 minutes. The lab calls this a



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"trunk-and-branch" approach: the trunk contains 3,000 interviews that are randomly assigned to one of two branches ( $n=1,500$ ). A limitation of this approach is that certain variables cannot be correlated, because they belong to two different branches; the advantage is the ability to collect data on a greater number of outcomes of interest.

**Pretesting via Cognitive Interviews.** LAPOP uses a three-stage iterative cognitive interviewing strategy. First, cognitive interviewers carry out a handful of tests of new modules and generate revisions. Second, the team conducts cognitive interview tests of the full questionnaire in a selected set of countries. Third, a similar process is carried out in each country with each country-customized questionnaire. For the 2021 AmericasBarometer, some cognitive interviewees were offered a small incentive and all cognitive interviews were conducted using video or phone calls.

**Interviewer Training.** All interview and supervising teams are trained according to the same standardized protocols. For the 2021 AmericasBarometer, training sessions consisted of videos and remote sessions using Zoom. Training sessions typically last two full days and all trainings conclude

with a learning assessment that team members have to pass (>80% correct answers) in order to be certified to work on the project.

**Auditor Training.** Each country's fieldwork team designated a set of auditors who were trained via remote workshop sessions. Auditors receive detailed training on how to identify low-quality interviews and how to flag and report these interviews in the CATI software.

**Quality Control.** The 2021 AmericasBarometer was implemented using a version of LAPOP's Fieldwork Algorithm for LAPOP Control over survey Operations and Norms (FALCON). FALCON was adapted to CATI and permits collection of multiple types of paradata, including voice recordings, question and questionnaire timing, and interviewer performance indicators. These paradata indicators are monitored daily during data collection so that any corrections or cancellations resulting from a failure to meet quality control standards are made while fieldwork is in progress. Final datasets include high-quality interviews only. Each technical report for an AmericasBarometer survey summarizes the results of this process.

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Nashville, Tennessee  
October 2021

Photo by Kaitlen Cassell,  
Vanderbilt University CLACX Latin  
American Images Photography  
Competition 2018

# The AmericasBarometer

The AmericasBarometer is a regional survey carried out by LAPOP Lab, a center for excellence in international survey research based at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN. LAPOP has deep connections to the Latin America and Caribbean region, established during more than five decades of public opinion research. The AmericasBarometer is possible due to the activities and support of a consortium of institutions located across the Americas. To complete each round of the study, LAPOP partners with individuals, survey firms, universities, development organizations, and others in up to 34 countries within the Western Hemisphere. Project efforts are informed by the four core components of LAPOP's mission: to produce objective, non-partisan, and scientifically sound studies of public opinion; to innovate improvements in survey research; to disseminate project findings; and, to build capacity. The AmericasBarometer project receives generous support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Vanderbilt University. Other institutions that have contributed recently to multiple rounds of the project include Environics Institute, Florida International University, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, the Universidad de los Andes, and the World Bank. Over the years, the project has benefited from grants from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development in Brazil (CNPq), the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, and numerous academic institutions across the Americas. The 2021 AmericasBarometer was carried out via phone interviews in 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries, and via the internet in Canada and the U.S. All samples are designed to be nationally representative of voting-age adults. In all, more than 64,362 individuals were interviewed in this latest round of the survey. The complete 2004-2021 AmericasBarometer dataset contains responses from over 350,000 people across the region. Common core modules, standardized techniques, and rigorous quality control procedures permit valid comparisons across individuals, certain subnational areas, countries, regions, and time. AmericasBarometer data and reports are available for free download from the project website: [www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop). Individuals can also use that website to access and query the data via LAPOP's interactive *data playground*. Datasets from the project also can be accessed via "data repositories" and subscribing institutions across the Americas. Through such open access practices and an extensive network of collaborators, LAPOP works to contribute to the pursuit of excellence in public opinion research and ongoing discussions over how programs and policies related to democratic governance can improve the quality of life for individuals in the Americas and beyond.



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