



# THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN MEXICO AND IN THE AMERICAS, 2016/17

A Comparative Study of  
Democracy and Governance

## Executive Summary

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Opinión Pública y Mercados



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## **Executive Summary**

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## Introduction

Democracy is on the defense in the Americas and around the world. In a number of places across the Americas, countries have been coping with security and economic crises, and scandals emanating from governments and parties. Among the mass public, skepticism is brewing over democracy's ability to succeed in delivering on citizens' expectations and improving the quality of their daily lives. The 2016/17 AmericasBarometer taps into this simmering frustration and allows it to be studied in comparative perspective across population subgroups, countries, and time. It also documents some notable signs of resilience. In this same vein, the survey reveals important nuances in challenges to democratic governance across a heterogeneous region. In this way, the AmericasBarometer provides a refined tool with which to make the types of diagnoses and distinctions that are so important to designing and implementing effective policy.

A core focus of the AmericasBarometer is citizens' evaluations of "democratic governance." Democratic governance refers to a system of politics and policy in which citizens' direct, indirect, and representative participation is privileged and enabled via basic freedoms, with the goal of ensuring that states are held accountable for their actions. As the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2013)<sup>1</sup> has defined it, "Democratic governance is governance that takes place in the context of a democratic political system, which is representative of the will and interests of the people and is infused with the principles of participation, inclusion, and accountability" (p. 37). The appeal of democratic governance is derived from its potential to improve the quality of citizens' lives by facilitating efforts to decrease corruption, increase economic development (and decrease poverty), and build strong communities. The legitimacy of democratic governance hinges, at least in part, on how well it delivers on these expectations (Booth and Seligson 2009)<sup>2</sup>. For this reason, taking stock of its successes and short-comings requires assessing citizens' varied experiences and evaluations under democratic governance.

This report summarizes the main findings of the 2016/17 AmericasBarometer survey in México. LAPOP has carried out the AmericasBarometer in México since 2004. The 2016/17 survey was conducted by DATA-OPM between January and March 2017, and 1,563 people were interviewed as part of the nationally representative survey.

## 1. Support for Electoral Democracy in the Americas

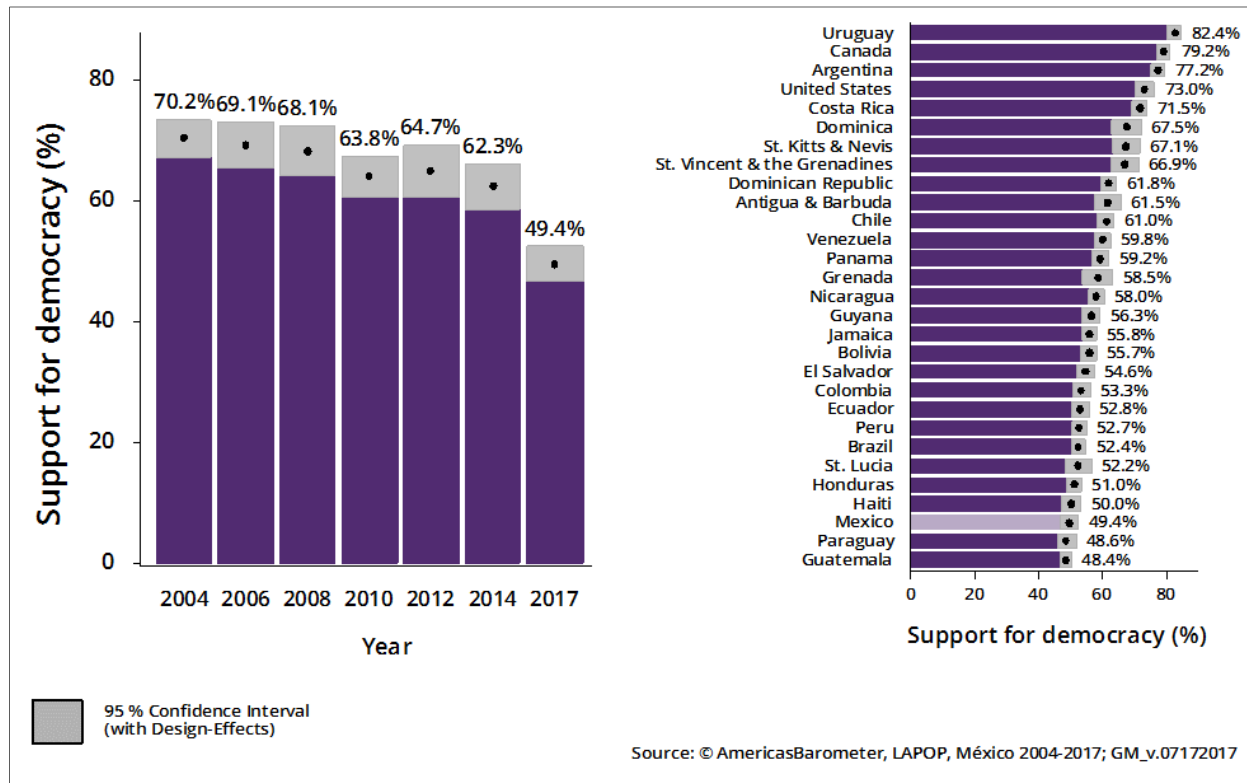
This chapter considers support for the abstract concept of democracy and two of its most fundamental components: elections and parties. There is a significant decline in the extent to which the public agrees that democracy, despite its flaws, is better than any other form of government. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, support for democracy decreased by almost 9 percentage points between 2014 and 2016/17. Overall, in an average country in the

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<sup>1</sup> USAID. 2013. USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance. Washington, D.C. [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pdax557.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdax557.pdf) (Accessed on July 29, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Booth, John A., and Mitchell A. Seligson. 2009. *The Legitimacy Puzzle in Latin America: Political Support and Democracy in Eight Nations*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

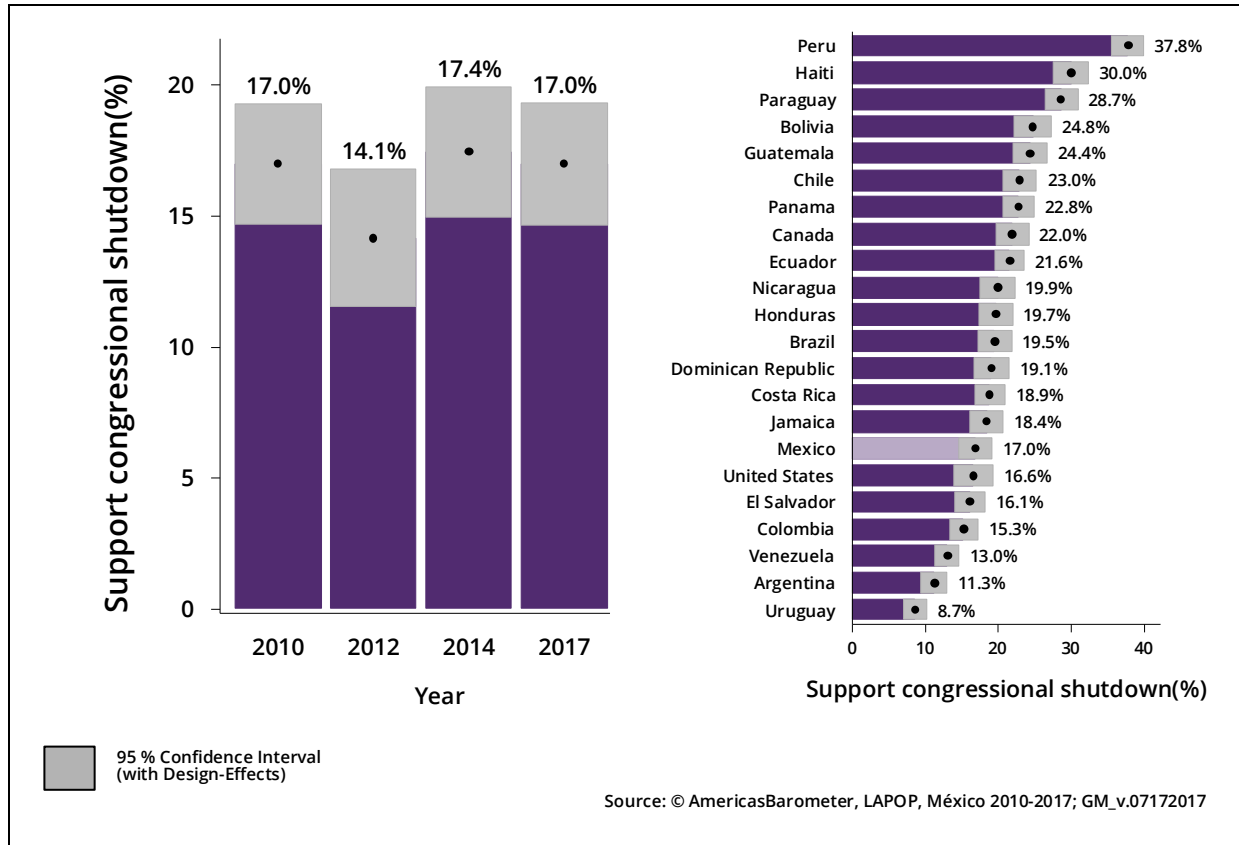
region, as many as two out of five people do not express support for democracy in the abstract. As shown in Figure 1, although most citizens in México have supported democracy since 2004, the percentage that supports democracy has declined to its lowest level in 2017 (49.4%). Less than half of the citizens support democracy as the best form of government in México, which places the country in the lower range of support for democracy compared to the rest of the countries in the region.



**Figure 1. Support for Democracy in México and in the Americas**

In addition to support for democracy in theory, acceptance of democracy as “the only game in town” is key to the stability and persistence of democratic governance. This means, in short, that citizens in democratic societies should not support the shutdown of legislative bodies by the executive branch. Support for executive coups in México is much lower than support for military coups.<sup>3</sup> As shown in Figure 2, the levels of support for an executive closure of Congress has remained stable in the AmericasBarometer 2016/17 for México (17.0%). México ranks among the countries with lowest support for executive coups in 2016/17.

<sup>3</sup> The 2016/17 AmericasBarometer includes two items that tap participants’ hypothetical willingness to support a military takeover of the government: in the face of a lot of crime and a lot of corruption. Support for military coups under high crime is 47.5% in México, which places the country among the highest ranks in the region. Support for military coups under high corruption is a little higher (49.9%), higher than the average for the region.

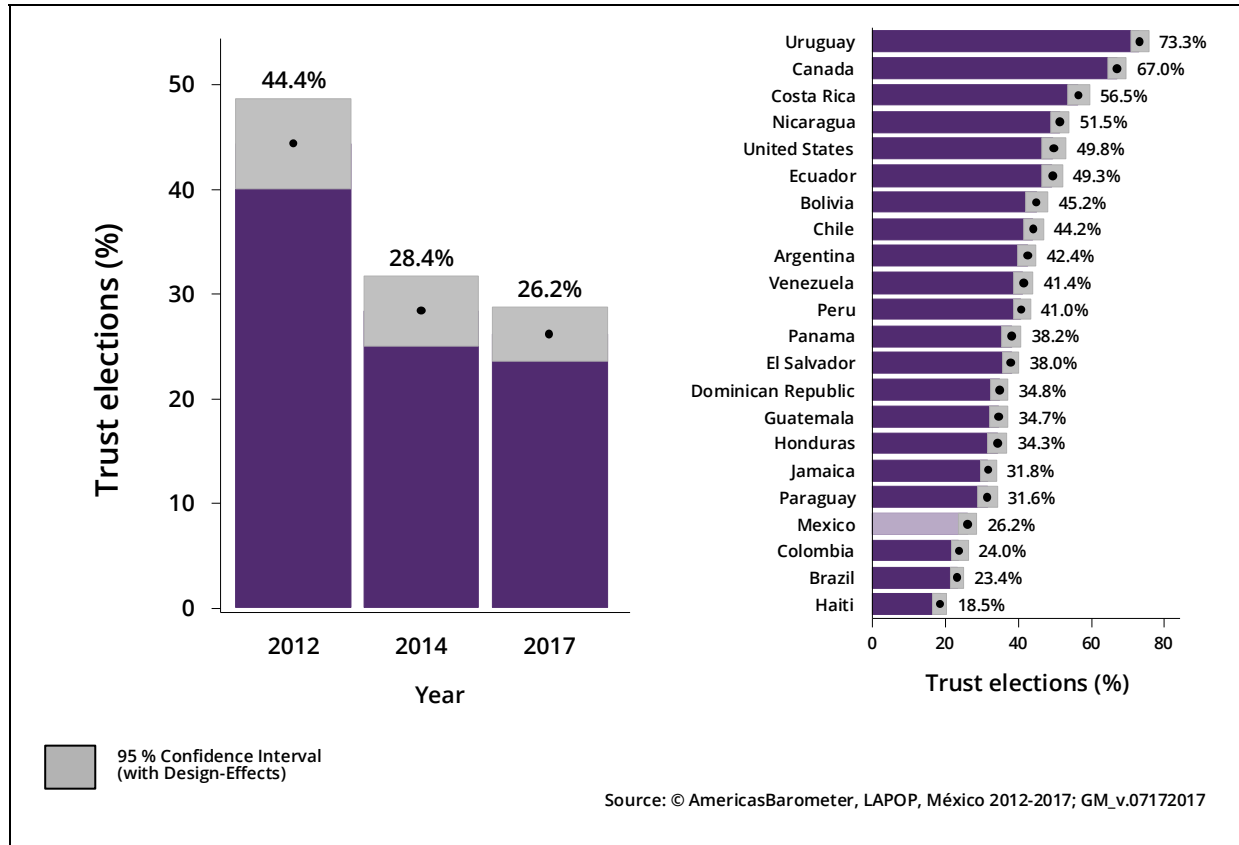


**Figure 2. Support for Executive Coups in México and in the Americas**

Electoral democracy relies on citizen participation through elections: voters select their representatives and voice their preferences at the ballot box. Public trust and participation in these institutions are therefore important for understanding citizen support for democracy as it functions in the real world and, as well, serve as a signal of citizens' commitment to democracy (a foundational part of democratic consolidation).

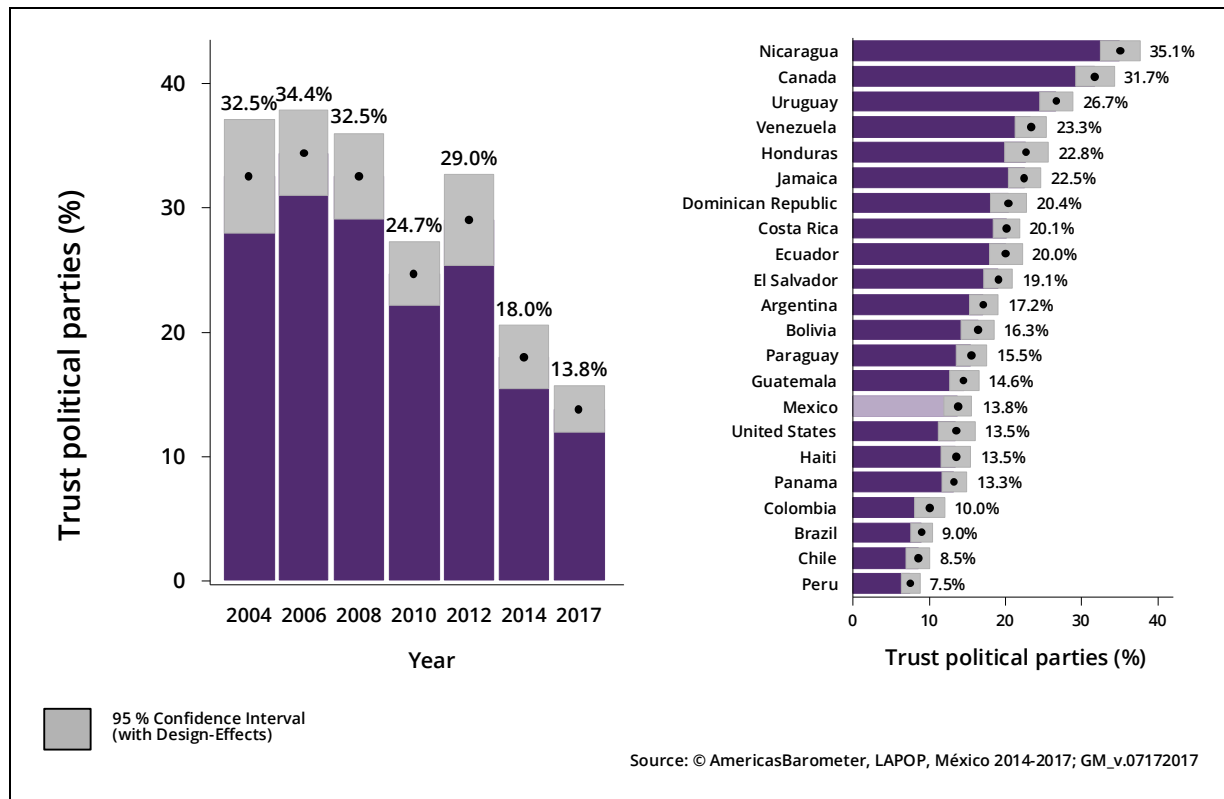
Citizens legitimate electoral democracy by trusting in elections as a mechanism to select leaders and by participating in elections. On average, trust in elections is low in the Americas. As shown in Figure 3, México is in a low range compared to other countries in the region, with about two-third of respondents reporting trust in elections, a drop of more than 2 percentage points compared to the 2014 round and more than 20 percentage points compared to 2012.





**Figure 3. Trust in Elections in México and in the Americas**

Parties also serve an important role for citizens. By organizing politics on policy lines, parties enable voters to identify a “team” that aligns with their preferences. At their best, then, parties facilitate citizen participation in the democratic process and ensure high quality representation. México has an intermediate level of confidence in political parties (13.8%) compared to the countries in the region. Figure 4 shows that confidence in political parties has declined sharply in México since 2004: while 32.5% trusted parties in 2004, only 13.8% report trusting parties in the 2016/17 round. Indeed, the levels of trust in political parties in the AmericasBarometer of 2016/17 are the lowest that have been recorded since the study began in México. Between 2014 and 2016, confidence in political parties in México declined by nearly five percentage points. Whereas on average trust in elections did not decline for the LAC region as a whole between 2014 and 2016/17, trust in parties did. Thus, on this latter measure (parties), the decrease in trust mirrors a regional trend, while on the former (elections), Mexico stands out as distinct from the region’s cross-time trend.

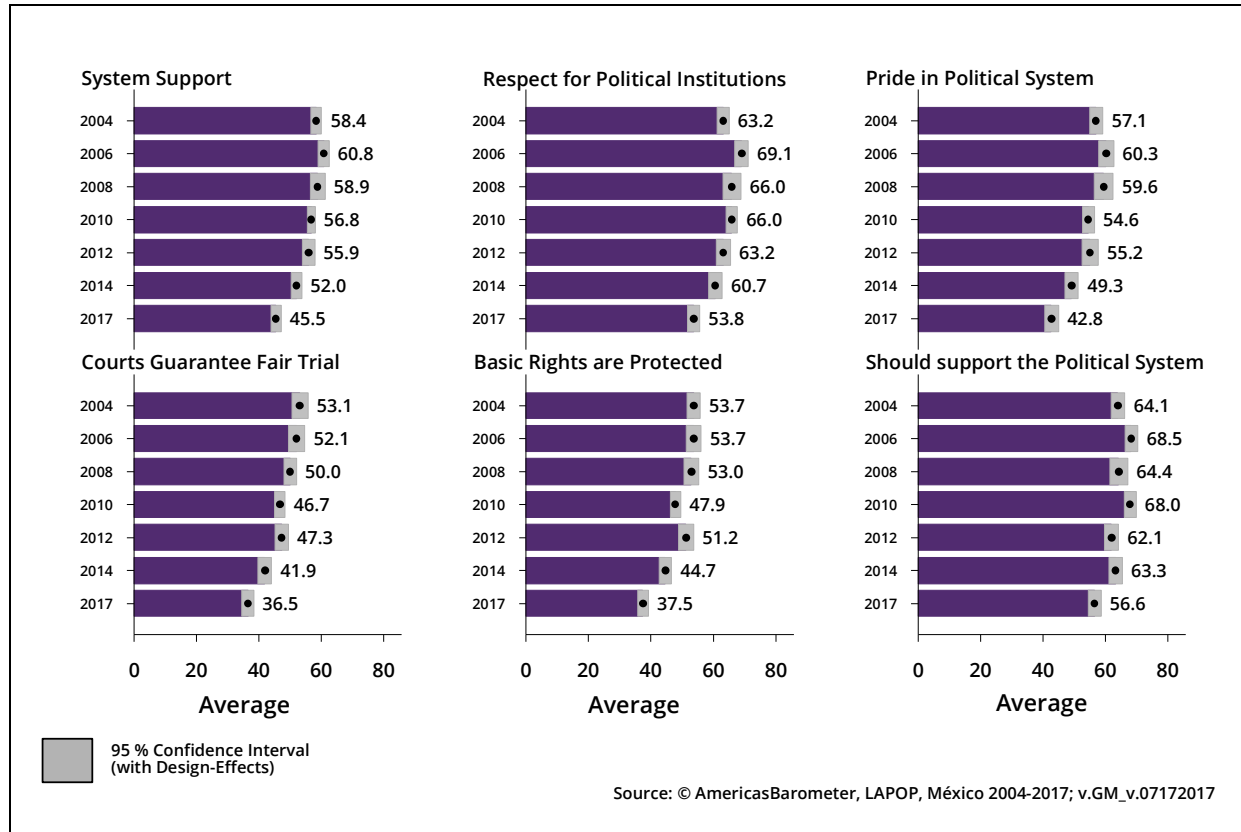


**Figure 4. Trust in Political Parties in México and in the Americas**

## 2. Democratic Orientations in the Americas

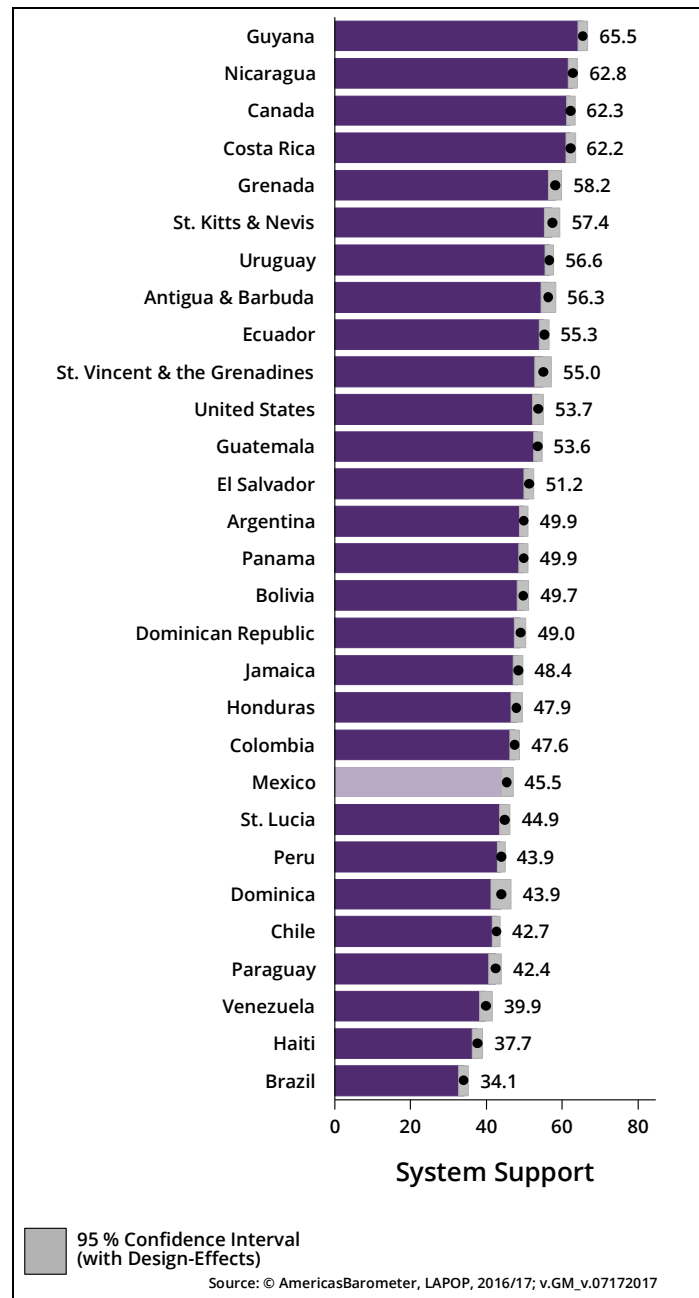
Over the years, LAPOP has hypothesized and found that democracy rests on firmer grounds to the extent that the following joint conditions are met: the public perceives the political system to be legitimate and it supports the right to participate for those who may hold diverging political views. Legitimacy and tolerance are, therefore, core elements of democratic culture. These attitudes combine to make unique profiles of democratic orientations.

Figure 5 compares levels of the system support index and its five components in México since 2004. The index and individual component variables are scores that from 0 to 100, where higher values indicate more positive attitudes toward the system. Support for the political system has reached its lowest level in México in 2017 (45.5). This is due to a decline in several components of this system support index in 2017: respect for institutions, level of normative support for the system, confidence that basic rights are protected, and pride in the political system of México.



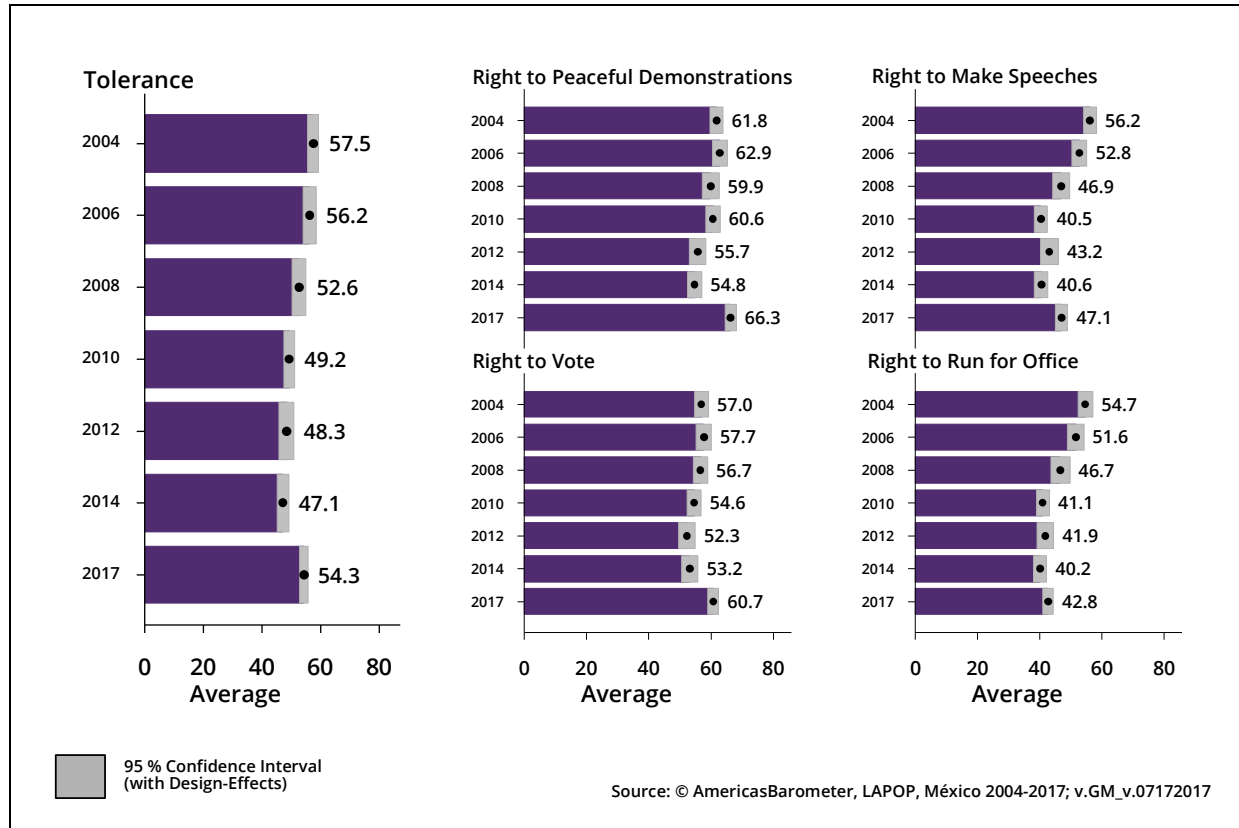
**Figure 5. System Support and Its Components in México, 2004-2017**

As shown in Figure 6, México ranks at an intermediate level in terms of its mean degrees of support for the political system when compared to the other countries in the region.



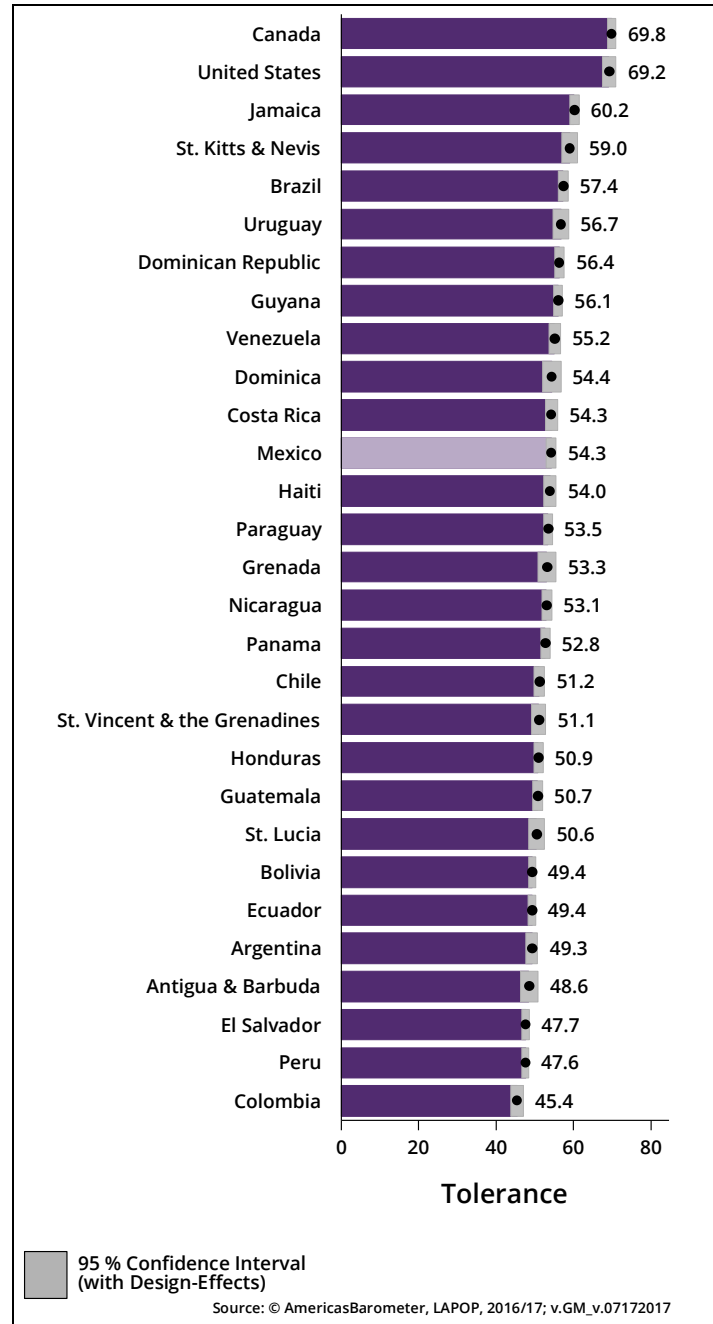
**Figure 6. System Support in the Americas, 2016/17**

High levels of support for the political system do not guarantee the quality and survival of liberal democratic institutions. Liberal democracy also requires citizens to accept the principles of open democratic competition and tolerance of dissent. Political tolerance in Mexico increased significantly to 54.3 degrees after a period of stability between 2010 and 2014 (see Figure 7). However, political tolerance for the country remains below the levels observed between 2004 and 2006. The increase in political tolerance among Mexicans is due to significant increases in all components of this index, which constitute measures of approval of the right to protest, vote, give speeches and be a political candidate.



**Figure 7. Political Tolerance and Its Components in Mexico, 2004-2017**

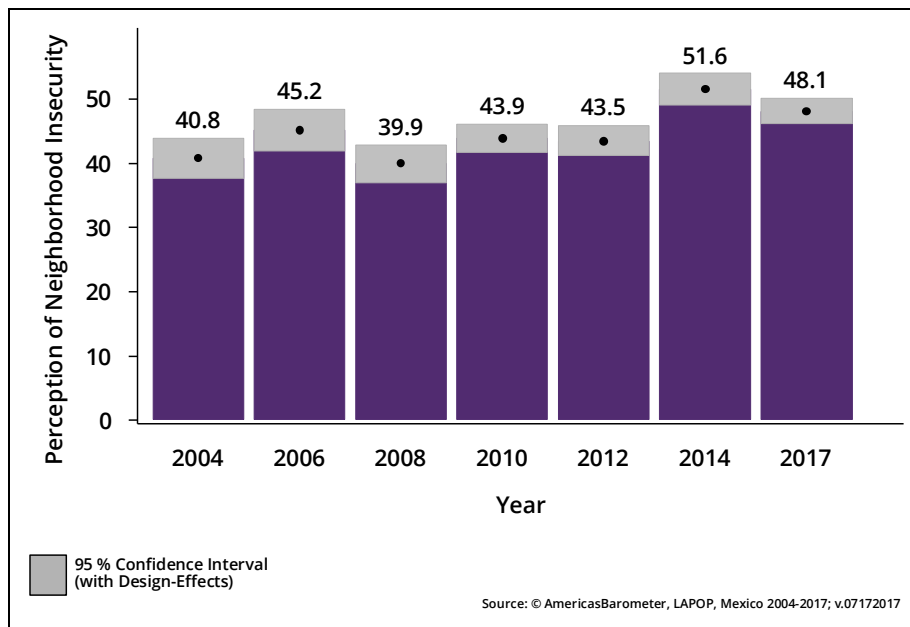
Although Mexico experienced a significant increase in political tolerance between 2014 and 2017, the country is positioned among the countries of the region with the lowest levels of political tolerance. As shown in Figure 8 and compared to other countries, Mexico ranks at an intermediate level in terms of its mean degrees of tolerance.



**Figure 8. Political Tolerance in the Americas, 2016/17**

### 3. The Negative Effects of Insecurity: The Perceived Need to Move to a Different Neighborhood

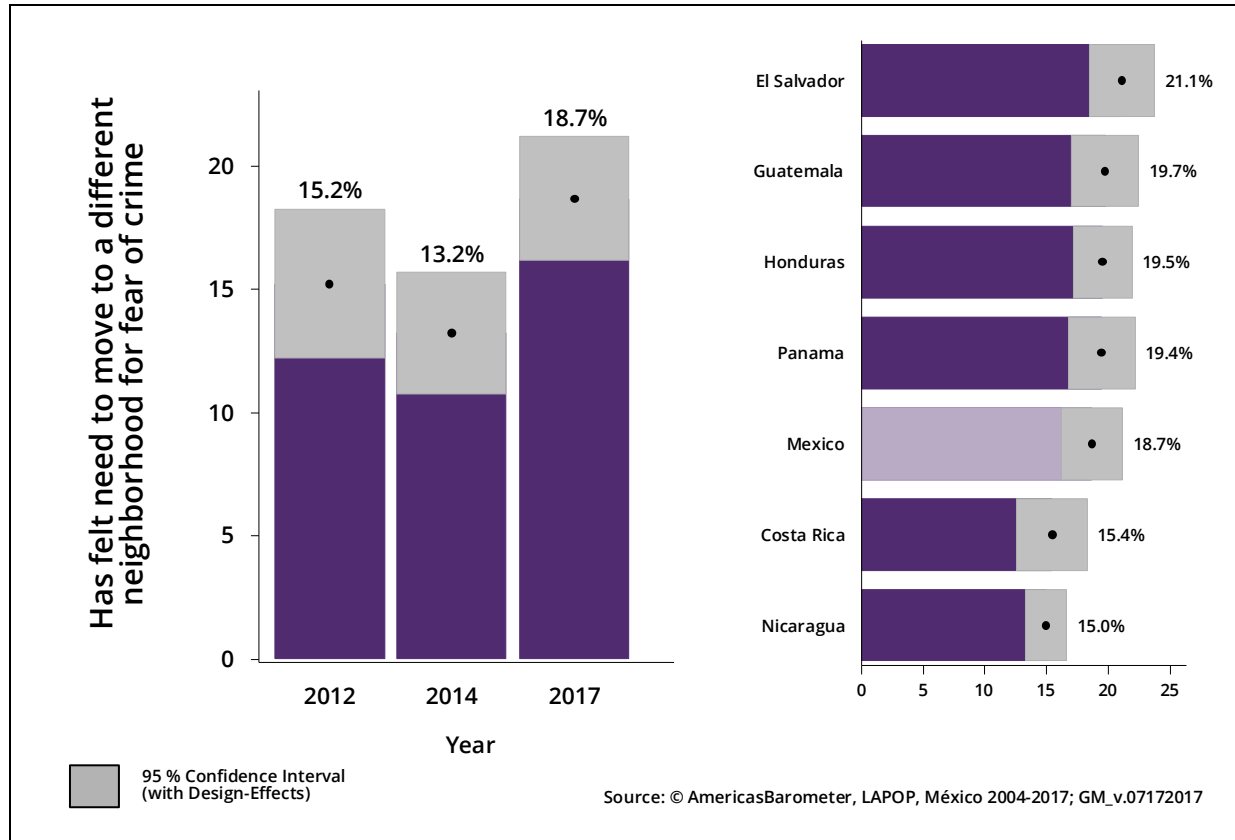
The 2017 AmericasBarometer in Mexico includes an important group of variables on security. The questions cover topics such as crime victimization, perceptions of insecurity and changes in respondents' attitudes due to fear of crime. Figure 8 shows citizens perception of insecurity in the neighborhood. We observed a general upward trend from 2004 (40.8 points) to 2017 (48.1 points), although it decreases in 2017 after reaching a peak in 2014 (51.6 points).



**Figure 9. Perception of neighborhood insecurity, Mexico 2004-2017**

The proportion of Mexicans who felt the need to move out of their neighborhood for fear of crime was 18.7% in 2017. This is not a trivial number given that it represents over 22 million people. This number is greater than the total population of the State of Mexico; and more than twice the number of residents of Mexico City. The percentage of Mexicans that felt the need to move to a different neighborhood out of fear of crime increased in 2017 with respect 2014 by five percentage points.

In the region, Mexico is not badly positioned at the moment. Compared with other countries, the percentage of Mexicans who felt the need to move to a different neighborhood due to fear of crime is just above the regional average, below countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama.

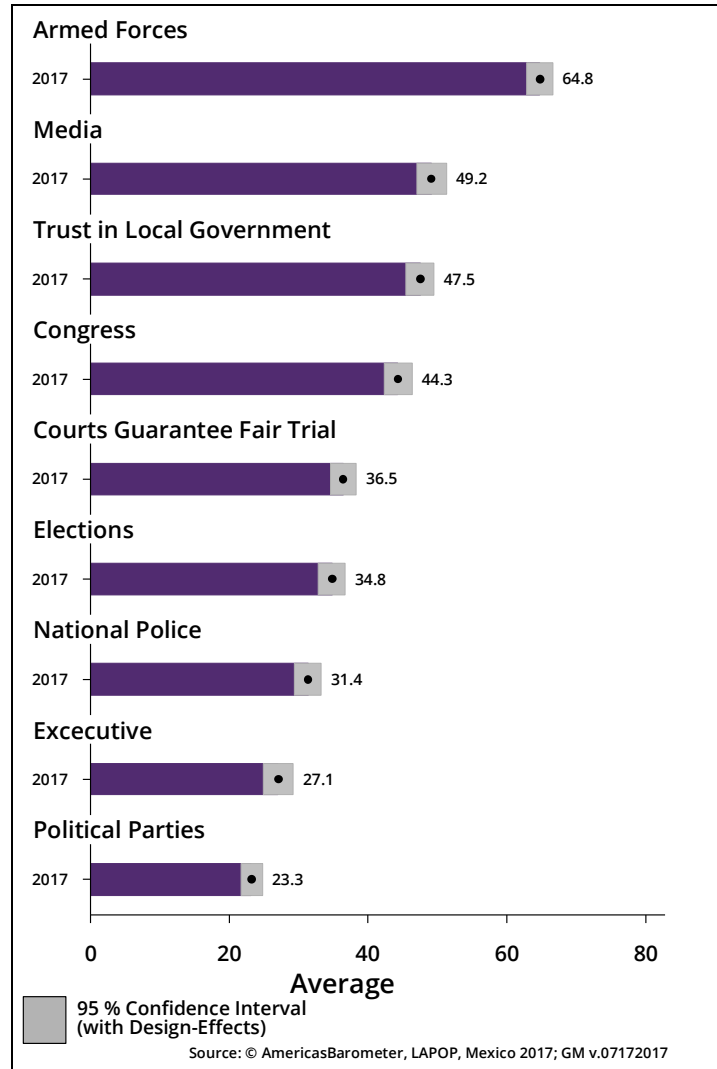


**Figure 10. Has felt the need to move to another neighborhood for fear of crime**

## 4. Institutional and Interpersonal Trust in Mexico

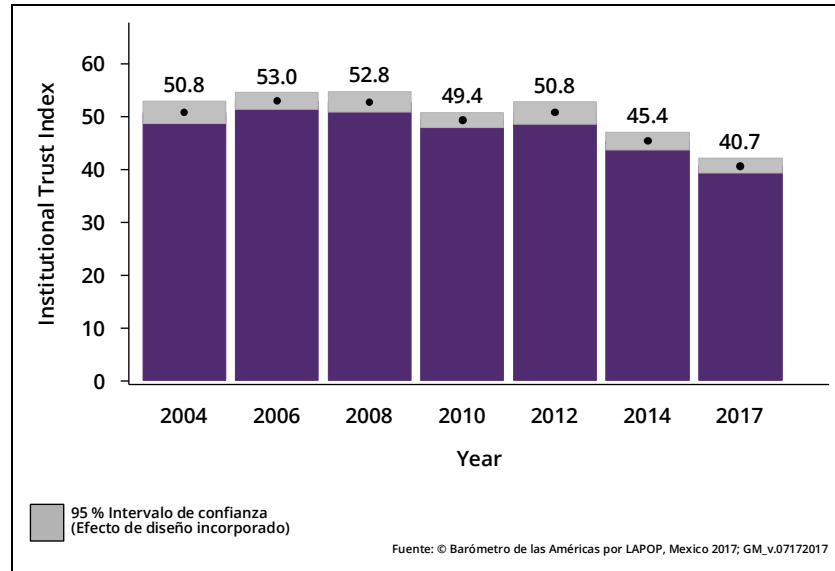
Trust is a specific condition to the subject of reference or interaction; that is, an individual can trust some subjects and distrust others. It is also a matter of degree. The levels of institutional trust in Mexico vary significantly across institutions. Figure 11 shows the average levels of trust in various institutions on a 0-100 scale of institutional trust. The armed forces are among the more trusted institutions in Mexico, followed by the media, the local government and the congress – although the latest are below the 50 points. Below, with levels of trust of about 35 points are the judiciary and elections, and the last three places in descending order and with grades less than 30 points are occupied by the police, the executive and political parties.





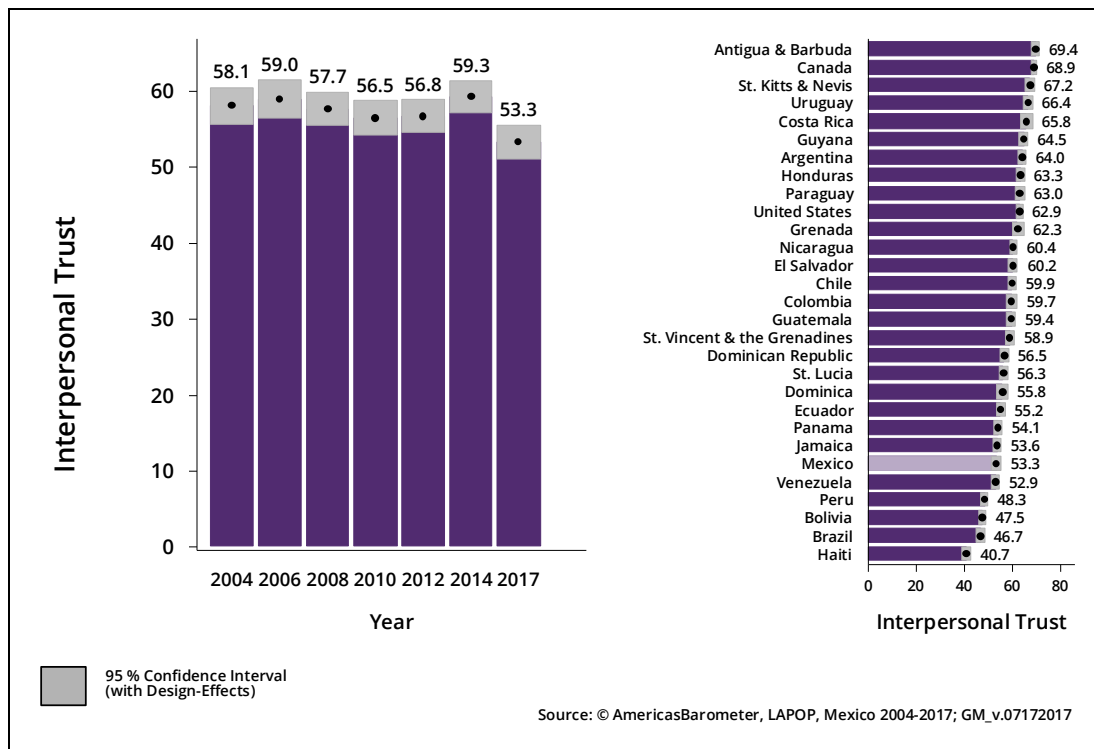
**Figure 11. Level of Trust in Institutions, Mexico 2017**

To measure the level of institutional trust, the AmericasBarometer has eight different indicators that provide a robust measurement of this concept. The indicators are: trust in the justice system, armed forces, national congress, police, Catholic Church, political parties, federal government and local government. These eight indicators were combined in a simple additive index normalized to a scale from 0 to 100 where higher values indicate higher reported levels of trust.



**Figure 12. Institutional Trust Index, Mexico 2004-2017**

The average level of interpersonal trust in Mexico has remained stable between 2004 and 2014 with values between 56 and 60 points. However, in 2017, interpersonal trust drops from 59.3 to 53.3 points, reaching the lowest level for the country since 2004. In the region, Mexico ranks among the countries with the lowest levels of interpersonal trust, placing only above Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, and Haiti.

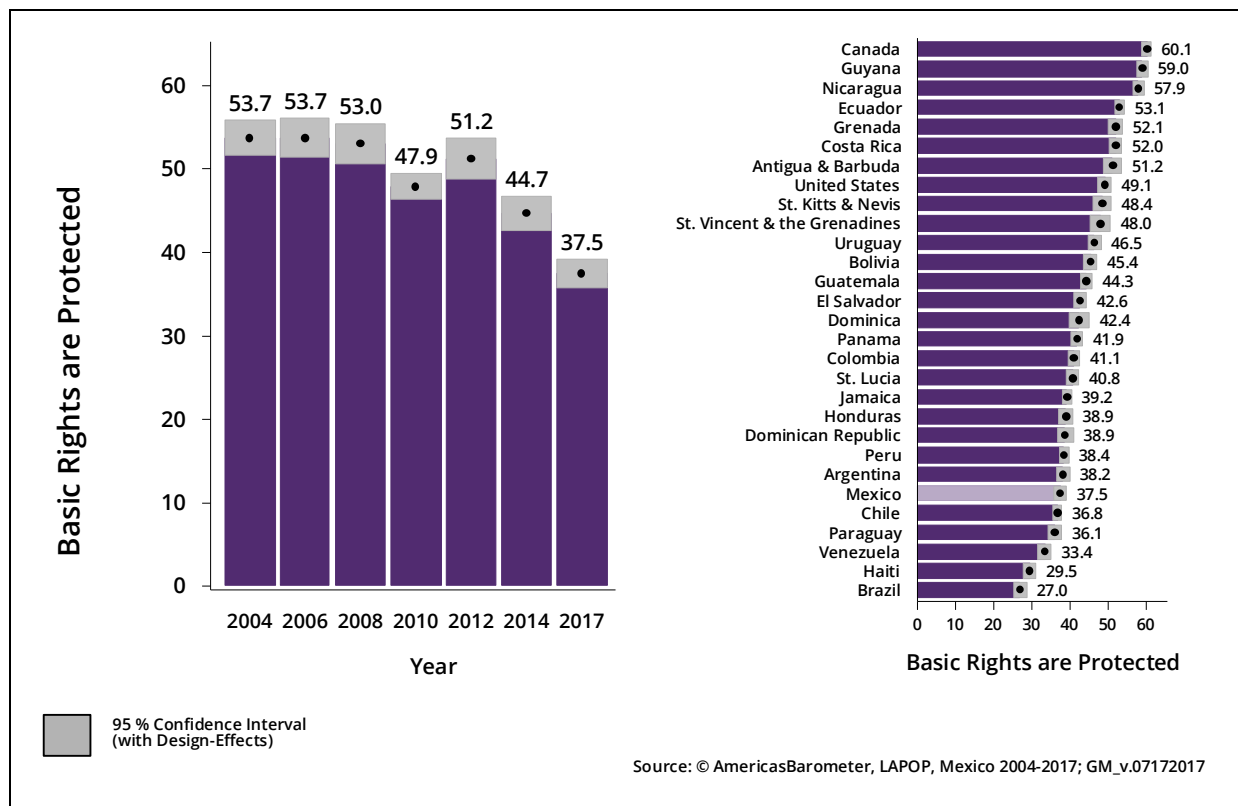


**Figure 13. Interpersonal Trust in Mexico and in the Americas**

## 5. Perceptions of Freedoms and Basic Rights of Citizens in Mexico

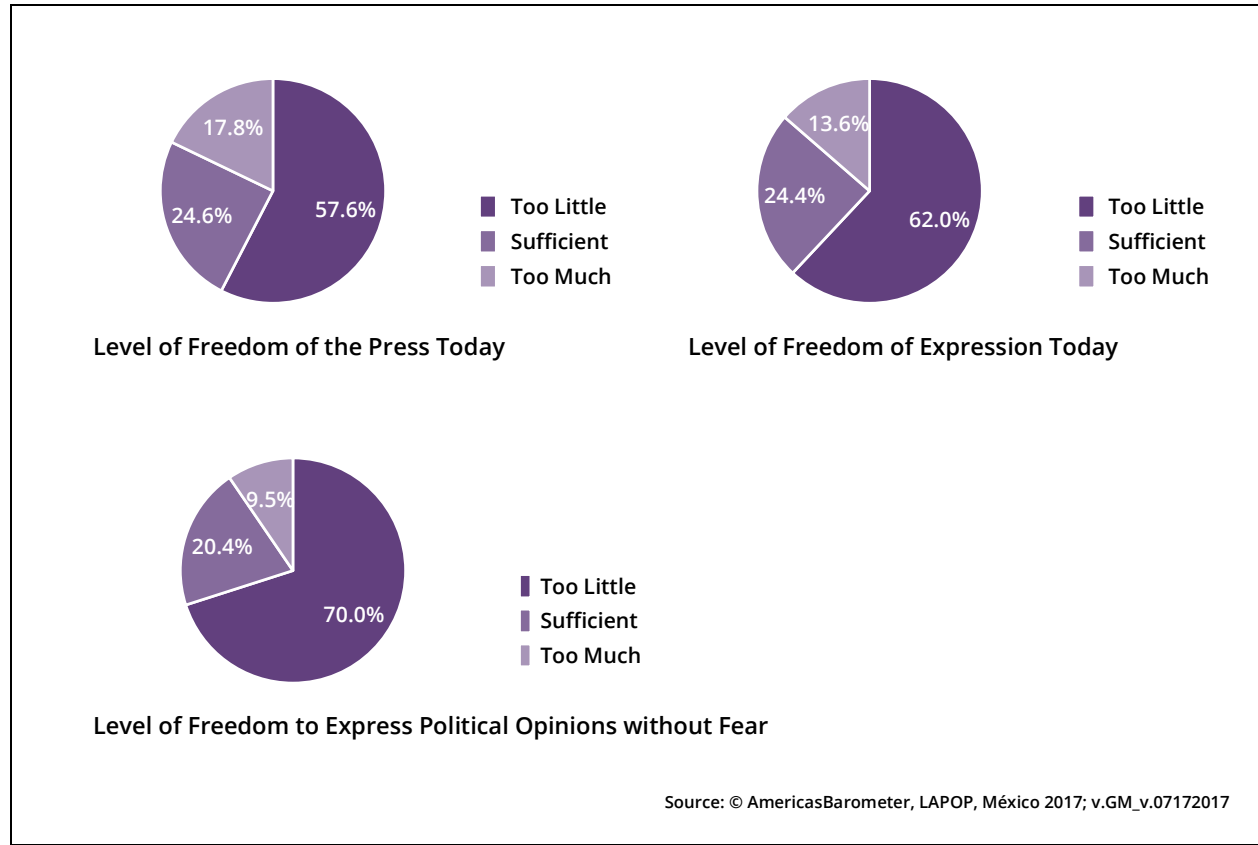
Basic liberties, such as freedom of the media, expression, and fundamental human rights, are critical to the public's engagement and inclusion in the democratic political system. Restrictions in basic liberties may undermine motivations to participate in politics and erode individuals' support for the incumbent administration and the democratic system more generally.

Figure 14 shows Mexicans perceptions regarding the protection of basic rights. The highest level is observed in the year 2004, which reflects an average of 53.7 points, as of that moment Mexicans perception that basic rights are protected shows a constant decrease (with the exception of 2012). In 2017, reaches 37.5 points, its lowest level. In the region, Mexico ranks among the countries with the lowest levels of perception that basic rights are protected.



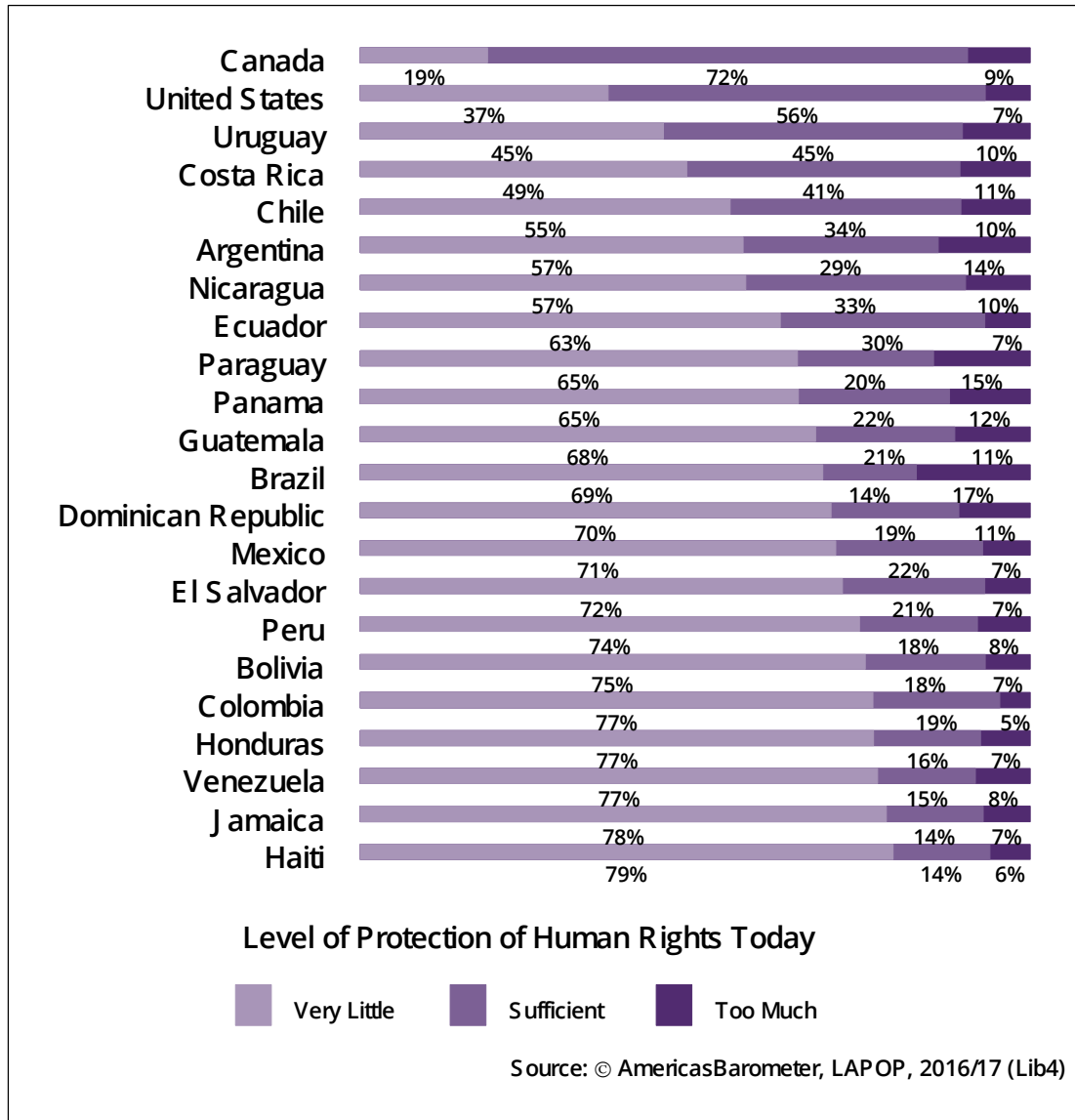
**Figure 14. Basic Rights are Protected**

As can be seen in Figure 15, 57.6% of Mexicans believe that there is very little press freedom, 24.6% believe that the level of freedom of the press is sufficient and 17.8% believe that there is too much. The percentage of Mexicans that believe that there is little freedom of expression is 62.0% in 2017, while almost a quarter of the population thinks that there is enough freedom to express opinions. Freedom to express political opinions is particularly important in a democracy. Around 10% of Mexicans feel that there is little freedom to express political views without fear in 2017. Also, 20% of the population thinks that there is enough freedom to express political opinions. México is among the countries with the greatest percentage of citizens perceiving very little freedom of political expression.



**Figure 15. Basic Rights are Protected, Mexico 2017**

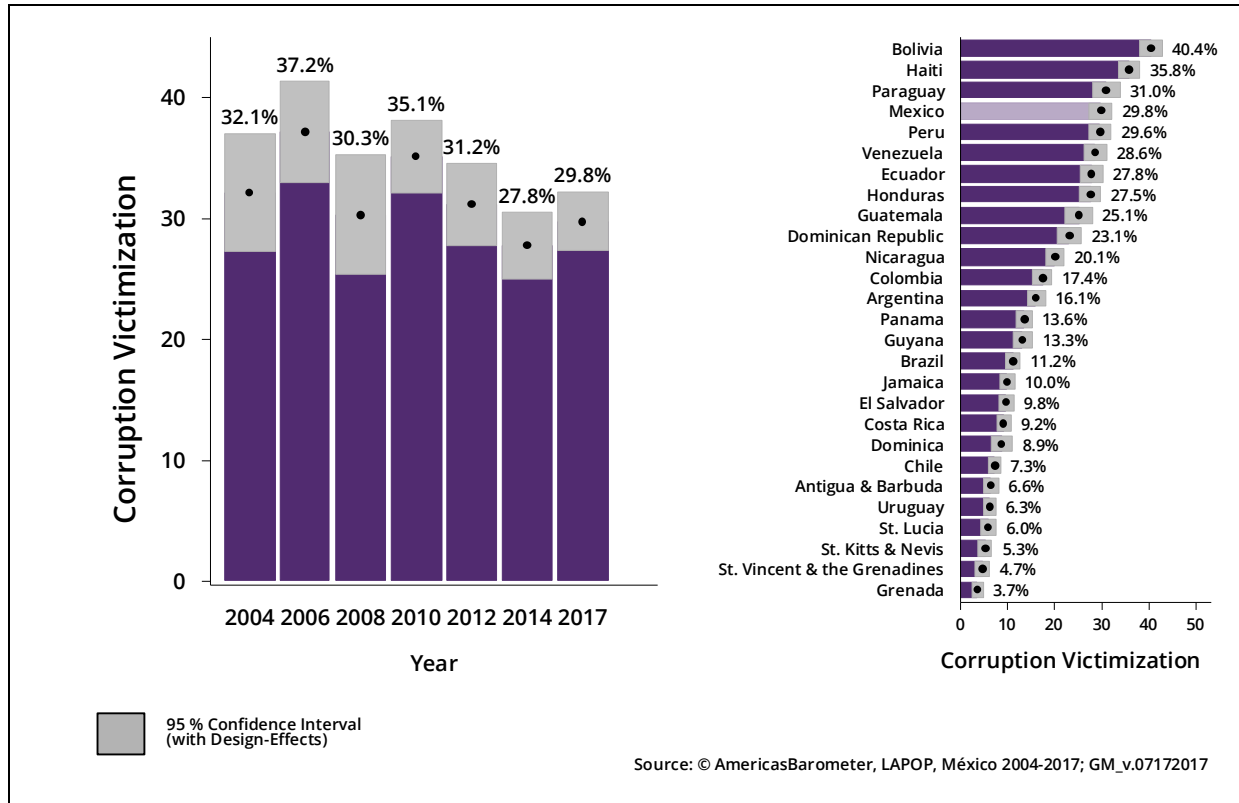
While concerns about deficiencies in levels of freedom of the press and of expression are elevated in the Americas, data from the 2016/17 AmericasBarometer reveal that concerns about human rights are even more pronounced. Mexico is among the countries with the lowest percentage of citizens who believe there is sufficient protection of human rights in the country, with 71% saying that there is very little protection for this type of rights in 2017.



**Figure 16. Assessments of Protection of Human Rights, 2016/17**

## 6. Corruption in Mexico

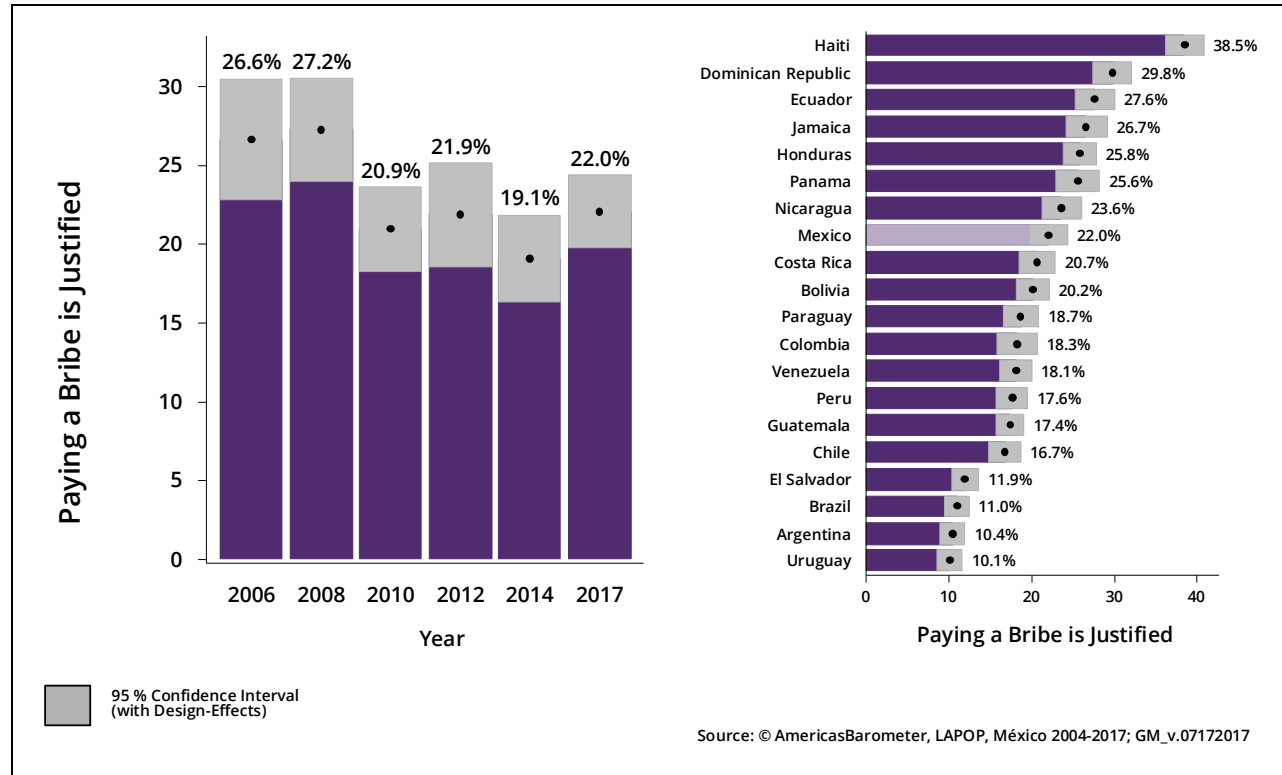
The AmericasBarometer surveys have employed over time a series of questions that measure corruption victimization, focusing specifically on bribery because this is the form that is most common for average citizens. In Mexico, corruption victimization increased to 29.8% in 2017. In the region, Mexico ranks among the countries with the higher levels of corruption victimization, just below Bolivia (40.4%), Haiti (35.8%) and Paraguay (31.0%), and is slightly above Peru (29.6%) and Venezuela (29.6%).



**Figure 17. Corruption victimization in Mexico and in the Americas**

Several studies have suggested individuals can see corruption as necessary to grease bureaucratic wheels, particularly when regulatory agencies are inefficient (Méon and Weill 2010; Dreher and Gassebner 2011). In such circumstances, the worry is that citizens might begin to consider corruption a natural part of politics. Thus the questions become whether Mexicans believe that bribery is an acceptable practice and, in particular, whether those who engage in it are more likely to justify it. The percentage of Mexicans who think bribes can be justified – 22% (Figure 18) – is similar (only 7 percentage points lower) to the number of people who were asked for bribes.

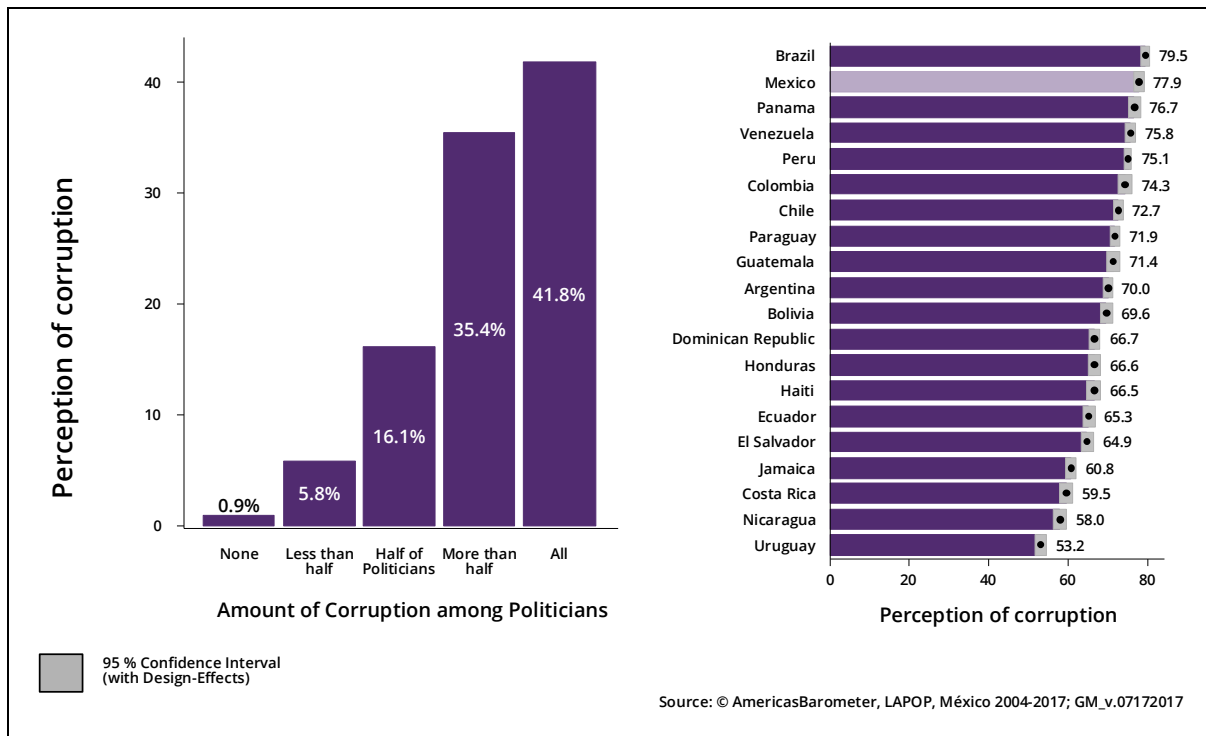
Figure 18 also shows the degree to which citizens justify corruption in a comparative perspective. As can be seen, Mexico is among the countries with the highest proportion of citizens that justify paying bribes but has a proportion that is close to the region average.



**Figure 18. Bribe Justification in Mexico and in the Americas**

In 2017, the vast majority of Mexicans considers corruption a common practice among public officials as they believe that more than half of politicians are involved in corruption. A little less than 80% believe that more than half (or all) of public officials are involved in acts of corruption, 16.1% think that only half, and less than 7% that are less than half or none corrupt government agents (Figure 19).

In the Latin American context, Mexico ranks in second place, with a level of perceived corruption of 77.9 points (in a 0 to 100 scale). In first place is Brazil with 79.5 points and in third place Panama with 76.7 points. The discrepancy between perceived levels of corruption and reported corruption rates is a common pattern in corruption studies because measures of corruption victimization tap the day-to-day corruption people observe and endure while questions about corruption in government often also track large-scale corruption such as national scandals that respondents do not have personal experience with. Respondents may also have different tolerances for what kinds of activities are considered corrupt.

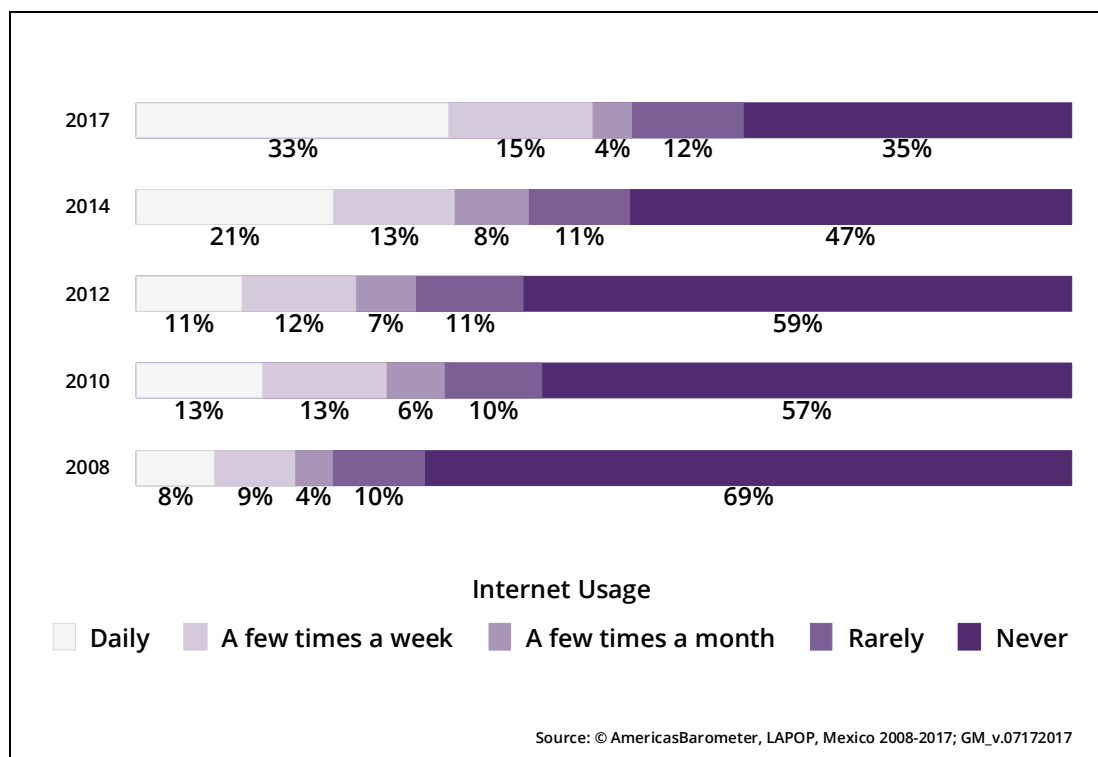


**Figure 19. Perception of Corruption in Mexico and in the Americas**

## 7. The Digital Gap: The Social Determinants of Internet and Social Networks Use in Mexico

In recent years, the study of social networks has focused on its political impact. That is, if the "likes" on Facebook, or the "retweets" or "favs" on Twitter have an impact on the electoral behavior and attitudes towards certain political phenomena. The frequency of Internet use in Mexico has increased notably since 2008 – year in which for the first time the AmericasBarometer measured the extent of internet use in Mexico. As shown in figure 20, a decade ago seven out of ten Mexicans declared that they never use Internet, while ten years later, less than four out of ten reported this same behavior. Ten years ago 17% of Mexicans used internet daily or a few times a week, today 48% of Mexicans use the internet weekly. In short, the change has been remarkable.

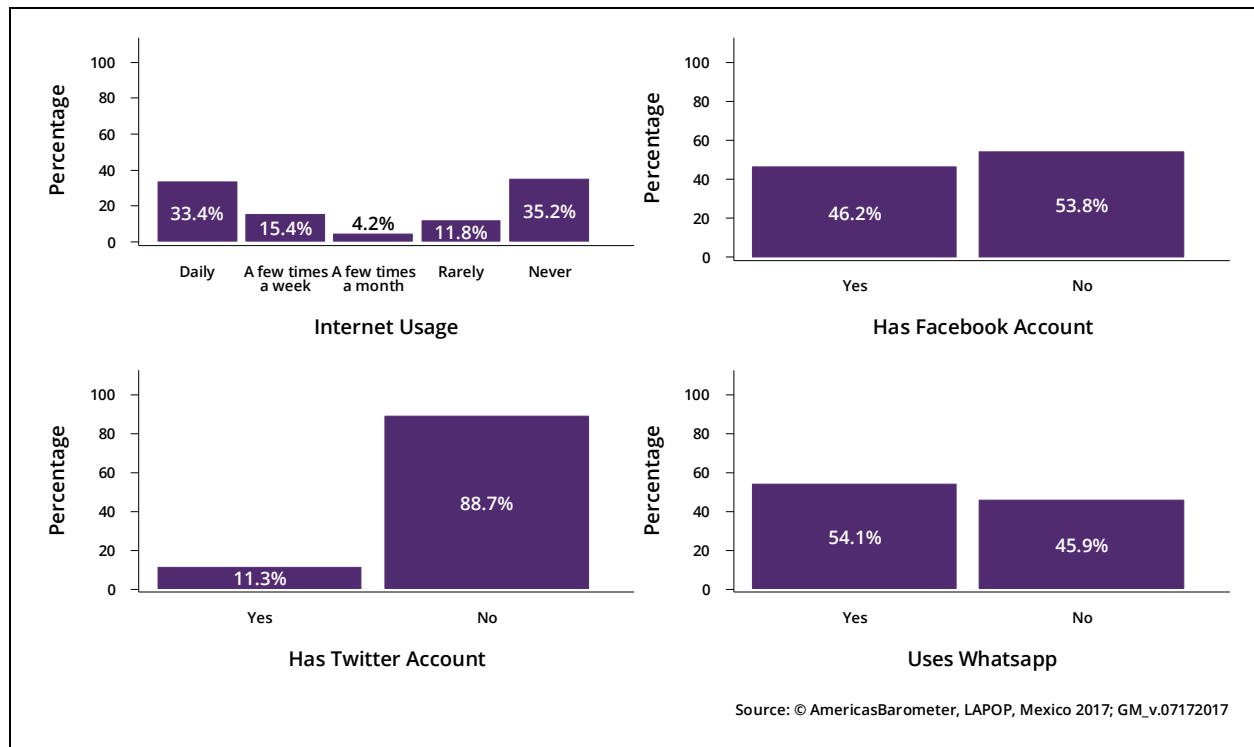




**Figure 20. Frequency of Internet use in Mexico, 2008-2017**

The way in which Mexicans communicate and access information has also changed drastically. In the year 2017, 46.2% of Mexicans reported to have a profile on Facebook and 54% use WhatsApp to communicate. Only 38% of the Mexicans said they had a conventional or landline telephone, which suggests that, in effect, the way through which Mexicans communicate and access information have varied considerably, moving to a more connected-mobile world. Within the so-called social networks there are also preferences in their use. The most popular social network in Mexico is WhatsApp with 54% of the Mexicans reporting using this social network. In second place is Facebook (46% of Mexicans) and in third place is Twitter with 11% of Mexican reporting to have an account.

Those who access the Internet more frequently and report the use of social networks are generally young, people with higher levels of education, who have higher levels of wealth, do not have or only have two children and who reside in urban areas. The digital divide seems to be exacerbated when analyzing variables related to available resources, such as schooling and wealth.



**Figure 21. Frequency of Internet and Social Networks use in Mexico, 2017**

# The AmericasBarometer

The AmericasBarometer is a regional survey carried out by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). LAPOP has deep roots in the Latin America and Caribbean region, via public opinion research that dates back over four decades. Its headquarters are at Vanderbilt University, in the United States. The AmericasBarometer is possible due to the activities and support of a consortium of institutions located across the Americas. To carry out each round of the survey, LAPOP partners with local individuals, firms, universities, development organizations, and others in 34 countries in the Western Hemisphere. These efforts have three core purposes: to produce objective, non-partisan, and scientifically sound studies of public opinion; to build capacity and strengthen international relations; and to disseminate important findings regarding citizens' experiences with, assessments of, and commitment to democratic forms of government.

Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer has received generous support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Vanderbilt University. Other institutions that have contributed to multiple rounds of the survey project include Ciudadanía, Environics, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Tinker Foundation, and the United Nations Development Programme. The project has also benefited from grants from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Center for Research in Brazil (CNPq), and the Open Society Foundation. Collaborations with university partners who sponsor items on the survey also sustain the project. In this most recent round, those contributors included Dartmouth, Florida International University, the University of Illinois, the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Venezuela, and several centers at Vanderbilt University.

The 2016/17 AmericasBarometer was carried out via face-to-face interviews in 27 countries across the Latin America and Caribbean region, and via the internet in Canada and the U.S. All samples are designed to be nationally representative of voting-age adults and electronic devices were used for data entry in all countries. In all, more than 43,000 individuals were interviewed in this latest round of the survey. The complete 2004-2016/17 AmericasBarometer dataset contains responses from over 250,000 individuals across the region. Common core modules, standardized techniques, and rigorous quality control procedures permit valid comparisons across individuals, subgroups, certain subnational areas, countries, supra-regions, and time.

AmericasBarometer data and reports are available for free download from the project website: [www.LapopSurveys.org](http://www.LapopSurveys.org) Datasets from the project can also be accessed via "data repositories" and subscribing institutions at universities across the Americas. Through such open access practices and these collaborations, 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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