

LAPOP's
AmericasBarometer
takes the

Pulse of Democracy

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20
23



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**VANDERBILT
UNIVERSITY**



AmericasBarometer
Barómetro de las Américas

Our Mission

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 run by experts in survey methodology who innovate approaches to public opinion research. The team is dedicated to collaboration and pedagogy. The lab's work facilitates evidence-based dialogue and policy decisions about a broad range of issues related to democratic governance.

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. Drawing upon survey data from over 34 nations from North, Central, and South America, and the Caribbean, the AmericasBarometer informs discussions over the quality and strength of democracy in the region.

Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer measures attitudes, evaluations, experiences, and behavior in the Americas using national probability samples of voting-age adults. Survey topics include the economy, rule of law, state capacity, trust in institutions, individual values, corruption, security, and more.

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.

Chantal Agarwal
Agreement Officer's Representative
Democracy Human Rights and Governance Team
Office of Regional Sustainable Development
Bureau for Latin America & the Caribbean
United States Agency for International Development

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 individuals and institutions. USAID is grateful to that network of supporters, the LAPOP team, their outstanding former and current students, the many experts 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.



LAPOP

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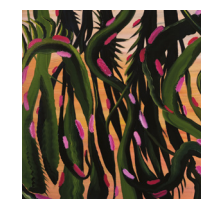
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UNDERSTANDING THE FIGURES IN THIS REPORT

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 2023 AmericasBarometer are based on weighted data where applicable. Due to sampling discrepancies, calibration weights are generated for national surveys in Ecuador, Trinidad & Tobago, The Bahamas, and Brazil by strata based on population distributions for urban/rural population, gender, and age. Weights for Haiti and Nicaragua (telephone surveys) are calculated by estimating baseline probabilities adjusted for eligibility and non-response, then calibrated to the distributions of gender, education, age, and region in the most recent previous face-to-face AmericasBarometer country surveys. 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 the pre-release dataset; analysts may find small differences in point estimates when using publicly released datasets due to ongoing data cleaning and quality control.



COVER ART
'Plagas de jardín' [Garden plagues]
50 x 52 cm, oil on paper, 2020, by Sylvia Fernández

Sylvia Fernández (Lima, 1978) graduated with a gold medal in Fine Arts from Corriente Alterna, in Lima, Peru, in 2002. Her painting explores the abstract boundaries of the mind and body and its relationship with nature, time and memory. <https://www.sylvia-fernandez.com>

Sylvia is represented by **Galería del Paseo** Founded in 1998 in Montevideo, Uruguay—and present as well in Lima, Peru, since 2003—Galería del Paseo promotes young Latin-American artists in the field of contemporary arts. <https://www.galeriadelpaseo.com>

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The Pulse of Democracy in 2023

Noam Lupu and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister

Investing in good governance and inclusive growth pays off. Under the former the rule of law prevails, while the latter ensures individuals can meet basic needs.

When these conditions are met, people trust their political institutions and are less motivated to emigrate. These conclusions are evident in our lab's analyses of data from the 10th round of the AmericasBarometer—a project that takes the *pulse of democracy* in the Western Hemisphere.

If good governance and inclusive growth constitute two metrics against which the public determines its commitment to democracy and its willingness to stay rooted in place, then what does the LAC scorecard look like on these two dimensions?

Good governance is effective, responsive, and transparent.¹ On this dimension, our assessment is mixed. On average, bribe solicitation by public servants has returned

to the more modest levels recorded prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which temporarily ushered in new opportunities for corruption at all levels of governance. As an example of the type of cross-national variation we often find underneath regionwide averages, Uruguay stands as an exemplar of clean governance in individuals' dealings with government officials, whereas Nicaragua ranks highest for this type of corruption.

Yet while street-level corruption has declined, the public remains worried about the integrity of high-level politics. Concerns about the probity of elections are widespread and confidence in elections has declined in the region—and to a particularly striking degree in Nicaragua, Peru, and Suriname.

Inclusive growth is achieved when economic development delivers widespread benefits.² On this dimension, the region is failing. Pessimism about national economies is at an all-time high. Household food insecurity has increased not only on average in the region but also within nearly every country. Today, close to one in three adults reports that their household has recently been without food. In Haiti, where 79% report they hope to leave the country, 78% of the public is food insecure. In the LAC region, alongside crime victimization and experiences with natural disasters, food insecurity is one of the most consistent predictors of both intentions and readiness to emigrate.

Our 2021 *Pulse of Democracy* report noted that satisfaction with democracy held fairly steady—and even ticked slightly



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1. See <https://www.usaid.gov/democracy/promoting-good-governance>
2. See <https://www.oecd.org/inclusive-growth/#introduction>
3. Lupu et al. 2021.
4. Castorena et al. 2023.

upward—in the midst of a pandemic that took a devastating toll on the region.³ Even in the face of high-level vaccine scandals, support for democracy remained stable.⁴ These days, in much of the region, patience is wearing thin. Support for and satisfaction with democracy have ticked slightly downward. Emigration intentions have declined but remain elevated compared to pre-pandemic levels. Public patience with intraregional migration is waning as well: goodwill toward Venezuelan migrants has declined notably in high-receiving countries.

To be sure, democracy is under stress—and even duress—in a number of countries in the region. For example, in the shadow of a high-level corruption scandal, unfounded challenges to electoral results, and an unsuccessful



executive coup, Peruvians' confidence in elections has declined substantially. In Ecuador, the public reports a level of crime victimization higher than any previous year for the country, and the highest in the region. And amidst a severe inflationary crisis and related social unrest, the public in Suriname has become far less committed to democracy and far less confident in democratic institutions. These shifts—and others detailed in this report—matter. For example, disenchantment with the status quo became so widespread in countries like El Salvador and Mexico in recent years that new, anti-establishment leaders have been able to use their popularity to undermine accountability and erode democratic institutions with the public's approval—a path to democratic backsliding that has become all too common around the world.

Still, there are reasons to be optimistic about the future of democracy in the LAC region. Younger age cohorts are

comparatively more committed to democracy than previous generations were when they were young. And majorities across the region, especially in South America, are calling for development plans that prioritize environmental protections. Support for same-sex marriage continues to rise in tandem with progressive legal shifts in many countries. These opinion dynamics suggest public demand for democracy, sustainable development, and social inclusion will persist into the future.

Realizing that potential requires domestic and international commitments to clean government and improving the capacity of institutions to deliver quality public goods and services. Data from 10 rounds of the AmericasBarometer show that it takes good governance and inclusive growth to bolster public demand for democracy, trust in democratic institutions, and interest in staying rooted in place.

There are reasons to be optimistic about the future of democracy in the LAC region. Younger age cohorts are comparatively more committed to democracy than previous generations were when they were young.

BY THE NUMBERS

1,100
interviewers

2023
AMERICASBAROMETER

41,524
interviews

180
core questions included in
most countries

415
country-specific questions

26
COUNTRIES

Argentina
Belize
Bolivia
Brazil
Canada
Chile
Colombia
Costa Rica
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
El Salvador
Grenada
Guatemala
Haiti
Honduras
Jamaica
Mexico
Nicaragua
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Suriname
The Bahamas
Trinidad & Tobago
United States
Uruguay

INTERVIEWER TRAINING

24
local firm
trainings

420
training
hours

CAPACITY BUILDING IN SURVEY RESEARCH IN 2023

33
events

600+
hours

1,390
attendees

THE AMERICASBAROMETER SERIES

10
waves of
surveys across
20 years

34
countries

385,000+
interviews

006

007

Support for Stable Democracy

Oscar Castorena¹ and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister

Chapter 1

"Morning Hike" by Gabriela Luis
Vanderbilt University CLAXC Latin American
Images Photography Competition 2022.

008

MAIN FINDINGS

Public support for democracy and attitudes conducive to stable democracy are lower in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region today than they were two decades ago when the AmericasBarometer launched its effort to monitor the pulse of democracy in the Western Hemisphere. Democratic tendencies decreased after 2014 and have remained at that lower plateau for the last ten years. Confidence in democratic institutions is a powerful predictor of democratic orientations. This chapter documents these findings.

- Support for democracy dropped a decade ago, and has not yet recovered
- Support for democracy is highest in Uruguay, Costa Rica, and Chile, and lowest in Honduras, Suriname, and Guatemala
- Decreases in support for democracy have been most severe in Argentina, Colombia, Jamaica, and Suriname
- Support for democracy is higher among more educated, wealthier, and older individuals
- Higher trust in institutions is strongly associated with higher support for democracy
- Other attitudes conducive to stable democracy decreased a decade ago
- Meanwhile, opinion profiles consistent with democracy at risk have increased

009

Greater support for democracy predicts future democratic deepening, and vice versa.² As some have said, democracy endures when the public accepts it as “the only game in town.”³ This chapter takes stock of public commitment to democracy in two ways: directly, by assessing support for “democracy” and, indirectly, by assessing attitudes conducive to a stable democracy.

Although individuals may attach different meanings to the term “democracy”, those working to strengthen democracy use the term to brand initiatives, policies, institutions, and governments. Therefore, it is important to track public opinion toward democracy as an overarching concept. Further, as we will show, support for democracy maps onto expert ratings of a country’s level of democracy.

The second part of this chapter examines a set of attitudes that LAPOP’s founder, Mitchell Seligson, theorized are conducive to stable democracy: system support and tolerance. To mark the tenth round of the AmericasBarometer, we recreate Seligson’s two-fold instrument for assessing attitudes conducive to stable democracy.

OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES, SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY HAS ERODED IN THE LAC REGION

The AmericasBarometer measures support for democracy by recording the extent to which individuals agree or disagree with this statement:

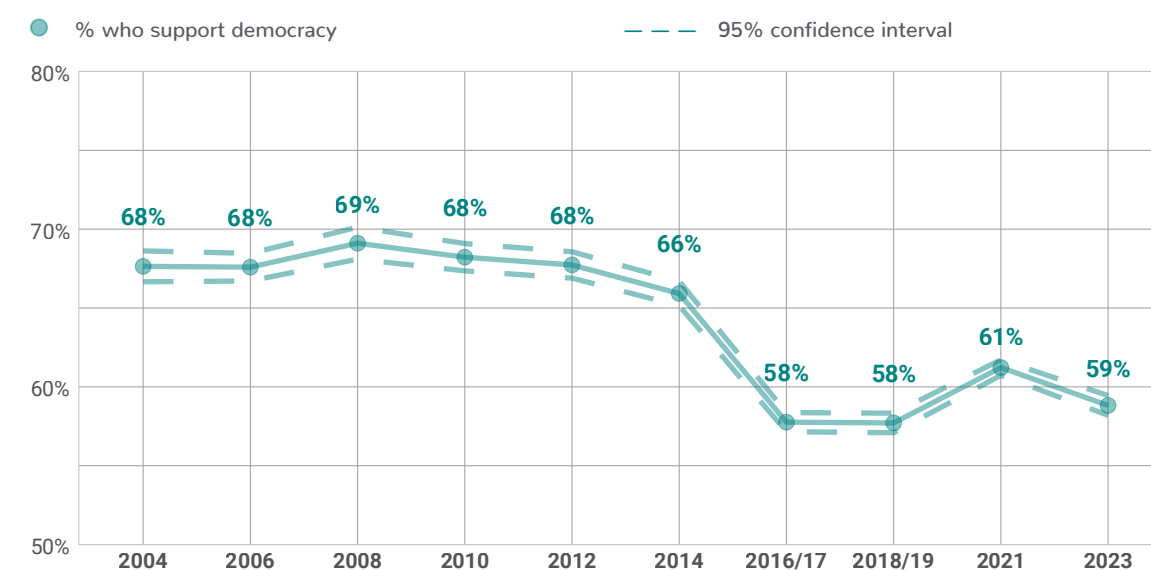
Democracy may have its problems, but it is better than any other form of government.

The question derives from remarks made by Winston Churchill: “No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.”⁴ On the 1-7 disagree/agree scale, individuals who answered 5-7 are coded as expressing support for democracy.

Support for democracy is lower today than it was two decades ago. **Figure 1.1** shows the LAC region-average level of support for democracy.⁵ From 2004-2014, on average approximately two-thirds of the public agreed that democracy is the best form of government. About a decade ago, the AmericasBarometer registered a significant downward shift. Since 2016, only about three in five adults express support for democracy.

Since 2016, only about three in five adults express support for democracy.

Figure 1.1 Support for democracy declined a decade ago and remains comparatively low



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2004-2023

An interviewer from the Fundación Centro de Información y Recursos Para el Desarrollo conducts qualitative pretesting of the 2023 AmericasBarometer country questionnaire in Paraguay. LAPOP Lab photo archives.



Regionwide averages mask heterogeneity in levels across countries. **Figure 1.2** shows the percentage of individuals who report support for democracy for each country in 2023. Support for democracy is comparatively high (above the region mean) in Uruguay (75%), Costa Rica (72%), Chile (70%), Argentina (68%), El Salvador (67%), The Bahamas (65%), Brazil (64%), the Dominican Republic (64%), Panama (62%), and Mexico (62%). Yet, in seven countries support for democracy hovers just above fifty percent: Jamaica, Haiti, Bolivia, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, and Ecuador. In three countries, fewer than one in two adults expresses support for democracy: Honduras (49%), Suriname (48%), and Guatemala (48%).

Public support for democracy is an important factor contributing to the endurance of democratic regimes. **Figure 1.3** displays the relationship between support for democracy as measured in the AmericasBarometer and a country’s score on V-Dem’s electoral democracy index for 2022. There is an overall positive correlation between the two measures: on average, countries rated as more democratic have publics that are more supportive of democracy (Pearson correlation = .34).

However, there are notable outliers. On one end, Suriname and Jamaica have relatively high V-Dem scores yet low levels of public support. As this chapter will

59%

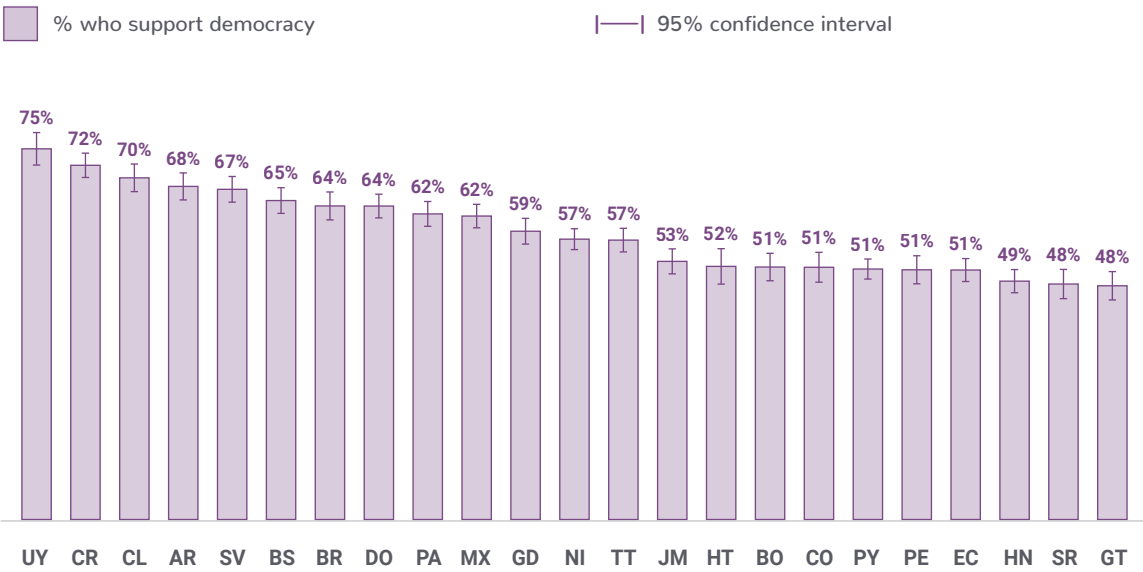
of adults in the LAC region, on average, express support for democracy.

document below, those countries have both experienced substantial declines in citizens’ support for democracy in the past decade. Given theory linking public support to the strength of democracy, policymakers may want to prioritize efforts to bolster democratic institutions in these countries against the type of erosion that can follow a decline in public support for democracy. On the other end, El Salvador stands out as a country with a relatively low V-Dem score but high levels of public support for democracy. The country’s electoral democracy score declined sharply in recent years,⁶ in particular after the election of current President Nayib Bukele, yet—for now—nearly two in three

Salvadorans retain the belief that democracy is the best form of government.

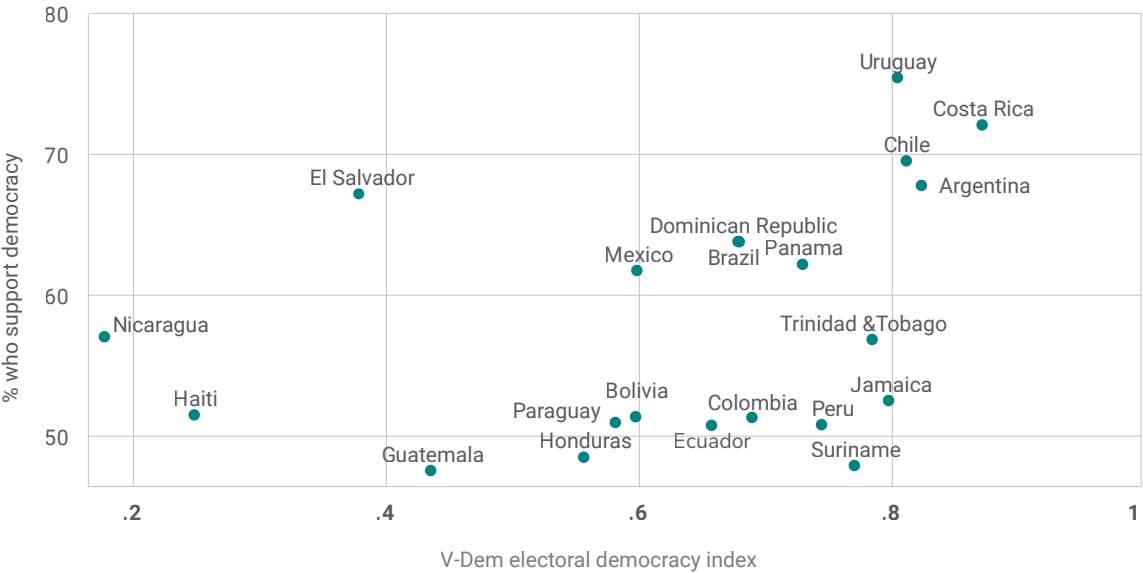
In fact, support for democracy shifted upward in El Salvador in recent years, reaching a series high of 73% in 2021. Cross-time trends for each country in the Mexico and Central America (CAM) region are graphed in **Figure 1.4**. Costa Rica has consistently exhibited some of the highest levels of support in the CAM region. The rest of the CAM region has fluctuated in the overall ranking of countries on this attitude. Overall, in all CAM countries except El Salvador, support for democracy is lower in 2023 than it was two decades prior.

Figure 1.2 In many countries, only about one in two supports democracy



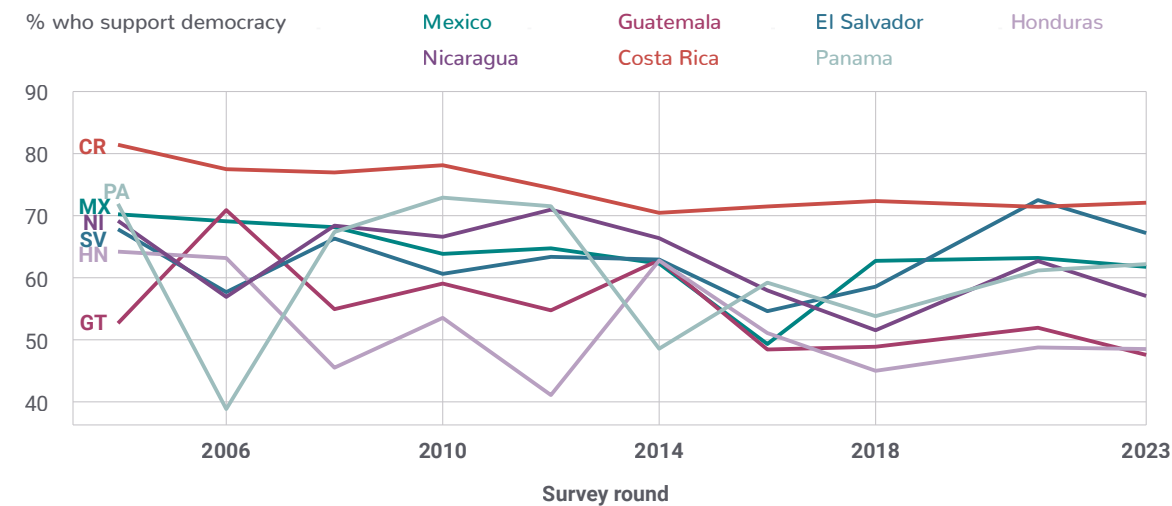
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Figure 1.3 In countries rated as more democratic, support for democracy is higher



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023; V-Dem 2022 v13

Figure 1.4 In most CAM countries, support for democracy has declined since the start of the AmericasBarometer



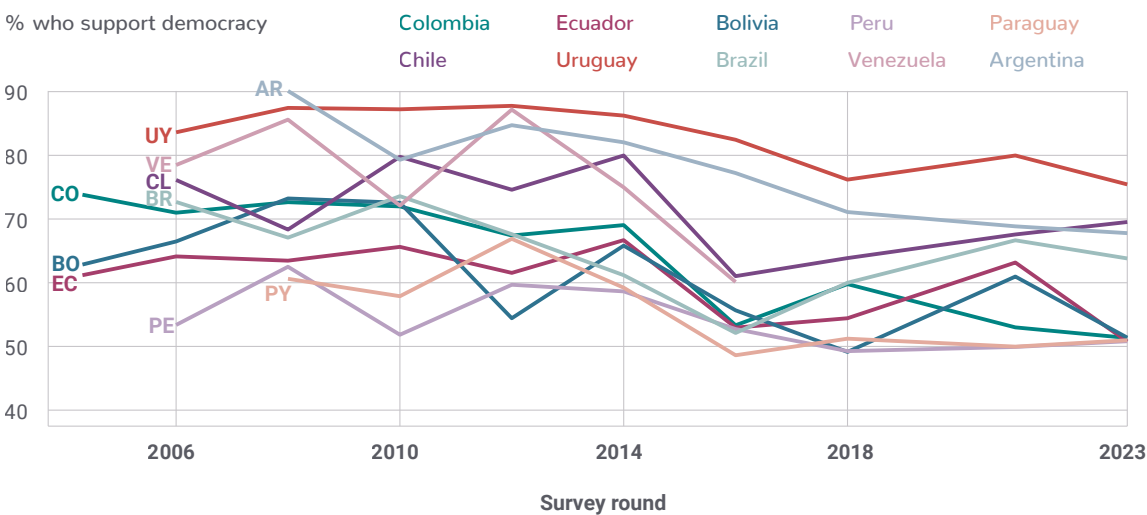
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2006-2023

Figure 1.5 shows levels of support for democracy across time for each country in the South America (SA) region. In all but one country (Peru), support for democracy is lower in 2023 than it was when the country first entered the AmericasBarometer series. Uruguay and Argentina have consistently exhibited some of the highest levels of support in the SA region. However, both have been steadily declining since the 2008 wave. The drop in support for democracy in Argentina is particularly acute: in 2008, 90% of Argentines expressed support for democracy, whereas this number is 68% in 2023 (a drop of 22 percentage points). Support for democracy has also declined sharply in Colombia: from 74% in 2004 to 51% in 2023 (a drop of 23 percentage points). While support for democracy in Peru is statistically the same in 2023 as when it first entered the series in 2006, the country began and has stayed at the lowest level of support for democracy recorded for SA countries.

Diminished support for democracy is also found in the Caribbean. **Figure 1.6** shows levels of support for democracy across time for each country in the Caribbean region. While The Bahamas and Grenada exhibit the same levels of support for democracy as in the previous rounds for which there is AmericasBarometer data, the Caribbean region has experienced some of the sharpest declines in support across the LAC region. Two of the largest drops in support for democracy are found in Jamaica and Suriname. In Jamaica, there has been a 26 percentage-point drop (from 79% in 2006 to 53% in 2023). In Suriname, the percentage expressing support for democracy has declined 36 percentage points (from 84% in 2010 to 48% in 2023).

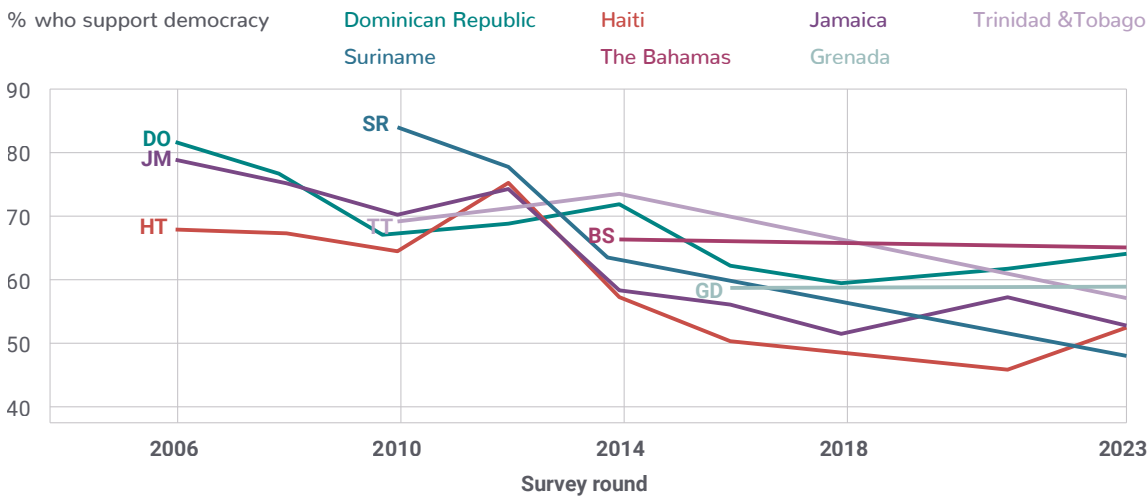
In brief, over the last two decades, **support for democracy has eroded in nearly all LAC countries**. Declines have been particularly acute in 4 countries: Argentina, Colombia, Jamaica, and Suriname.

Figure 1.5 Support for democracy has trended downward across most countries in South America



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2006-2023

Figure 1.6 Some of the largest declines in support for democracy have been in the Caribbean



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2006-2023

BUILDING TRUSTWORTHY INSTITUTIONS IS CRITICAL TO PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY

In addition to tracking the public mood for democracy across countries and time, the AmericasBarometer permits us to consider individual-level determinants of support for democracy. Thus, in this section, we ask: Who supports democracy?

We first consider variation across a set of standard socioeconomic and demographic subgroups in **Figure 1.7**.⁷ Individuals from wealthier households express higher rates of support for democracy, with a difference of nearly 10 percentage points between the lowest and highest wealth levels. Education is also positively correlated with support for democracy. In this case, it is the most highly educated group (those with

post-secondary education or higher) that drives this relationship. While support is high among this group, the two lower education groups both express similar levels of support for democracy. Age is also positively associated with support for democracy; for additional insight into this relationship, we refer the reader to this report’s Spotlight on “Political Generations and Democratic Attitudes”.

In light of diminished levels of support for democracy, it is important to consider what can increase support for democracy. Classic work highlights the importance of regime performance for public fealty to democracy in less established systems, where “reservoirs” of support are comparatively low and vulnerable to short term shocks to the public’s well-being.⁸ Yet, the quality of institutions may matter even more.⁹ To examine the relationship between support for democracy and public views of political institutions, we

78% of those who have high trust in institutions express support for democracy.

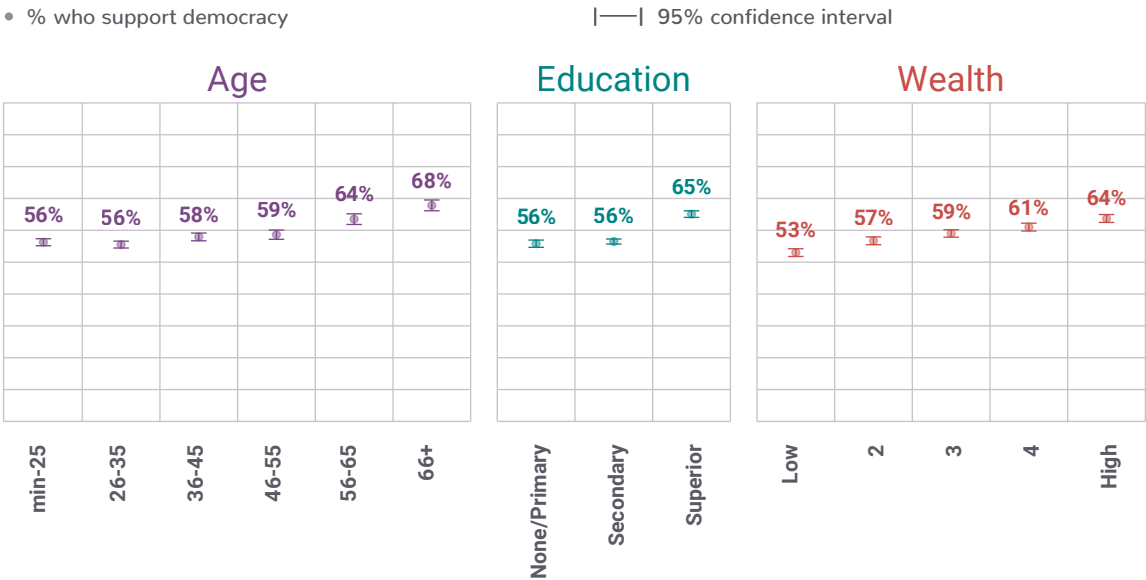
construct a measure of institutional trust from five questions that ask about trust in the legislature, the executive, the highest court, the national government, and elections.¹⁰

Figure 1.8 shows that trust in political institutions is strongly associated with the belief that democracy is preferable to any other form of government. Citizens in the most trusting group express levels of support for democracy that are higher than those exhibited among the most educated citizens or oldest cohort. The range of support for democracy between low and high trust citizens is sizeable: the rate of support for democracy is 35 percentage points higher among those with high trust in institutions compared to those with scant trust in institutions. The implications for policymakers and democracy specialists are clear: **building strong, trustworthy institutions is critical to public commitment to democracy.**

THE PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WITH ORIENTATIONS CONDUCTIVE TO STABLE DEMOCRACY REMAINS LOW

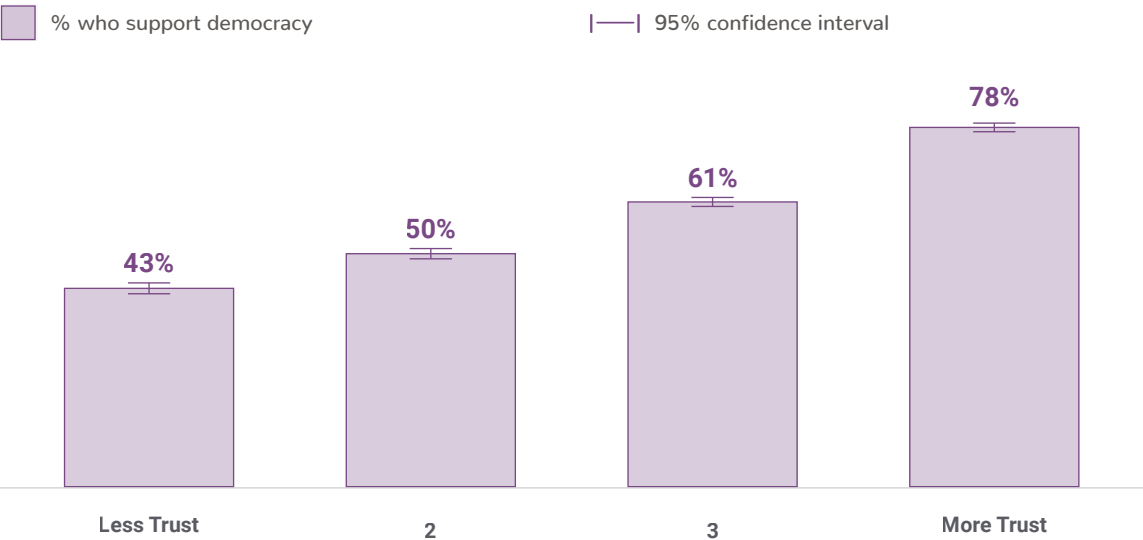
Democracy is more durable when people view the political system as legitimate and embrace widespread participation in the system.¹¹ The founder of LAPOP and the AmericasBarometer, Mitchell Seligson, developed measures of both concepts: system support (also called political legitimacy) and tolerance for political participation. Seligson further argued that these two sets of attitudes matter jointly.¹² Specifically, Seligson asserted that the combination of system support and political tolerance provides useful insights into a country’s potential democratic trajectory.

Figure 1.7 Support for democracy is higher among higher educated, wealthier, and older citizens



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Figure 1.8 Higher trust in institutions is strongly associated with higher support for democracy



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

The result is a “two-by-two” framework depicted in **Figure 1.9**, which has appeared in many prior LAPOP reports. It captures the percentage of citizens who fall into one of four cells labeled as attitudes conducive toward stable democracy, authoritarian stability, unstable democracy, or democracy at risk. Individuals expressing high system support and high tolerance are considered to hold a set of attitudes consistent with stable democracy. The combination of high system support with intolerance is conducive to authoritarian stability in that maneuvers that decrease space for opposition may receive at least passive support from the public. The combination of low system support with high tolerance can create an unstable situation, as individuals may tolerate aggressive moves by regime opponents to replace the existing government (though not necessarily replace democracy itself). Finally, the combination of low system support and low tolerance puts the system at risk of democratic erosion or breakdown.

To assess the health of a democracy and prospects for political instability, one can examine how these profiles shift over time. Analyses of the data leading into and including the 2023 AmericasBarometer reveal significant variation across the LAC region, which we detail below after describing how system support and political legitimacy are operationalized.

Political legitimacy is captured in the 2023 AmericasBarometer via an additive index based on these four questions:

To what extent do you respect the political institutions of (country)?

To what extent do you think that citizens’ basic rights are well protected by the political system of (country)?

To what extent do you feel proud of living under the political system of (country)?

To what extent do you think that one should support the political system of (country)?

Response options for each question are a 1 to 7 scale where 1 corresponds to “not at all” and 7 to “a lot.” The additive index of these questions that forms the political legitimacy measure is rescaled to range from 0 to 100.

Political tolerance is captured in the 2023 AmericasBarometer via an additive index based on these two questions about critics of the system of government:

How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people being permitted to run for public office?

How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people appearing on television to make speeches?

Response options for each question are a 1 to 10 scale where 1 corresponds to “strongly disapprove” and 10 to “strongly approve.” The additive index of these questions that forms the political tolerance measure is rescaled to range from 0 to 100.

Figure 1.9 A Political Culture Framework: System Support and Political Tolerance

	High Tolerance	Low Tolerance
High System Support	Attitudes Conducive to Stable Democracy	Attitudes Conducive to Authoritarian Stability
Low System Support	Attitudes Conducive to Unstable Democracy	Attitudes Conducive to Democracy at Risk

The combination of low system support and low tolerance puts systems at risk of democratic decay.

Indigenous women in Guatemala City, Guatemala hold an artistic protest on August 10, 2023. Their weavings denounce corruption and that the authorities of the Public Prosecutor’s Office have tried to ‘undermine’ the country’s elections. Esteban Biba/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock.



Figure 1.10 shows how democratic orientations have changed in the LAC region over time. Specifically, it shows the percentage of individuals, on average, who fit each of four profiles, by round of the AmericasBarometer.¹³ Orientations consistent with a stable democracy shifted downward in the LAC region around the year 2014, just prior to the significant drop in public support for democracy documented in the previous section. At that same time, there was a growth in profiles consistent with democracy at risk. The percentage of the public in the average LAC country with orientations consistent with stable democracy—high system support and high tolerance—is 21% in 2023, compared to 26% in 2006.

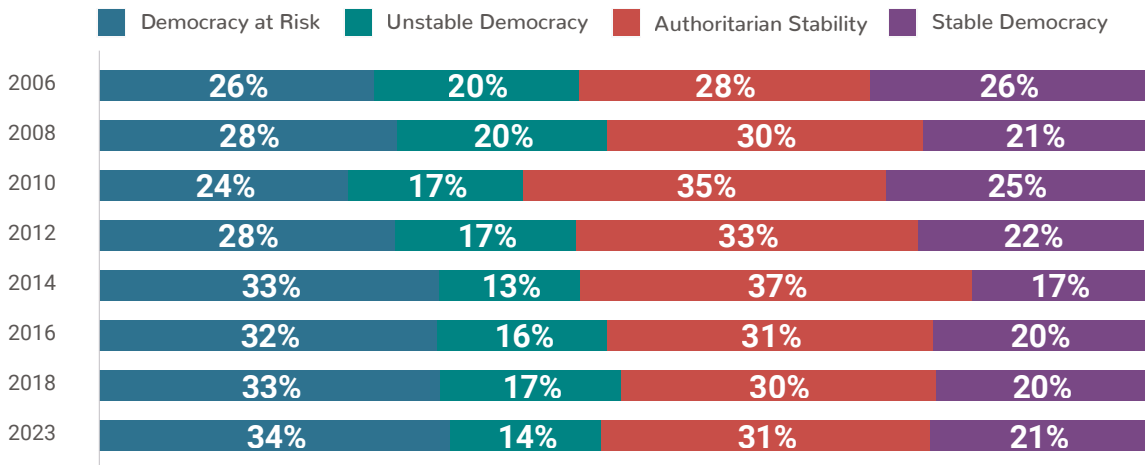
There is considerable cross-national variation in democratic orientations, as shown in **Figure 1.11**. Costa Rica has the greatest proportion of citizens who register both high system support and high tolerance. Although the country has faced challenges, including a high-profile corruption scandal and the assassination of an indigenous activist in recent years,¹⁴ it retains the region’s record for the longest uninterrupted democracy. On the other hand, countries with particularly low proportions of citizens expressing both high system support and tolerance are Argentina (14% stable democracy), Chile (14%), Trinidad & Tobago (14%), Peru (14%), and Suriname (13%). It is noteworthy that each of these countries has been battling significant political

and economic crises: defaults and rising inflation in Argentina;¹⁵ social uprisings and the rejection of a new constitution in Chile;¹⁶ rising crime and persistent corruption in Trinidad & Tobago;¹⁷ high level corruption and executive instability in Peru;¹⁸ and debt struggles, rising inflation, and unrest in Suriname.¹⁹

Earlier we flagged El Salvador as an exception to the regionwide pattern of diminished support for democracy. Here we see that El Salvador has a comparatively high proportion of citizens with attitudes conducive to stable democracy. Yet, simultaneously, the country has the highest proportion (51%) of individuals with a profile consistent with authoritarian stability. This set of results affirms the utility of

considering a broad set of democratic attitudes to reveal nuances and potential trajectories that might otherwise be overlooked. El Salvador is at a crossroads: sizeable portions of the population remain committed to democracy and its core principles (i.e., tolerance), yet there is room within public opinion for popular incumbent President Bukele to move the country further away from democracy. In a worst-case scenario, such maneuvering would place it on a trajectory we documented in Venezuela, where public support for democracy remained elevated for some time under Hugo Chávez and his successor, Nicolás Maduro, and then dropped significantly (see **Figure 1.5**) as the country’s democracy finally evaporated.

Figure 1.10 Attitudes conducive to stable democracy have declined across the LAC region since the start of the AmericasBarometer series

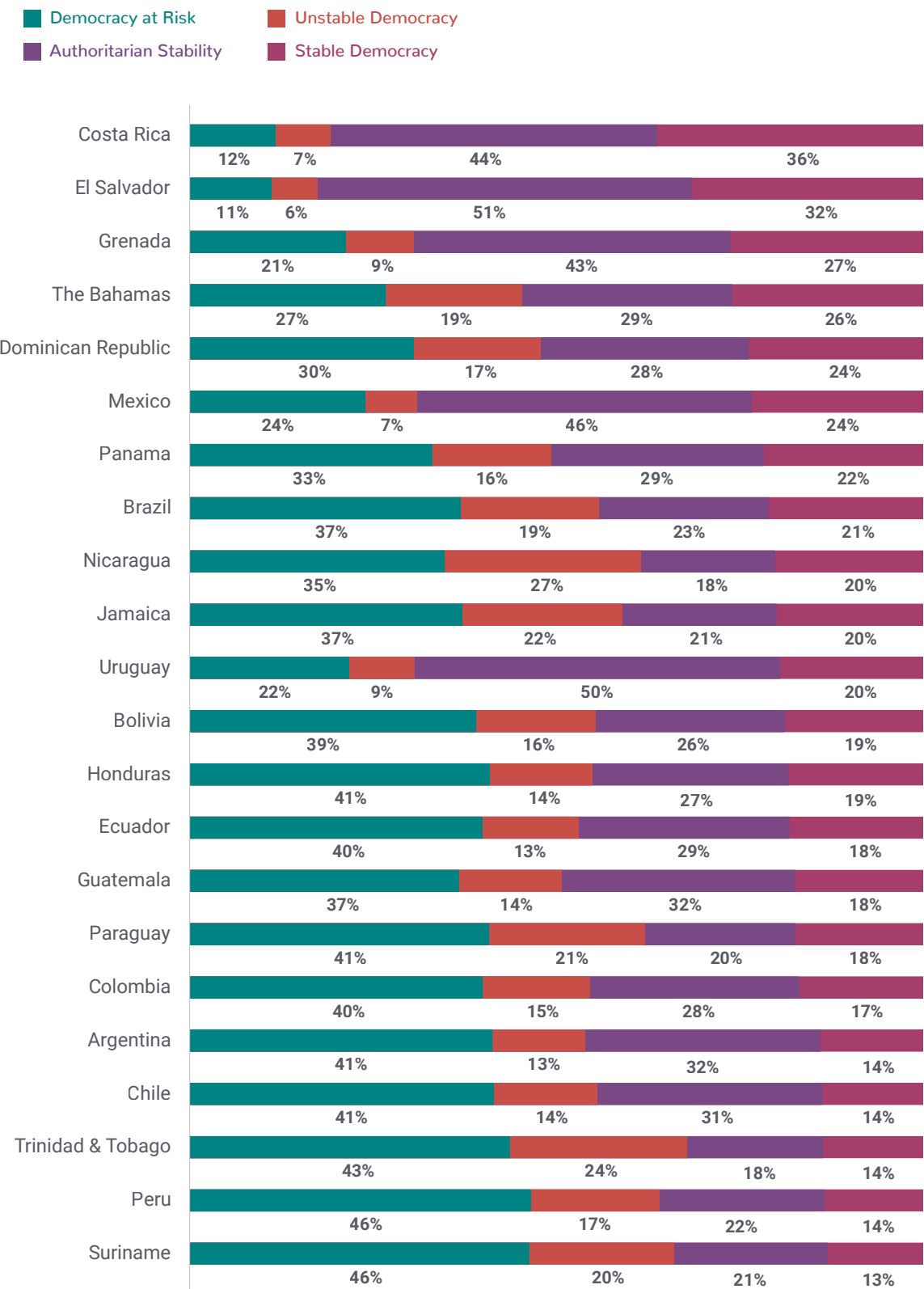


Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2006-2023

El Salvador’s President Nayib Bukele attends an official event, in Mejicanos, El Salvador on January 17, 2023. Bukele stated that El Salvador has become “the safest country in Latin America” and pointed out that now young people “are no longer victims” of violence. *Rodrigo Sura/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock.*



Figure 1.11 Democratic orientations vary by country



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Support for democracy has declined in most countries across the AmericasBarometer time series. Attitudes consistent with a stable democracy decreased around the year 2014, just prior to a significant drop in public support for democracy. At that same time, there was an uptick in attitudes that put democracy at risk.

Conclusion: A Slow-Burning Crisis of Confidence in Democracy

On the most recent International Day of Democracy, United States President Joe Biden championed democracy as “humanity’s most enduring means to advance prosperity, security, and dignity for all.”²⁰ Cross-time data from the AmericasBarometer reveal a persisting need to restore public confidence in democracy. Across the AmericasBarometer time series, support for democracy has declined in 20 out of 24 countries. Attitudinal profiles conducive to stable democracy—that is, the combination of high system support and high political tolerance—are likewise lower in the region these days than they were a decade ago.

To resolve this crisis, simultaneous to supporting countries on paths toward economic well-being, policymakers need to strengthen democratic institutions whose leaders act with integrity and, in turn, earn the public’s trust.

These patterns are mirrored by results presented in this report’s Spotlight on “Satisfaction with Democracy”, which shows that public satisfaction with the way democracy is working dropped a decade ago and has not yet recovered. Collectively these results speak to a slow-burning crisis of confidence in democracy.

To resolve this crisis, simultaneous to supporting countries on paths toward economic well-being, policymakers need to strengthen democratic institutions whose leaders act with integrity and, in turn, earn the public’s trust.²¹ As we have seen in this chapter, confidence in institutions is a strong predictor of support for democracy and, as we will document in the next chapter, the output they deliver is highly determinative of the public’s trust in those institutions.

Notes

- 1
- Oscar Castorena is a Senior Statistician with LAPOP Lab.
- 2
- Claassen 2020.
- 3
- Easton 1965; Linz and Stepan 1996.
- 4
- See <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/quotes/the-worst-form-of-government/>
- 5
- The number of countries included across rounds of the AmericasBarometer has varied across time. For greater consistency in comparisons over time, regional cross-time analyses in this report exclude The Bahamas, Grenada, Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad & Tobago, and Venezuela.
- 6
- Based on data from V-Dem’s graphing tool: https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/
- 7
- These three variables each have substantively meaningful and statistically significant relationships with support for democracy, including in regression analysis that includes each factor here as a predictor along with country fixed effects. Gender is also statistically significant, although substantively marginal, with men having one percentage-point more trust than women. We note the following for analyses of gender in this report: while LAPOP has developed an open-ended gender question (Castorena and Schweizer-Robinson 2023), there are too few individuals who identify outside the gender binary to analyze as a separate category: .13% said neither a man nor a woman, .71% said they did not know, and .67% did not answer.
- 8
- Easton 1965.
- 9
- Evans and Whitefield 1995.
- 10
- The measure of institutional trust is calculated from an additive index of four 7-point trust items (B13, trust in the legislature; B21a, trust in the executive; B31, trust in the highest court, and B47a, trust in elections) and the 4-point national government trust item (ANESTG). The index has a scale reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) of .83. Respondents are then coded into four levels of trust corresponding to the quartiles of the additive index.
- 11
- Lipset 1981 [1961]; Dahl 1971.
- 12
- Seligson 2000.
- 13
- Individuals who scored above 50 (the midpoint) on both of the scales are considered to have attitudes conducive to stable democracy. Those who scored 50 and below on both scales are considered to hold attitudes that place democracy at risk. Individuals with high political tolerance but low system support have attitudes that favor unstable democracy. Lastly, individuals with high system support but low tolerance are said to foster authoritarian stability. Prior operationalizations of these measures have been based on more variables; we use a subset that is available across multiple rounds of the AmericasBarometer.
- 14
- See <https://freedomhouse.org/country/costa-rica/freedom-world/2020>
- 15
- See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-65524072>; <https://www.cfr.org/background/argentina-south-american-power-struggles-stability>
- 16
- See <https://convergencemag.com/articles/learning-from-chile-navigating-complexities-of-political-crises/>
- 17
- See <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/08/01/trinidad-gang-violence-corruption-oil/>
- 18
- See <https://www.npr.org/2022/12/09/1141855115/from-president-to-prisoner-the-rapid-descent-of-perus-pedro-castillo>
- 19
- See <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/26/business/suriname-china-imf.html>
- 20
- See <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/09/15/statement-from-president-joe-biden-on-international-day-of-democracy/>
- 21
- See <https://www.usaid.gov/stories/how-democracy-can-win>

How Government Critics View Freedom of Speech

Noam Lupu and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister

Concerns about freedom of speech among government critics have risen in a number of LAC countries.

Democracy advocates have taken note of restrictions on civil liberties in certain LAC countries, such as Nicaragua and El Salvador. Globally, freedom of expression has deteriorated in dozens of countries, according to expert ratings compiled by V-Dem.¹ A fundamental test of civil liberties is whether those critical of the incumbent government feel free to express their oppositional views.

The AmericasBarometer included the following question in the 2016/17 and 2023 rounds:

Do you think that now in the country we have very little, enough, or too much freedom to express political views without fear?

Perceptions of basic freedoms are often correlated with perceptions of the government.² Supporters of the government may have few critical views to express, and therefore not often experience fear about expressing their views. Therefore, as a measure of freedom of speech, we focus on those who do not approve of the incumbent executive:³ to what extent do these *government critics* perceive restrictions on freedom of political speech?

Over the last five years, concerns about freedom of political expression among government critics increased in a number of LAC countries.⁴ Consistent with experts' views on civil rights in the region, these upticks are large in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The former increased from 70% to 89% concerned about freedom of speech, and the latter

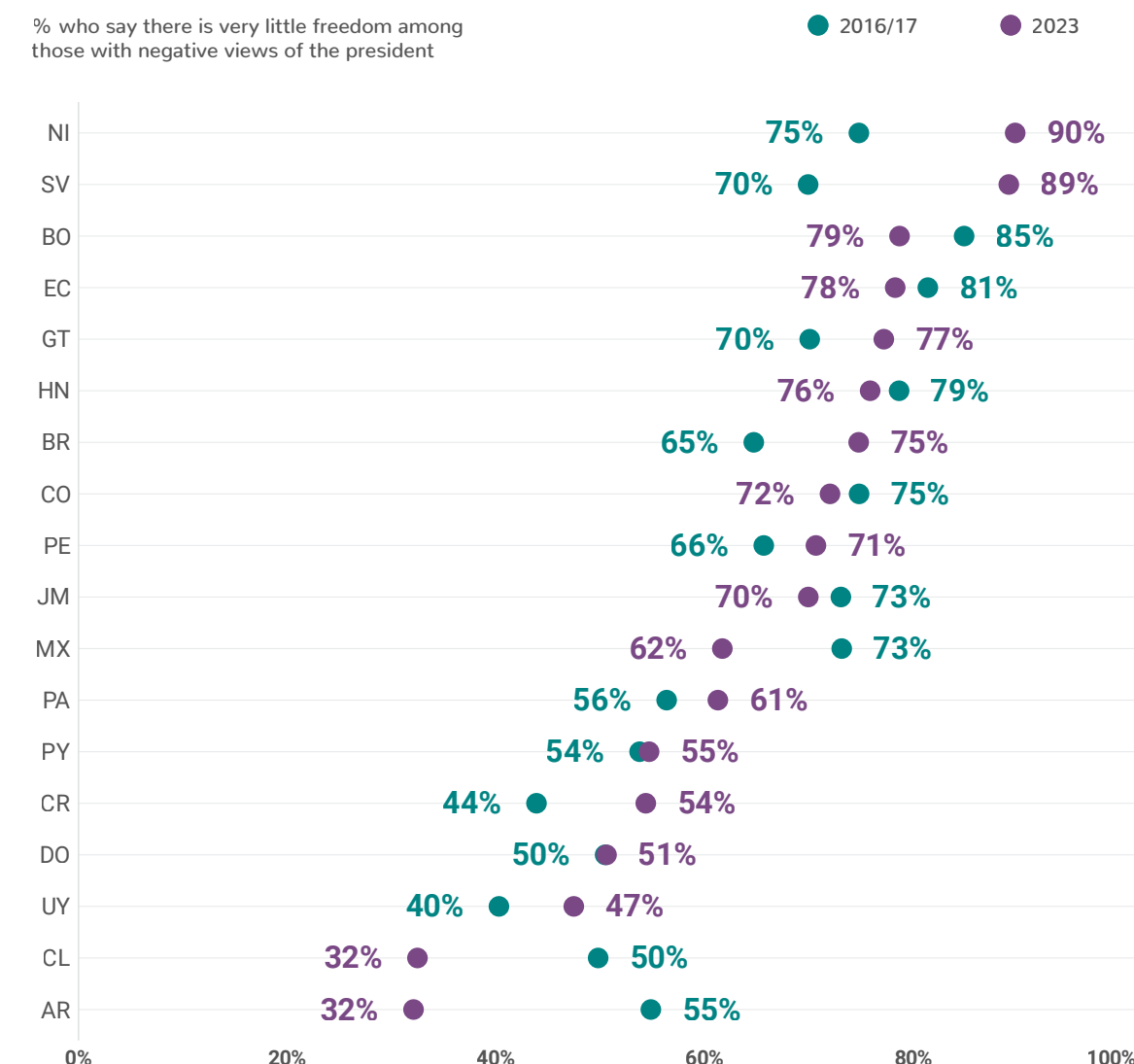
increased from 75% to 90%. But the data also include surprising cases—like Costa Rica and Uruguay—where government critics increasingly feel their freedom of expression is being curtailed.

At the same time, perceptions of freedom of expression among government critics improved in other cases. In Argentina and Chile, government critics were far less likely to say that there is very little freedom of expression in 2023 than they had been in 2016/17. A similar, if more muted, decline in concerns also took place in Mexico. Notably, all three are cases in which presidential elections also brought about a large ideological shift in the executive.

The region as a whole is remarkably heterogeneous when it comes to government critics' views of their freedom of expression. Whereas the majority of critics in the Southern Cone feel that they have enough or more than enough freedom to express their political views, most critics in the rest of the region feel their civil liberties are restricted.

Alarming reports from government critics reach near-consensus in the cases of El Salvador and Nicaragua, but they are also strikingly high in another six countries, with roughly three-quarters of government critics saying they cannot express their political views freely in 2023. The freedom to express views critical of the government is central to a well-functioning liberal democracy and on this score much of the region is falling short.

Concerns about free speech have increased among government critics in many countries



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Notes

- See https://v-dem.net/documents/19/dr_2022_ipyOpLP.pdf
- Perry 2023.
- LAPOP measures presidential approval with this question: Speaking in general of the current administration, how would you rate the job performance of President/prime minister [Name]? Using the 5-point response scale, we code those who respond “poor” or “very poor” as government critics.
- Given a lower number of cases for government critics (vs. the full sample), assessing the significance of cross-time differences becomes more difficult. In five countries—Dominican Republic, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay, the tick upward is not significant at $p < 0.10$.

Satisfaction with democracy in the LAC region is lower today than it was one decade ago. With a few exceptions across LAC countries, the majority are dissatisfied with democracy.

A cornerstone AmericasBarometer question gauges satisfaction with democracy:

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

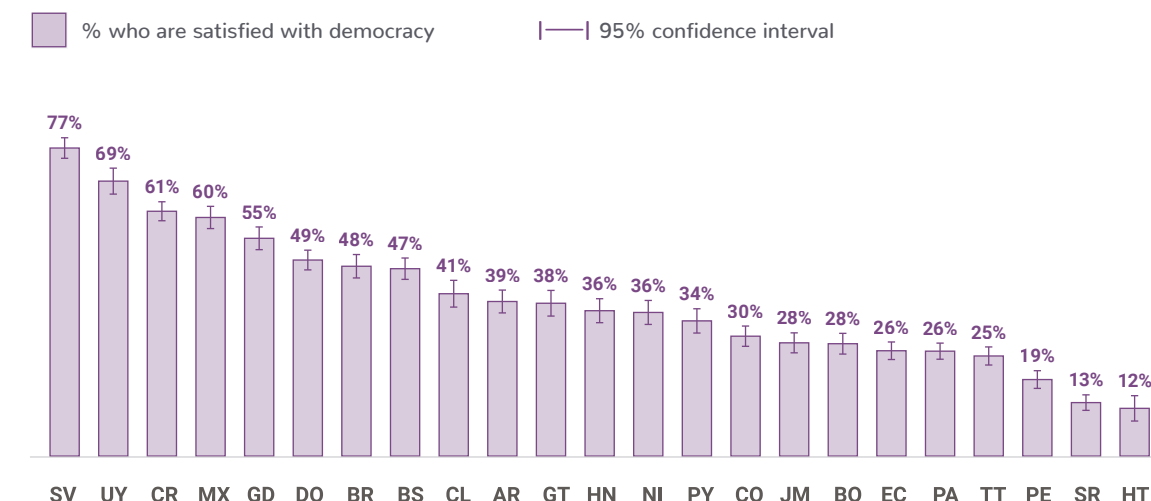
This measure is meant to encapsulate several dimensions of political support, including attitudes about both current leadership and the institutions of the country as a whole. The 2023 round included this item in 23 countries. The results that follow show the percentage of those who report being “satisfied” or “very satisfied”, in contrast to those who are “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with democracy.

Less than half of people are satisfied with democracy in 18 of 23 countries studied. Honduras holds the median value at 36%. However, satisfaction varies greatly across the region, with a high of 77% in El Salvador and a low of just 12% in Haiti. Notably, Ecuador’s level of satisfaction fell by more than half in the last two years, from 56% in 2021 to 26% in 2023. Meanwhile, Brazil improved by 17 percentage points from last round to 48% this year, its highest level since 2012.

We can also see from the time-series data that satisfaction with democracy regionwide fell slightly in 2023 to around two in five. While a majority reported feeling satisfied in every year between 2004 and 2014, that number dipped to 40% in 2016/17 and has not yet recovered, outside of a small rebound in 2021. As documented in this report’s chapter on *Support for Stable Democracy*, this pattern of results echoes cross-time change in support for democracy in the abstract.

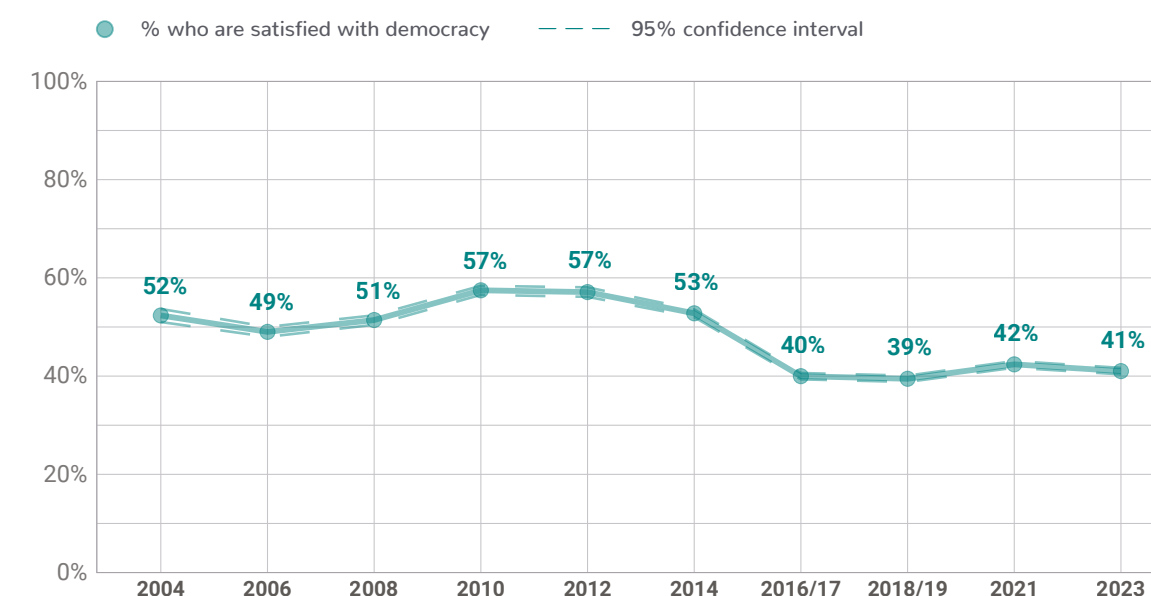
Satisfaction with democracy varies significantly across demographic groups in 2023. Men are more likely to report satisfaction than women (42% versus 38%). Satisfaction has a curvilinear relationship with age: the youngest and oldest cohorts are more likely to say they are satisfied with democracy (44% and 47%, respectively) compared to 26–45-year-olds (37%). Satisfaction is also significantly lower among those who have at least some secondary education (38%) compared to those with no or only primary education (45%). Finally, similar to the pattern found with age, people in the middle category of wealth are less likely to say they are satisfied (39%) compared to the highest (41%) and lowest (42%) levels.²

Most people in the region are not satisfied with democracy



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Satisfaction with democracy declined slightly in 2023

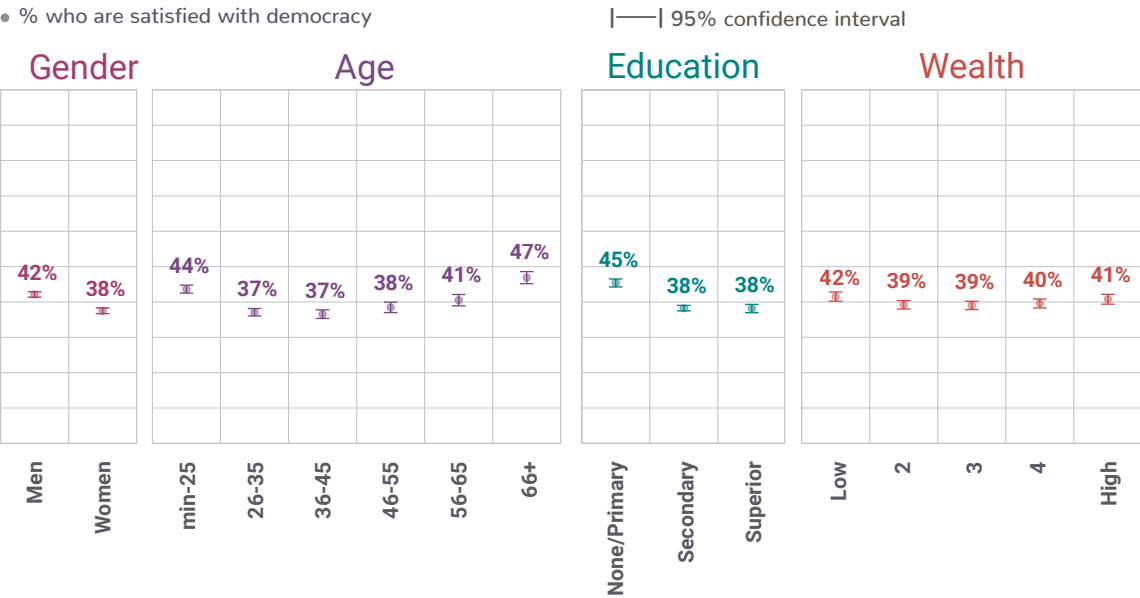


Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2004-2023

Satisfaction with democracy has not recovered from a precipitous drop after the 2014 wave. Democracies that fail to perform up to expectations risk losing their legitimacy.³ Policymakers and activists interested in upholding democracy must continue to work to

increase faith in institutions and political leadership, particularly among women and the middle class. This is especially critical for countries with dangerously low levels of satisfaction including Haiti, Peru, and Suriname.

Satisfaction with democracy is significantly lower among women, 26-45-year-olds, those with higher educational attainment, and the middle class



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Notes

- 1 Luke Plutowski is a Senior Statistician with LAPOP Lab.
- 2 These results hold when controlling for the other variables shown here, in addition to place of residence (urban/rural status was not significantly associated with satisfaction with democracy).
- 3 Lipset 1959.



"Siempre Gira al Sol" by Elsa Mercado.
Vanderbilt University CLAXC Latin American
Images Photography Competition 2020.

Citizens' Views on Bringing about Political Change

María Fernanda Boidi¹ and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister

The 2023 AmericasBarometer shows that a plurality of LAC citizens view voting as a key means to influence politics. Yet, those perceptions vary by levels of trust in elections.

Citizen participation in politics is central to democracy.² Robust democracies provide multiple channels for public input: individuals can vote, petition, protest, engage in local organizations, and run for office.

Elections are a core democratic process, yet data from the AmericasBarometer has demonstrated that many citizens harbor serious concerns about the integrity of elections.³ Protests are a normalized mechanism for engagement in some LAC countries, but not in others.⁴ Participation in local organizations is also varied, and often leads to other forms of political involvement.⁵

Understanding citizens' views on what channels are best for providing input into politics may provide perspective on the nature and future of political participation. To address this topic, the 2023 AmericasBarometer introduced a new question:

*In what way do you believe you can have the most influence to change things in the country?*⁶

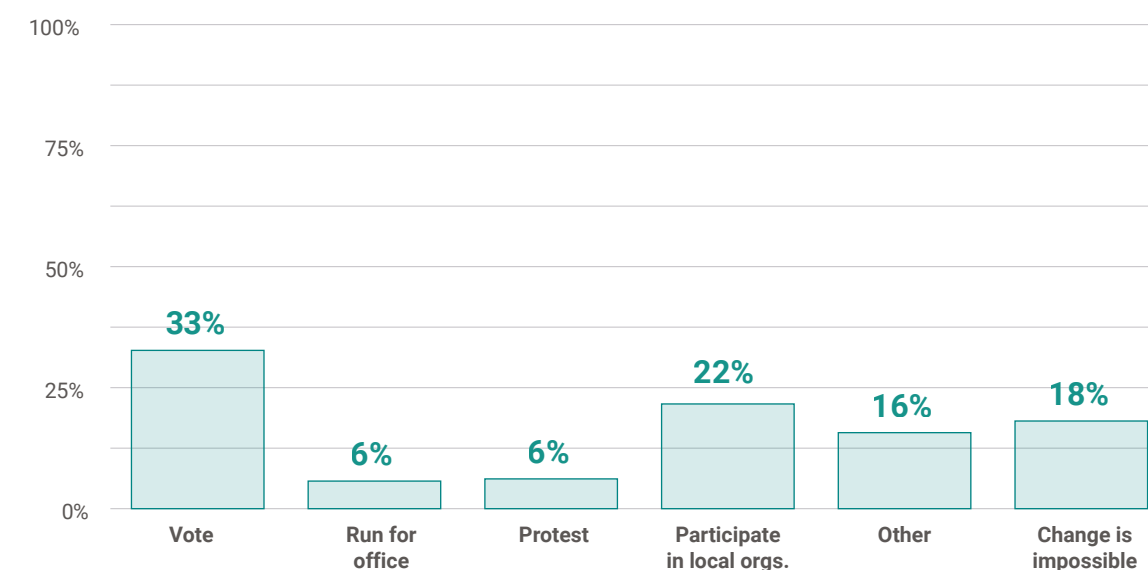
Respondents could select from this list: vote to elect those who support their position; run as a candidate for public office; participate in protests; participate in community organizations; work to influence things in another way; or none of these—that is, they could report that they do not believe it is possible to change things.

On average in the LAC region, the most popular option is voting: 33% believe that the best way to bring about change in their country is by casting a ballot. Still, approximately one in five (22%) report it is more efficacious to participate in local organizations. Just under one in five (18%) express a lack of faith that political engagement can bring about change. Participation in protests and running for office are the least preferred ways to bring about political change.

Focusing just on the modal category—voting—the 2023 AmericasBarometer reveals that Jamaica has the smallest percentage of adults who perceive voting to be the core mechanism for political change (19%), while Uruguay has the largest (51%).

On average in the LAC region, one in three say voting is the best way to influence change

In what way do you believe you can have the most influence to change things in the country?

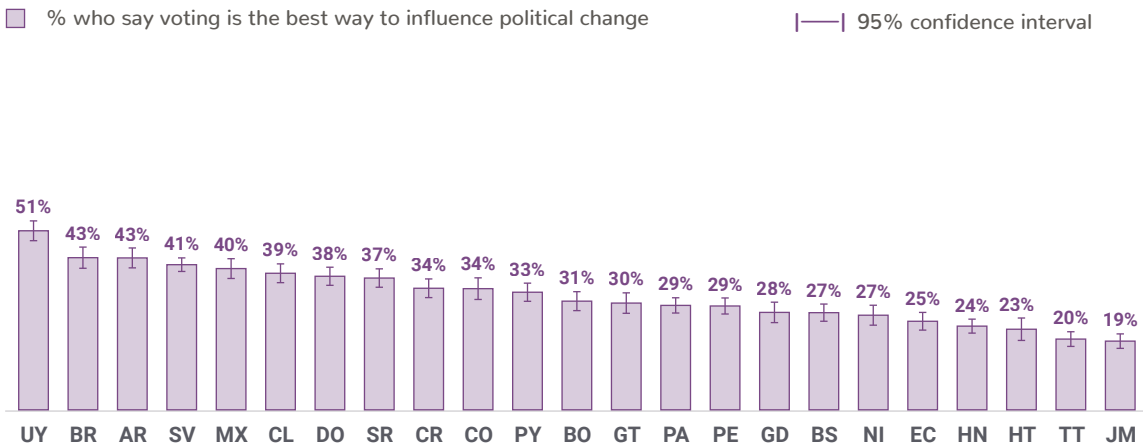


Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Trust in elections matters for whether an individual identifies voting as the core channel through which to voice input. Those who have higher trust in elections are significantly more likely to view voting as the best channel for political input (40%), compared to those who have neutral views on election (32%) and especially compared to those with low trust in elections (27%).⁷

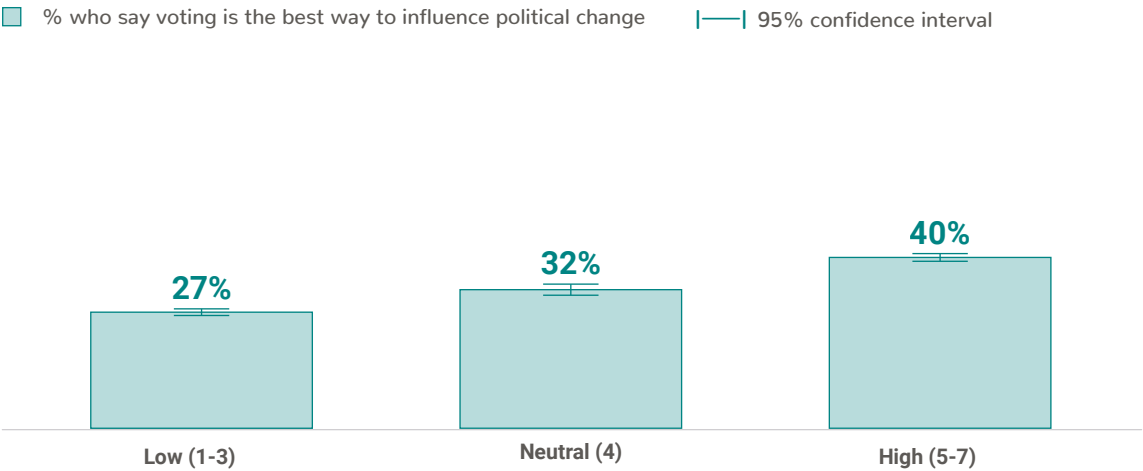
Scholars have shown, using AmericasBarometer data, that trust in elections influences individuals' willingness to vote in national elections.⁸ Our analyses here affirm that conclusion with a different variable: views on whether voting or another means of participation—if any—is the best way to bring about change. Building strong democracies in which citizens engage in one of their most important rights and duties—voting in elections—requires bolstering the integrity of elections.⁹

Only in Uruguay does a majority say voting is the best way to influence change



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Trust in elections strongly predicts the likelihood a person prioritizes voting as a means to bring about change



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Building strong democracies in which citizens engage in one of their most important rights and duties—voting in elections—requires bolstering the integrity of elections.

Notes	1	Dr. María Fernanda Boidi is Director of Fieldwork & Regional Partnerships with LAPOP Lab. An expert in political efficacy, she developed the question that we focus on in this Spotlight and refined it through qualitative pre-testing.
	2	Verba et al. 1995.
	3	Lupu et al. 2021.
	4	Moseley and Moreno 2010; Moseley 2018.
	5	Boulding and Holzner 2020.
	6	A different, reduced version of this question was asked in the 2008 AmericasBarometer, and since then sporadically in a few countries.
	7	We recode the AmericasBarometer trust in elections scale into low trust (1-3 on the 7-point scale), neutral (4), and high trust (5-7). In a logistic analysis that controls for gender, age, education, wealth, urban (vs. rural) residence, and country, trust in elections is a significant predictor of the likelihood of reporting voting as the best channel.
	8	Carreras and İrepoğlu 2013.
	9	Norris 2014.

Less than one in two (44%) adults in the LAC region, on average, have recently fact-checked online information. Skills, education, and age are significant predictors of fact-checking.

Digital literacy—the capacity to use technology effectively to navigate the online information environment²—is a crucial tool for 21st century citizenship.

Digital literacy is associated with a capacity to sort accurate information from erroneous news circulating in online media.^{3,4} This skillset is particularly important given the prevalence of fake news in today's media environments and its correspondence with an erosion of public faith in democracy.⁵

We can gain perspective on digital literacy in the LAC region by looking at the extent to which people fact-check online news. The 2023 AmericasBarometer introduced this question:

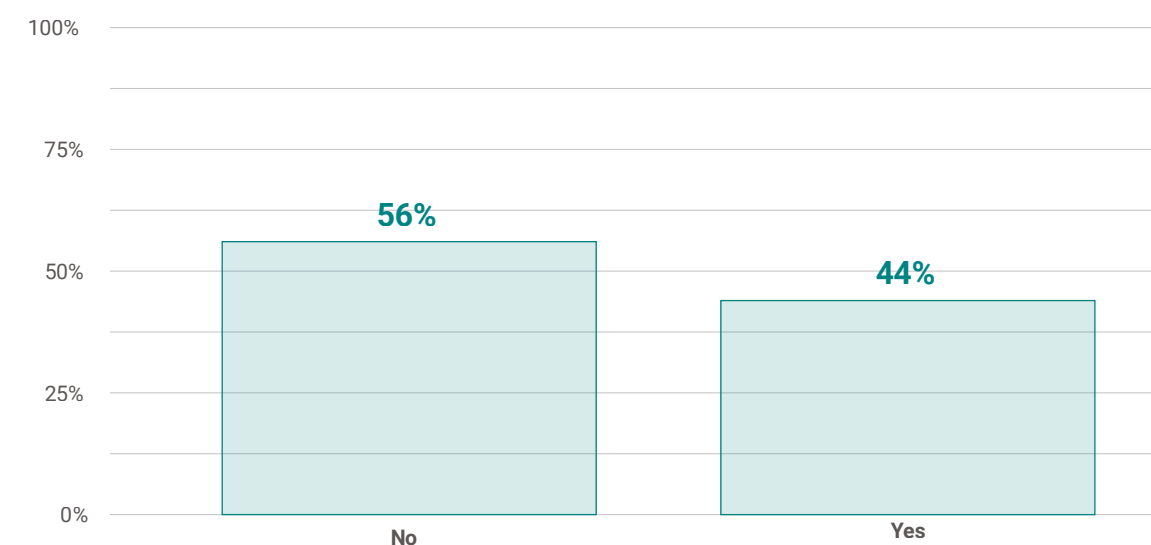
In the last three months, have you checked the truthfulness of the information or content you found on the Internet, including social media? Yes/No

On average in the LAC region, 44% report that, yes, they have recently fact-checked online news. Although not shown here, there is cross-national variation in this fact-checking rate: from a low of 33% in Guatemala to a high of 59% in Peru.

In considering what predicts online fact-checking behavior, gender, age, and education matter. Men are more likely to say they checked whether online news is true compared to women (47% vs. 41%).

Less than half in the LAC region have recently checked the veracity of online information

In the last three months, have you checked the truthfulness of the information or content you found on the Internet, including social media?



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

An interviewer from the Centre for Leadership & Governance, University of the West Indies, Mona conducts qualitative pretesting of the 2017 AmericasBarometer country questionnaire in Jamaica. LAPOP Lab photo archives.



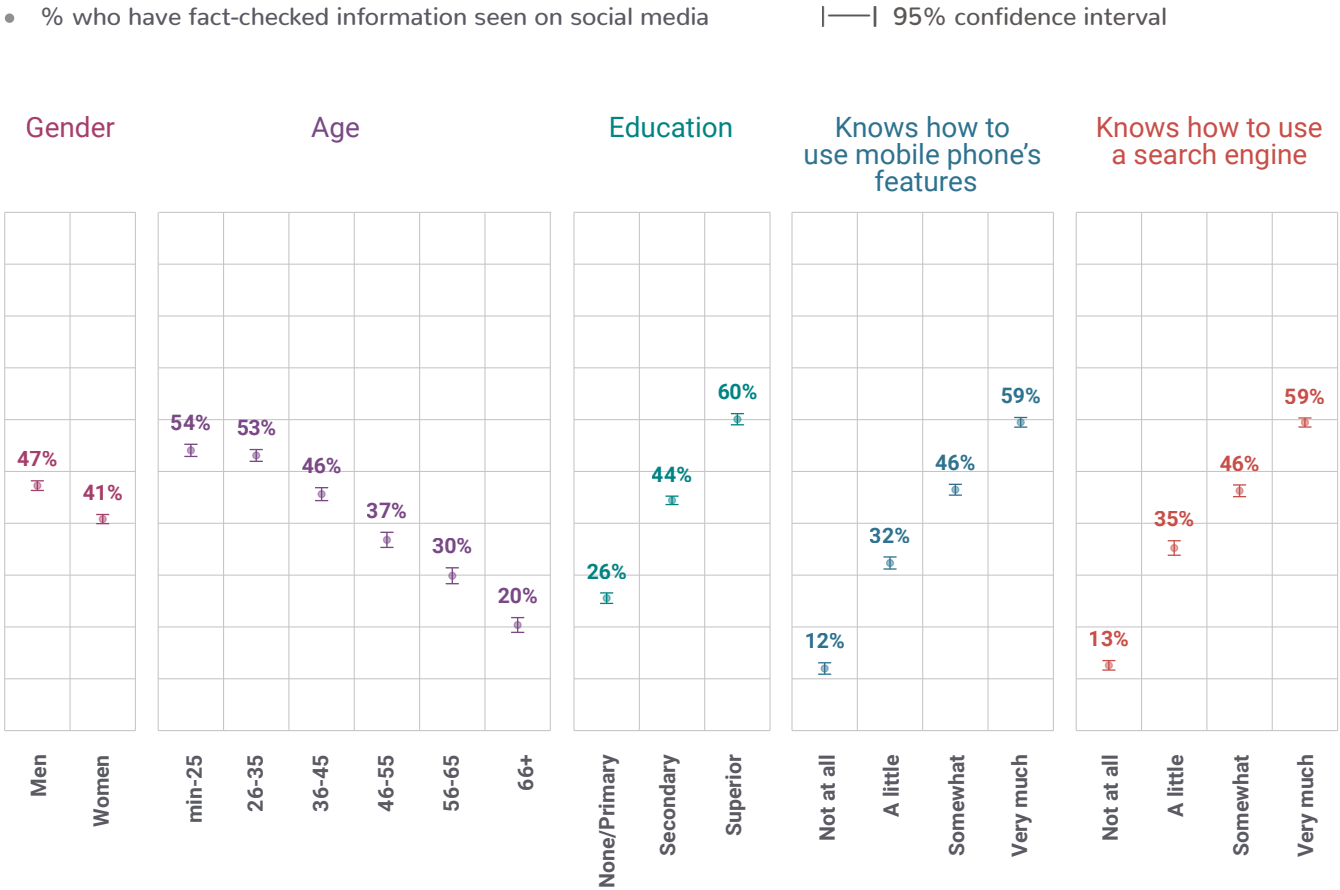
Those who are in the 35 and younger age cohorts report fact-checking at rates just over 50%, while those in older cohorts report lower levels of fact-checking. Among those 66 and older, only 20% have recently fact-checked online information. Those who are more educated are more likely to report recently having checked the truthfulness of online information: among those with no formal education or only primary education, 26% have recently checked online information; this compares to 44% of those with secondary education and 60% of those with post-secondary education.

Fluency in digital technology matters. Those who report a higher capacity to use a mobile phone and its features are more likely to report they recently verified the truthfulness of online content as opposed to those with a lower capacity to use a cellphone. Moving from reporting one is “not at all” to “very much” capable of using their mobile phone’s features shifts the likelihood of fact-checking from 12% to 59%. Analyzing capacity to search the internet for information yields a similar set of results, which reflects the fact that these digital technology skills are highly correlated (Pearson correlation=0.70).

Education and digital skillsets help citizens discern what news is accurate and what news is not. Investing in these pathways to build digital literacy is important to strengthening democratic politics.

Building digital literacy—via education and expanding digital skillsets—is important to strengthening democratic politics.

Those who know how to use a search engine, are well-versed in their mobile phone features, are male, younger, and more educated are more likely to fact-check online information



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Notes

- 1 Lucas Borba is a PhD student in political science at Vanderbilt University and a LAPOP Lab Affiliate.
- 2 Kahne et al. 2012.
- 3 Sirlin et al. 2021.
- 4 Guess and Munger 2023.
- 5 See, e.g., <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/misinformation-is-eroding-the-publics-confidence-in-democracy/>

Confidence in Democratic Institutions

Oscar Castorena and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister

Chapter 2

"Rainbows in Guatapé" by Alexander Tripp.
Vanderbilt University CLAXC Latin American
Images Photography Competition 2021.

040

MAIN FINDINGS

Trust in democratic institutions yields positive political, economic, and social outcomes, and vice versa. The AmericasBarometer reveals persistently low levels of trust in political institutions in the LAC region. This chapter documents this challenge, using 10 rounds of the survey to present cross-time and cross-national variation. Further, by linking suboptimal evaluations and experiences to lower trust levels, the chapter shows how strengthening democracy requires building institutions that are fair and effective.

- Trust in high courts and legislatures has remained stable at low levels
- Trust in executives has declined in recent years, with notable exceptions in Mexico and El Salvador
- Trust in the military and churches is high, while levels of trust in elections and the three main branches government are relatively low
- Trust in elections varies across countries, yet is low and has decreased in a number of countries
- Levels of trust in the three main branches of government vary significantly across countries
- Fair and effective institutions are key to building institutional trust

041

Trust in institutions is integral to democratic stability. Individuals who perceive institutions as trustworthy are more accepting of policy and electoral outcomes, even when those outcomes run counter to their preferences.¹ And high levels of trust are associated greater support for democracy, as we documented in the previous chapter. Trust in institutions is also critical to inclusive economic growth² and social cohesion.³

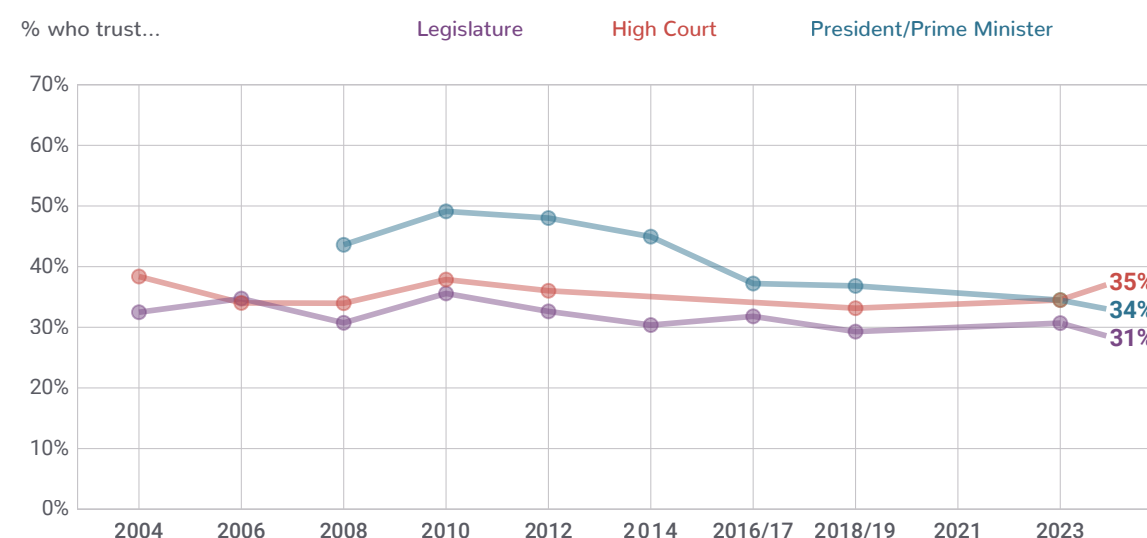
Institutions in the LAC region have struggled to build public confidence in the face of increasing levels of economic inequality, widespread violence, persistent high-level and street-level corruption, and other challenges to public well-being. This chapter focuses on the AmericasBarometer's trust in institutions module to document levels of institutional trust across time and across countries. We intersperse that discussion with analyses of other core questions—including experiences with crime and

corruption victimization and evaluations of the economy—to demonstrate the tight connection between how citizens experience and evaluate institutions.

TRUST IN THE JUDICIAL AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES HAS REMAINED STABLE, TRUST IN EXECUTIVES HAS DECLINED

On average in the LAC region, public confidence in high courts and legislatures has remained fairly constant at low levels the last two decades. In contrast, trust in executives has decreased significantly. **Figure 2.1** documents these cross-time trends; each line begins at the earliest point in which the question was included in the core AmericasBarometer survey. Trust is measured using a 1-7 scale, and then grouping together higher-than-midpoint (i.e., 5-7) responses.

Figure 2.1 Trust in executives has declined to a level similar to other political institutions



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2004-2023

On average, public confidence in high courts and legislatures has remained fairly constant, while trust in executives has declined.

34%

of adults, on average, trust the executive, down 15 percentage points from a peak in 2010.

Although trust in the high court is lower in 2023 than in the first year it appears in the time series (2004), the difference from the beginning of the series (38%) to the endpoint (35%) is not particularly stark. Similarly, we do not find evidence of a noteworthy drop in trust in national legislatures: in 2004, 32% of adults in the average LAC country reported confidence in the legislature; that value is 31% in 2023.

Trust in the executives has dropped in a more striking manner: confidence in the executive hovered between 44 and 48% from 2008 to 2014, and then dropped noticeably in 2016/17. It has remained low such that, in 2023, the region-mean level of trust in the executive is 34%, which is 10 percentage points lower than it was at the start of the time-series. Although not shown in analyses here, exceptions to the decline in executive trust include Mexico and El Salvador, where currently popular presidents have elevated public confidence in the branch.

In contrast, some of the largest drops in executive trust are found in Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, and Suriname—which have experienced declines of 32, 35, 42, and 42 percentage points, respectively—from the earliest to latest AmericasBarometer surveys in which the question was asked.

The implications of changes in confidence in the executive are complex and thus difficult to foretell. On one hand, higher levels of confidence in the executive branch as a core political institution ought to strengthen public acceptance of unpopular incumbents and policies. On the other hand, higher levels of confidence could embolden populist leaders to take actions to centralize power in a popular branch. Democracy observers have raised warnings of these types of maneuverings—which erode democracy from the inside⁴—under the leadership of presidents Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico and Nayib Bukele in El Salvador.⁵

TRUST IN CORE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS LAGS BEHIND TRUST IN THE MILITARY AND CHURCHES

How does trust in the three main branches of government compare to other institutions? **Figure 2.2** shows the percentage of individuals, on average for the LAC region, who trust in each of eight institutions in 2023. In each case, responses on 7-point scales are coded to show those who provide affirmative responses above the scale’s midpoint. Trust is highest in the armed forces, followed by the Catholic and Evangelical Churches.⁶ Reserves of confidence in national legislatures are particularly low: fewer than one in three adults expresses trust in their national legislative body.

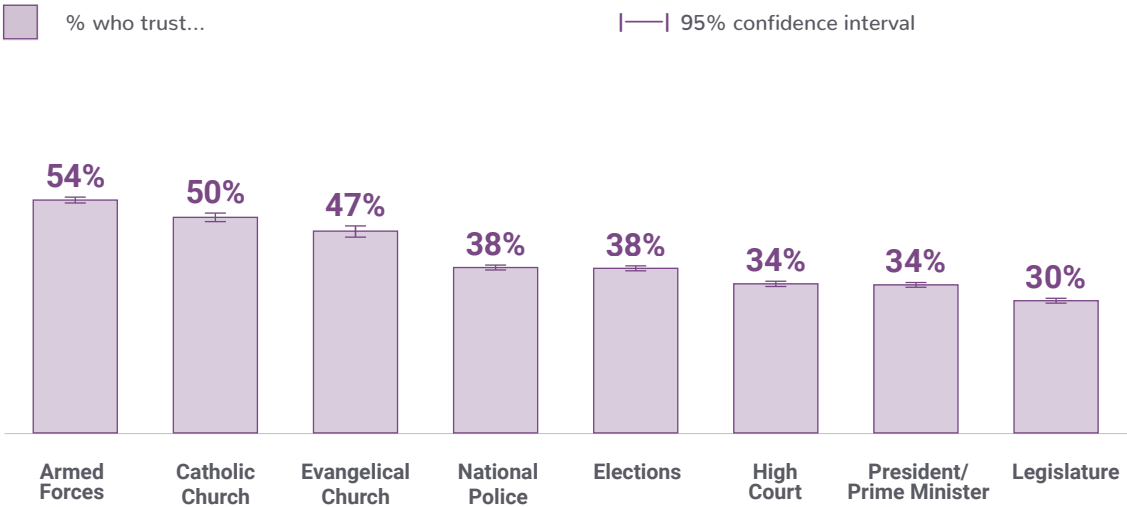
Trust in executives is barely greater than trust in legislatures. As noted above, this represents a significant change from a decade ago. Prior rounds of the AmericasBarometer consistently found comparatively high levels of trust

in the executive branch alongside the persistently higher levels of trust in the armed forces and religious institutions. In 2008 and 2012, the executive ranked third among the institutions under analysis. Yet, in 2023, levels of executive trust are among the lowest.

WHILE GENERALLY HIGH, TRUST IN PUBLIC SECURITY INSTITUTIONS VARIES BY COUNTRY AND INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE

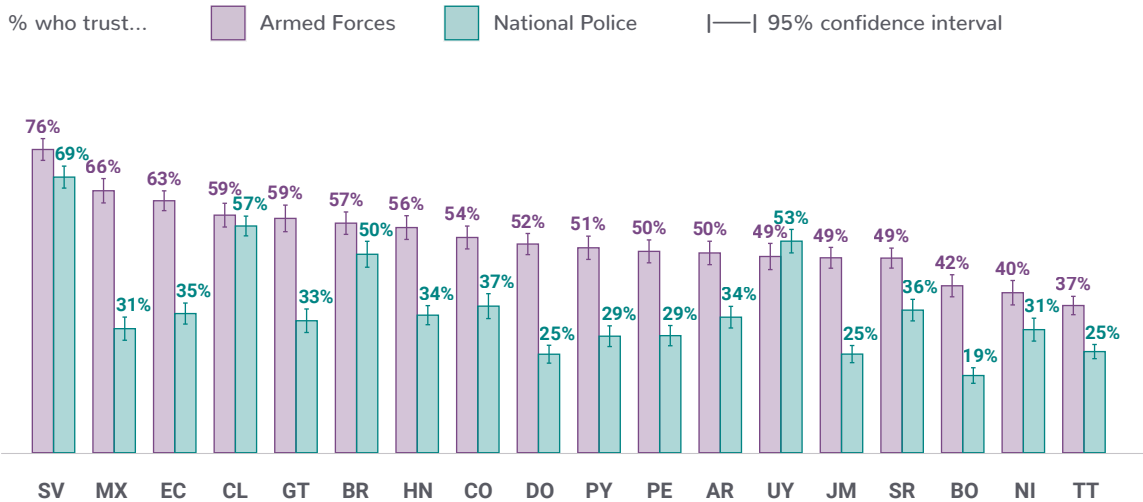
Regional averages mask differences across countries. **Figure 2.3** shows country-level outcomes for trust in the armed forces and national police in 2023.⁷ Among countries in which the question was included in 2023, trust in the armed forces is highest in El Salvador (76%), and lowest in Trinidad & Tobago (37%). Trust in the national police is likewise highest in El Salvador (69%), and it is lowest in Bolivia (19%). The high rate of confidence in the armed forces and police in El Salvador tracks with the executive’s high approval

Figure 2.2 In the LAC region, more than half trust their armed forces while few trust their legislature



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Figure 2.3 The public typically reports more trust in the armed forces than the police, but levels vary



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

ratings, and—given President Bukele’s use of police and soldiers to brutally crack down on crime and violence⁸—raises serious questions about whether there is public will to demand checks on the power of security forces in the country.

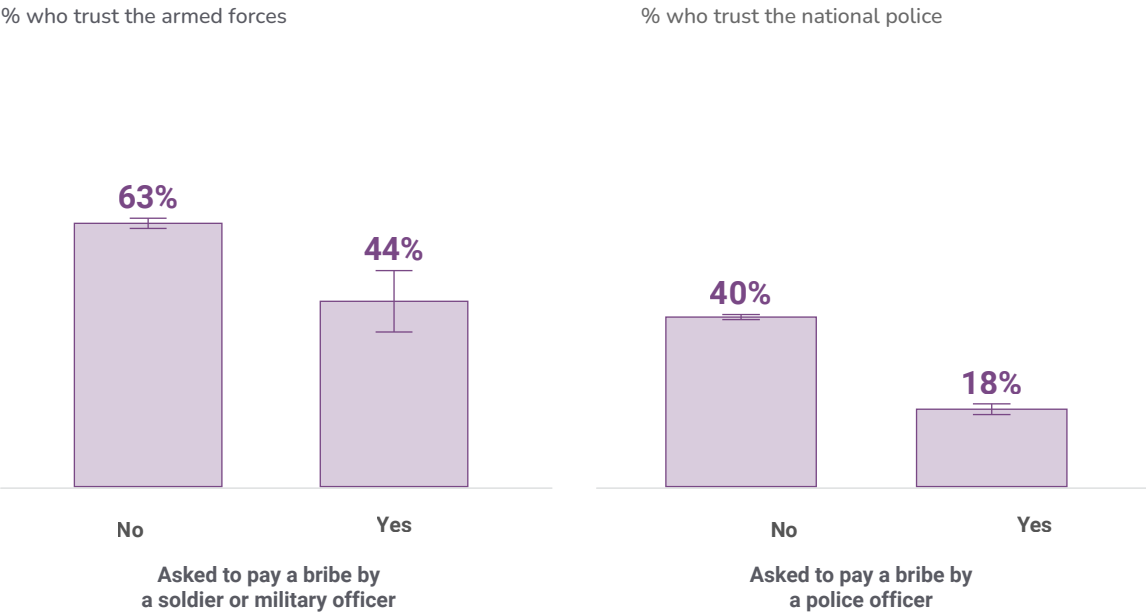
In general, elevated levels of trust in the armed forces compared to the national police reflect how revered the military is as a symbol of the nation. Yet this pattern may also reflect the fact that citizens have more opportunities for interactions with police that tarnish the institution’s image. **Figure 2.4** shows that average levels of trust in the armed forces and the national police are higher for those who have *not* been asked to pay a bribe compared to those who have been victimized by this type of corruption.⁹

The magnitude of these differences is striking: among those who have *not* been victims of corruption by the armed forces and police, levels of trust are 63% and

40%, respectively. For those who have been asked for a bribe, these levels are approximately 20 percentage points lower: 44% and 18% for the armed forces and police, respectively. While the predicted effect of being solicited for a bribe is roughly the same for both the police and military, the incidence rate is dramatically different. Nearly 10%, on average across the region, report being asked for a bribe by the police in the last year, whereas only 0.5% say they were asked for a bribe by a member of the armed forces.

The public values not only integrity, but also effectiveness. The more capable the police are in providing public safety, the more they earn public confidence. **Figure 2.5** shows that trust in the police is 12 percentage points higher (41% vs. 29%) among those who have *not* been the victim of a crime, compared those who have experienced crime victimization in the last year.

Figure 2.4 Those solicited for bribes are less likely to trust the armed forces and the police



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Figure 2.5 Crime victims are less likely to trust the national police



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

LOW LEVELS OF TRUST IN ELECTIONS ARE LINKED TO PERCEIVED DEFICITS OF ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

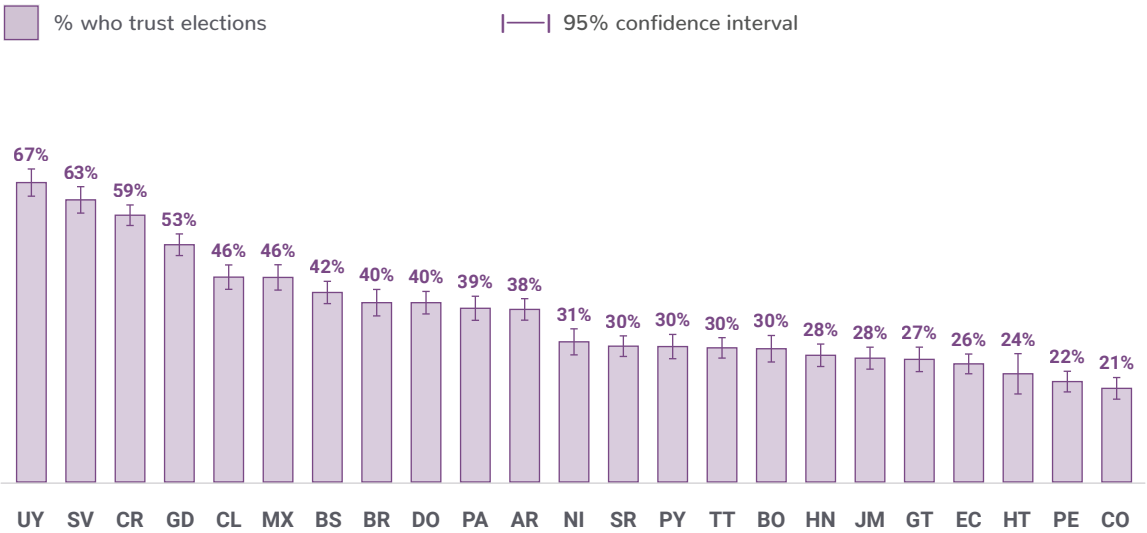
67%

Uruguayans trust their elections, compared to just one in five in Peru and Colombia.

Trust in elections motivates civic engagement and tolerance for unpopular electoral outcomes.¹⁰ On average, just under two in five trust elections in the LAC region. In analyses not shown here, we find that trust in elections has decayed slightly over time: on average in the LAC region, 44% of individuals expressed confidence in elections in 2012, compared to 38% in 2023.¹¹ Declining confidence in elections has been particularly substantial in Nicaragua, Peru, and Suriname, which saw 20-, 23-, and 40-percentage point decreases—respectively—from the earliest to latest surveys in the AmericasBarometer in which the question was asked.

Figure 2.6 shows significant variation in levels of trust in elections in 2023 across countries. In Uruguay, two in three (67%) trust elections, while in Peru and Colombia, respectively, only 22% and 21% of citizens express confidence in elections. As noted above, Peru is among the countries that has experienced substantial declines in trust in elections since 2012. This has been in the context of multiple very close and highly polarized presidential elections. For example, in 2021, the losing candidate, Keiko Fujimori, disputed the outcome and called into question the integrity of the election with unsubstantiated claims of fraud.¹²

Figure 2.6 Across most countries in the LAC region, only a minority of citizens express trust in elections



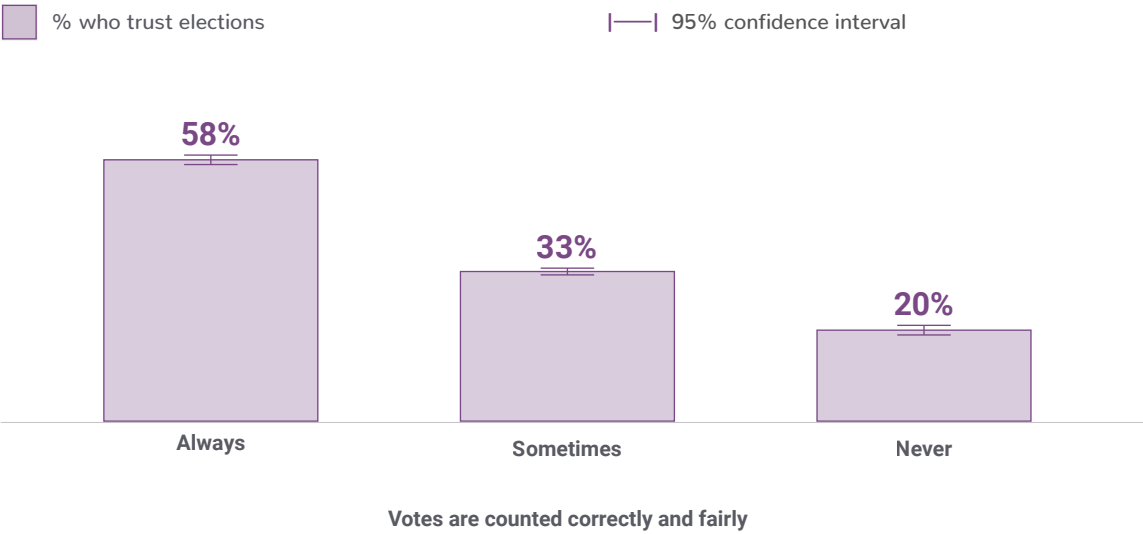
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Similar to other institutions analyzed in this chapter, performance shapes citizen confidence in a nation's elections. One dimension of election performance relates to the fair and accurate counting of ballots. **Figure 2.7** summarizes the relationship between the perceived integrity of vote counting procedures and trust in elections. Among those who believe votes are never counted correctly and fairly, only 20% express trust in elections. In contrast, a majority (58%) of citizens who think votes are always counted correctly and fairly express trust in elections.

CONFIDENCE IN THE COURTS RELIES ON THEIR ABILITY TO OPERATE FAIRLY

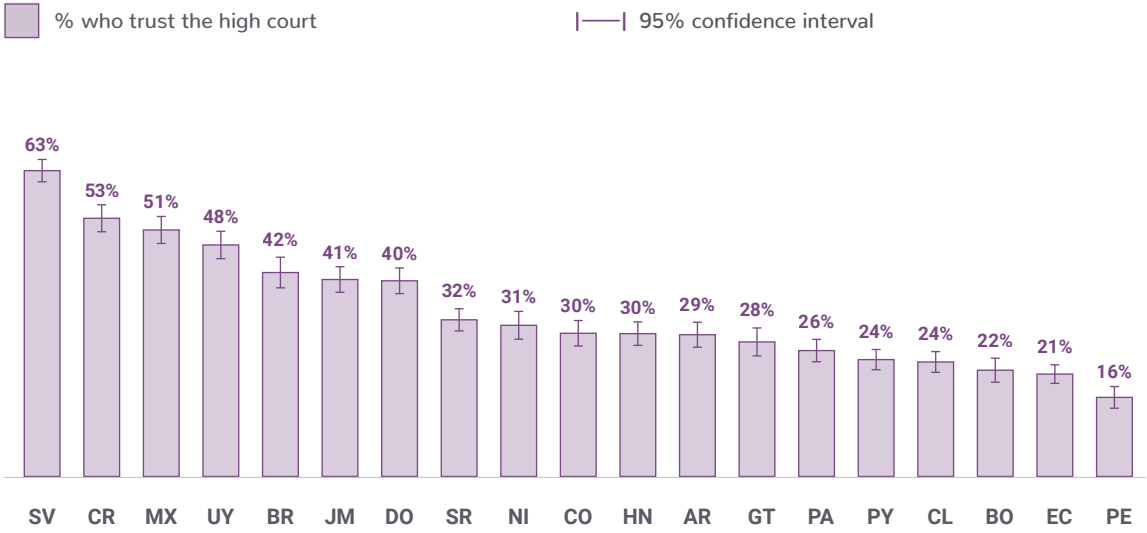
In modern democracies, constitutional courts check executive and legislative power and adjudicate public rights.¹³ Levels of trust in the highest court in each country vary significantly across countries in the LAC region. Trust is highest in El Salvador (63%), and lowest in Peru (16%), yielding a difference of 47 percentage points between the extremes in **Figure 2.8**. Once again, we find evidence that negative experiences with political institutions erode trust: those who have been asked to pay a bribe in a judicial matter are 15 percentage points less likely to report trust in the high court (see **Figure 2.9**¹⁴).

Figure 2.7 Those who think votes are always counted correctly and fairly are most trusting in elections



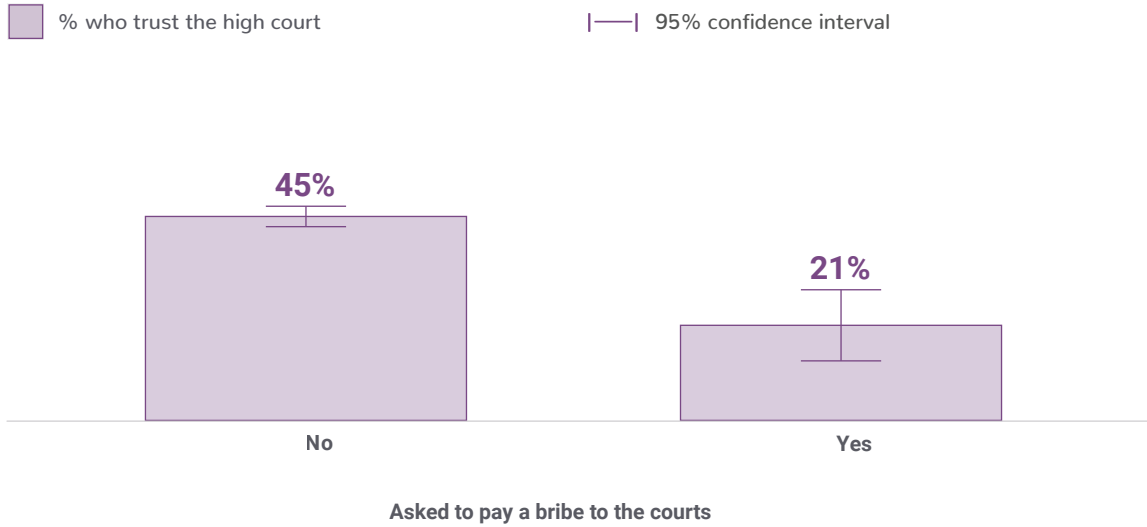
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Figure 2.8 Trust in the high court varies significantly across the LAC region



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Figure 2.9 Those who have been solicited for a bribe in the courts are less than half as likely to trust in the high court



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

TRUST IN THE LEGISLATURE AND EXECUTIVE IS CLOSELY TIED TO THE ECONOMIC WELLBEING OF THE NATION

Levels of trust in executives (that is, the president or prime minister) and legislatures also vary significantly across countries. **Figure 2.10** shows that levels of confidence in the executive range from a high of 78% in El Salvador to a low of 10% in Suriname and Peru. Likewise, confidence in the legislature is highest in El Salvador (57%) and lowest in Peru (7%). While confidence tends to run higher in executives than legislatures, exceptions include Uruguay, Argentina, and Suriname.

To consider the connection between citizens' views of institutions and their views on the performance of those

institutions, **Figure 2.11** summarizes the relationship between evaluations of the state of the national economy and trust in legislatures and executives, respectively. For both institutions, trust is highest among citizens who believe the economy is doing better these days than it was the previous year; it is lowest among those who believe the economy has worsened. While both measures of trust have a significant association with evaluations of the economy, the magnitude of the relationship is much larger for the executive: the difference between the “better” and “worse” group is 48 percentage points, compared to just 25 percentage points for the legislature. The public may find it easier to blame an executive for economic outcomes than a more heterogeneous and often divided legislature.

Levels of trust in the legislature and executive are highest among citizens who report that the national economy has improved.

Figure 2.10 Across most LAC countries, citizens are more trusting in executives than legislatures

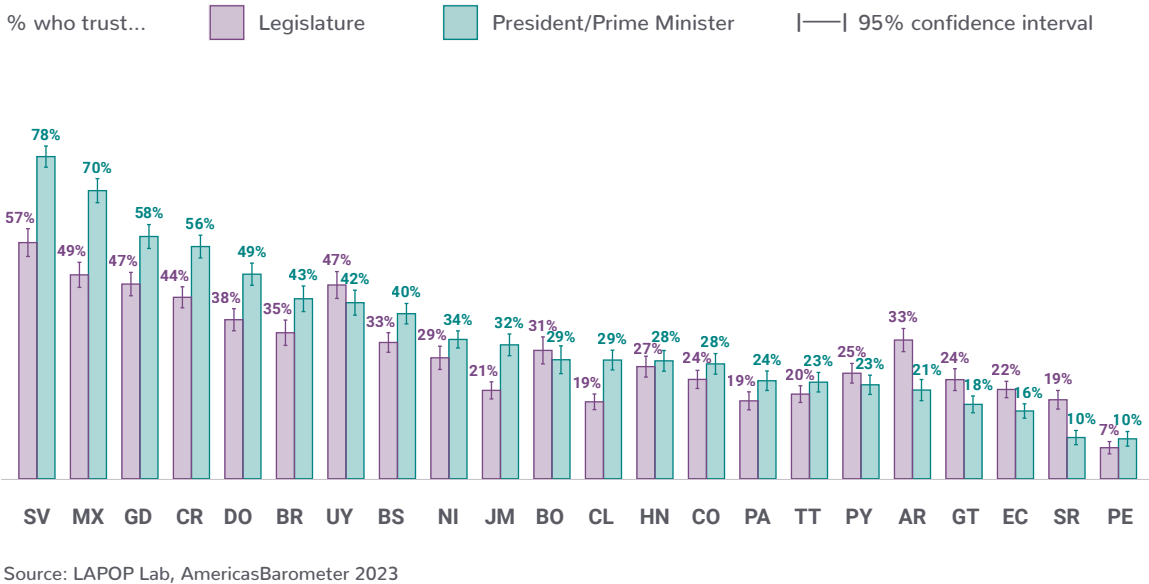
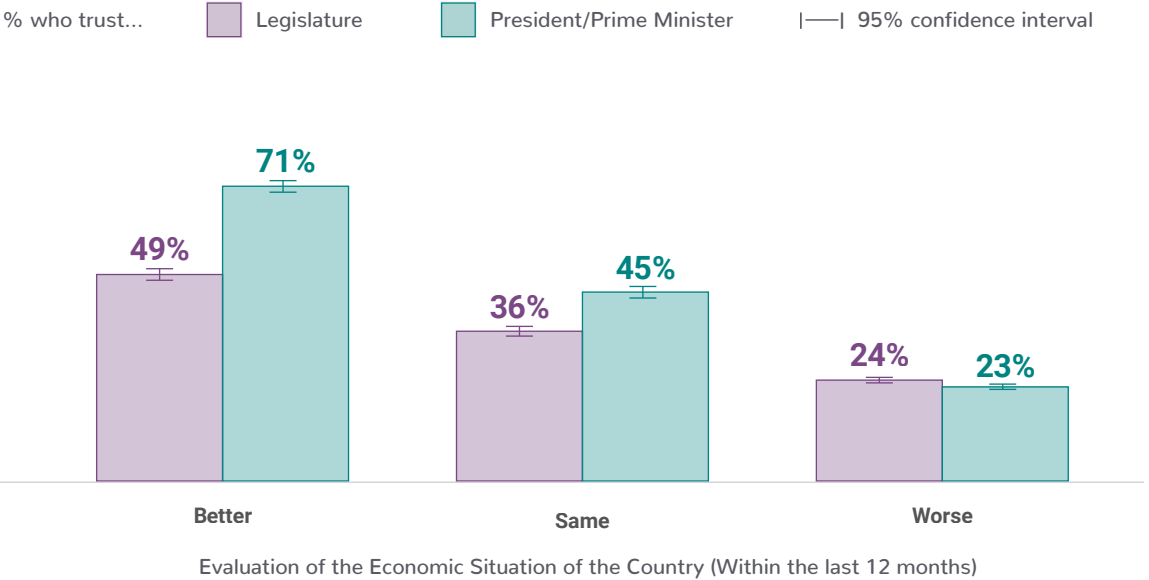


Figure 2.11 More positive outlooks on the economy are associated with higher trust in the legislature and the executive



Conclusion: A Critical Need to Build Trustworthy Institutions

The quality and durability of democracy rest on strong institutions. This chapter documents three core findings. First, on average, levels of trust in legislative and judicial institutions have been comparatively low and stable across 10 rounds of the AmericasBarometer, while trust in elections has decreased somewhat and trust in executives has declined significantly. Second, there are exceptions to those cross-time trends as well as significant variation in contemporary levels of confidence in institutions and across countries. Third, building trust in institutions requires efforts aimed at professionalizing and incentivizing public officials in ways that tamp down on bribery and bias, as well as efforts aimed at increasing prosperity. Confidence in institutions is greater when individuals perceive them as fair and effective.

Building trust in institutions requires professionalizing and incentivizing public officials in ways that tamp down on bribery and bias, as well as efforts to increase prosperity. Confidence in institutions is greater when individuals perceive them as fair and effective.

A number of countries in the region are experiencing significant crises of confidence in their institutions. Countries that stand out in this regard include Ecuador, Haiti, Peru, and Suriname, four countries where crime, corruption, poor economic output, and/or public unrest have shaken the public’s confidence in the country’s institutional pillars. Serious efforts are needed to repair the fractured levels of trust that dot these and other political landscapes in the region.

Yet, confidence in institutions is not a panacea for democracy. The dark side to institutional trust appears when popular leaders take advantage of public trust to undermine the authority of institutions designed to curb their authority and/or embolden security forces to disregard human rights. Trust may be critical, but blind trust can be catastrophic for democracy.

Notes

- 1
- Easton 1965; Norris 2017.
- 2
- Keefer and Scartascini 2022.
- 3
- Sønderskov and Dinesen 2016.
- 4
- Bermeo 2016; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019.
- 5
- Taraciuk Broner and Bullock 2023; Taraciuk Broner and Chavez 2023.
- 6
- We recognize that there is no single Evangelical Church and that, in fact, evangelical churches can differ significantly in their teachings and memberships (Smith 2019); yet, for the sake of parsimony, the survey asks respondents about their trust in the Evangelical Church.
- 7
- The surveys in Haiti, Panama, Costa Rica, Grenada, and The Bahamas only ask about trust in the national police. Levels of trust in these countries are 53%, 53%, 50%, 42%, and 32%, respectively.
- 8
- Taraciuk Broner and Chavez 2023.
- 9
- The analysis on bribe victimization by the armed forces includes the six countries where this question was asked in 2023: Chile, Guatemala, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, and El Salvador. The analysis on bribe victimization by the national police includes all countries in the 2023 AmericasBarometer except Nicaragua, where the question was not asked.
- 10
- Carreras and Irepoğlu 2013; Norris 2014.
- 11
- Average trust in elections increased slightly in 2021, to 42%, but that upward tick did not hold into 2023.
- 12
- See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57439548>
- 13
- Taraciuk Broner and Chavez 2023. For more analysis of public opinion on high courts in the LAC region, see Driscoll and Nelson 2021.
- 14
- We note that the question about paying bribes to courts was only asked in eight countries in the 2023 AmericasBarometer, but these include low, medium, and high trust countries.

Citizens' Beliefs about the Secrecy of the Vote

Oscar Castorena

Confidence in ballot secrecy in the LAC region is low and citizen evaluations of electoral integrity track closely with experts' assessments.

Regular elections are essential features of modern democracies. Therefore, citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of elections are vital to the overall health of a nation's democratic regime. This is especially relevant for the LAC region, where disputed electoral outcomes have served to undermine public trust in elections.¹ As discussed in this report's chapter on *Confidence in Democratic Institutions*, perceptions about the integrity of electoral processes are important predictors of trust in elections. Public evaluations of electoral integrity are particularly important in the context of declining trust in elections, as highlighted in that chapter.

Chief among the components that contribute to the integrity of an election is the secrecy of the ballot. When citizens are certain that no one but themselves can know for which candidate or party they cast their ballot, their autonomy as voters is protected.² Confidence in ballot secrecy is especially relevant in the LAC region where clientelism has thrived in contexts that allow political actors to monitor the voting behavior of citizens.³ To shed light on citizens' views of this topic, the 2023 AmericasBarometer asked the following question:

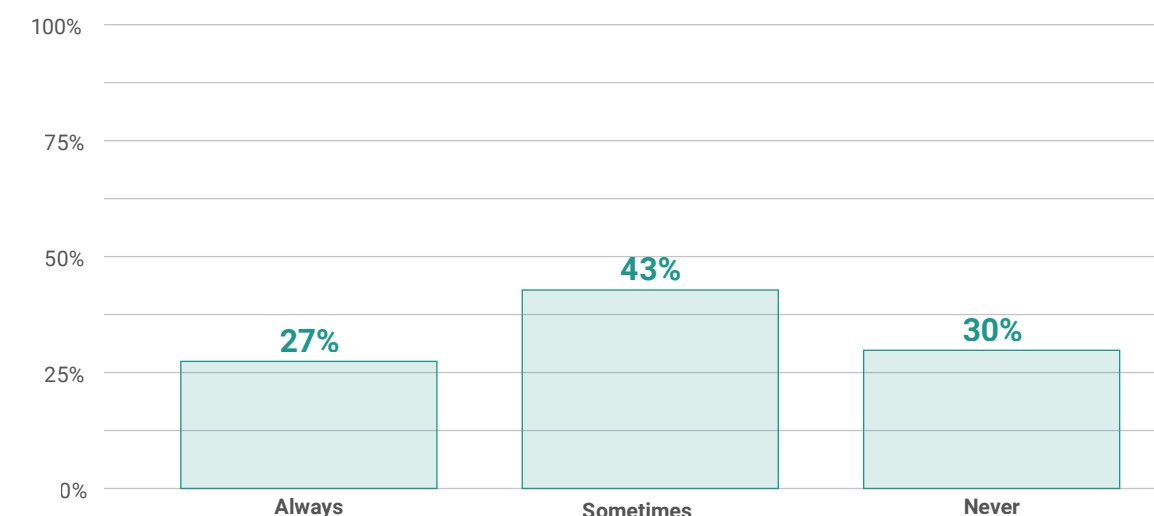
Politicians can find out who each person voted for. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?

On average across the LAC region, assessments of the secrecy of the ballot are evenly split. The most common response is "sometimes" with 43%, followed by "never" at 30%, and "always" at 27%. That means a large majority of about 70% believe the secrecy of their vote is not completely secure.

There is substantial variation across countries in the extent to which citizens believe politicians can never find out how they voted (i.e., the ballot is always secret). Chile, Brazil, and Costa Rica have the highest percentages of citizens who believe in the complete secrecy of the ballot, with 45%, 43%, and 41%, respectively. There are no countries in the LAC region where a majority believe the vote is always secret. Three Caribbean countries exhibit the lowest percentages of those who believe the ballot is always secret: Trinidad & Tobago (21%), The Bahamas (15%), and Jamaica (14%).

In the LAC region, a majority believe politicians can sometimes or always find out for whom they voted

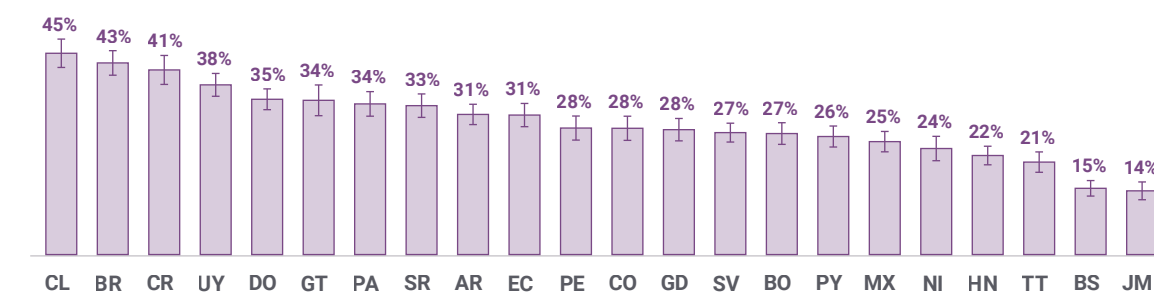
Politicians can find out who each person voted for. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Across most LAC countries, less than a third believe politicians can never find out for whom they voted

■ % who say vote is always secret |—| 95% confidence interval



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

How do these assessments by the public compare to expert evaluations of electoral integrity? This question can be answered with data from the Electoral Integrity Project, which produces a Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (PEI) index based on surveys of experts in electoral processes.⁴ The PEI index is positively associated with the percentage of citizens who said the vote is always secret in the 2023 AmericasBarometer.⁵ Both experts and the mass public give relatively high assessments of electoral integrity in Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay, and relatively low assessments in Honduras and Trinidad & Tobago.

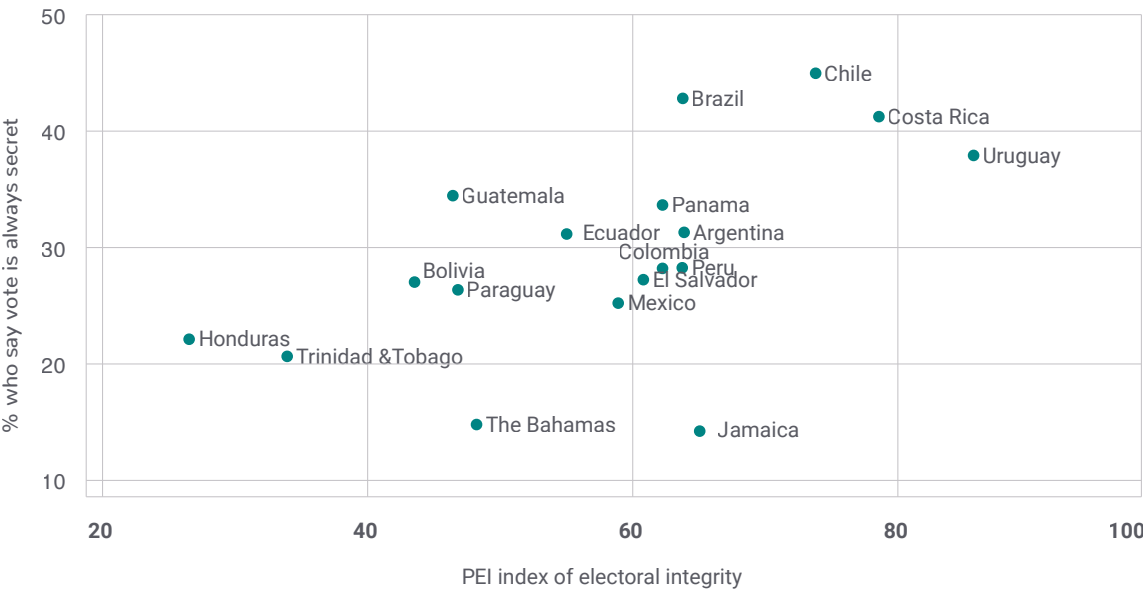
In analyses not shown here, the AmericasBarometer 2023 reveals significant differences across age cohorts, levels of education, and gender. The oldest age group (66+) is 14-percentage points more likely than the youngest age group (16/18-25) to believe politicians can never find out how they voted. In terms of education, those

with no formal education or primary-level education are significantly more likely to believe their vote is always secret compared to those with secondary or superior education. There is a smaller, though statistically significant, difference across gender groups with men (31%) more likely than women (28%) to believe the vote is secret. Household wealth and urban/rural residence were also analyzed but did not have statistically significant associations with perceptions of ballot secrecy.

The secret ballot is a cornerstone of modern democracy. In theory, institutional guarantees that individuals' choices are not visible to authorities tamp down on coercion, corruption, and clientelism.⁶ Yet, many across the LAC region do not have confidence that their votes are secret. These data reveal a critical need for policymakers to focus efforts on strengthening the integrity of elections, and public confidence in them, across the region.

There is a critical need to bolster confidence in elections. These days, an average of about 70% express doubts about ballot secrecy.

Citizens' belief in the secrecy of the ballot tracks closely with experts' evaluations of election integrity



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023; Electoral Integrity Project, PEI_9.0

Notes

- 1 Hernández-Huerta and Cantú 2022.
- 2 Mares 2015.
- 3 Stokes et al. 2013.
- 4 Garnett et al. 2023.
- 5 The Pearson correlation coefficient is .58.
- 6 Aidt and Jensen 2017.

Political Generations and Democratic Attitudes¹

Noam Lupu

Analyses of the AmericasBarometer time series reveal that, while younger age cohorts are often more critical of democracy, this skepticism erodes over time. In fact, today's young adults are more committed to democracy than were their predecessors.

Observers of Latin American public opinion regularly raise alarms about the commitment of the region's young people to democracy. Surveys in Latin America, including the AmericasBarometer, consistently find that younger citizens express less support for democracy in principle, less satisfaction with how democracy works, and more tolerance for authoritarian alternatives to democracy. Often, these findings are attributed to the fact that younger people in the region have lived almost entirely under democratic regimes and no longer have memories of authoritarian repression. As a result, one recent headline warned, "Young Latin Americans are unusually open to autocrats."² These patterns are alarming because they give the impression that the public's overall commitment to democracy is likely to decline as these younger respondents replace older generations over time.

But that interpretation makes an important assumption: that attitudes do not change as people age. If people become more committed to democracy as they age, for instance, then there may be no reason to worry about today's youth at all. They will simply catch up over time. It is even possible that today's youth are more committed to democracy than their elders were when they were younger, suggesting that the public's commitment to democracy will actually grow as younger generations replace older ones—precisely the opposite of most observers' dire predictions. Simply comparing today's youth to today's older cohorts is not an apples-to-apples comparison: instead, the right counterfactual for today's youth is those older cohorts *when they were younger*. That comparison requires more data and more sophisticated analyses that distinguish age effects from cohort effects.

Because it covers such a long period of time, the AmericasBarometer is an ideal dataset for conducting this kind of analysis. Looking at the region's 15 major Third-Wave democracies, it provides us with measures of democratic attitudes for 230,000 individuals over nearly 20 years. We can distinguish three different political generations within this dataset: those who came of age after the democracy was consolidated (the post-transition generation), those who came of age during the democratic transition period (the transition generation), and those who came of age before the last transition to democracy (the pre-transition generations). The cross-national nature of the dataset is also helpful because democratic transitions took place in different years across countries, providing leverage for statistical models to distinguish age effects from cohort effects.

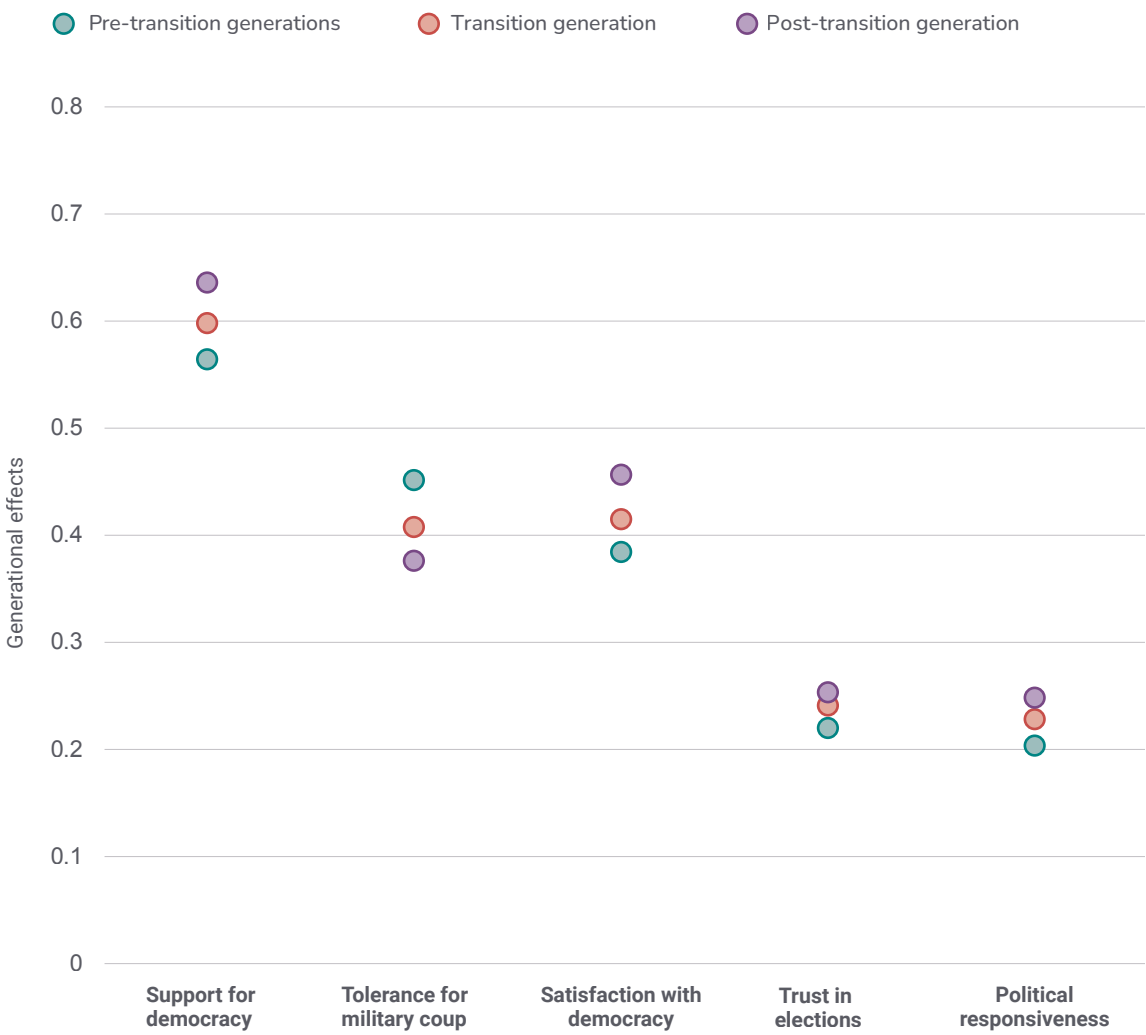
The AmericasBarometer includes many survey questions that measure democratic commitments, but we can focus here on five important examples: support for

democracy in the abstract, tolerance for a military coup during a crisis, satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, trust in the country's elections, and government responsiveness to voters. The conventional narrative about Latin America's post-transition generation suggests that they are less committed to democracy, suggesting lower levels of support for democracy, satisfaction with democracy, trust in elections, and perceptions of government responsiveness, and higher levels of tolerance for coups.

Once we account for age effects, we actually see the opposite. The dots in the figure show the estimated effect of being a member of each generation on democratic commitments. The data show that the post-transition generation, which came of age under democracy, is more likely to say that they support democracy in the abstract, less likely to think a military coup might be justified, more satisfied with democracy in their country, more likely to trust elections, and more likely to think that government responds to them.

The AmericasBarometer time series provides an ideal instrument for distinguishing age effects from cohort effects.

The post-transition generation in LAC is more committed to democracy than their older counterparts



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2004-2023

Far from being anti-democratic and “unusually open to autocrats,” the generation of Latin Americans who came of age after the early years of Third-Wave democracy in the region is in fact more committed to democracy than previous generations were at their age. The observation that Latin American youth are less committed to democracy appears to

be a product of age effects rather than generational differences. This is very reassuring: it suggests that we should be less concerned about the future of public support for democracy and democratic participation in the region. If anything, generational replacement in the region will bolster, rather than weaken, public support for democracy.

The generation who came of age after the early years of Third-Wave democracy in the region is more committed to democracy than previous generations were at their age.



Notes

- 1
- 2

The analysis in this Spotlight draws on more extensive analysis in Lupu, Noam. 2023. “The Kids Are Alright: Political Generations, Authoritarian Legacies, and Democratic Attitudes in Latin America.” Available at <https://noamlupu.com/generations.pdf>. Additional information about coding decisions and alternatives can be found there.

See <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2023/07/20/young-latin-americans-are-unusually-open-to-autocrats>

Prioritizing Economic Growth over the Environment

Guilherme Fasolin¹

There is significant variation in the prioritization of economic growth over environmental protection across countries in the LAC region.²

In the vast majority of countries, less than half agree that economic growth should take precedence over the environment.³ Prioritization of economic growth is comparatively low in South American countries. In most countries in that subregion, less than 40% of adults believe economic growth is a more pressing concern than environmental protection. The presence of several threatened biomes in South America, such as the Amazon rainforest, Cerrado, and Gran Chaco, may be fueling an unwillingness to trade off environmental protection for economic gain.⁴

Caribbean and Central American nations, on the other hand, are relatively favorable toward economic growth vis-a-vis environmental protection. In the Dominican Republic and Grenada, just over half agree economic growth should be prioritized over environmental protection.

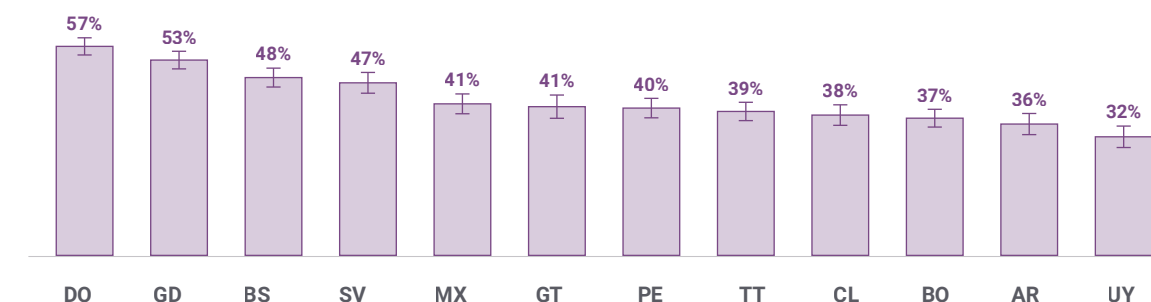
Who across the LAC region is more likely to prioritize economic growth over environmental protection? The 2023 AmericasBarometer shows that women, on average, tend more to prioritize economic growth over environmental protection compared to men (44% vs. 41%). Age also matters: individuals

increasingly favor economic growth over the environment as they grow older. Moreover, less affluent individuals give precedence to economic growth over environmental protection: 52% of the least wealthy prioritize economic growth compared to 36% of those with the most wealth. A similar pattern emerges for education: individuals with no or primary education place economic growth over environmental protection at a level (58%) that is significantly higher than their more educated counterparts (43% and 31% for secondary and post-secondary education, respectively). Finally, compared to urban residents, rural residents are more likely to prioritize economic growth over the environment (47% vs. 41%).

Overall, these results suggest that appetite for stronger environmental protections vary along traditional socioeconomic and demographic cleavages. This reinforces the importance of crafting environmental solutions that meet the economic needs of vulnerable subgroups. Such an approach could help assuage concerns that environmental protection hinders economic growth and generate greater public demand for sustainable development policies in the LAC region.

In most countries, less than half prioritize economic growth over the environment

■ % who think economic growth should be given priority over environmental protection |—| 95% confidence interval

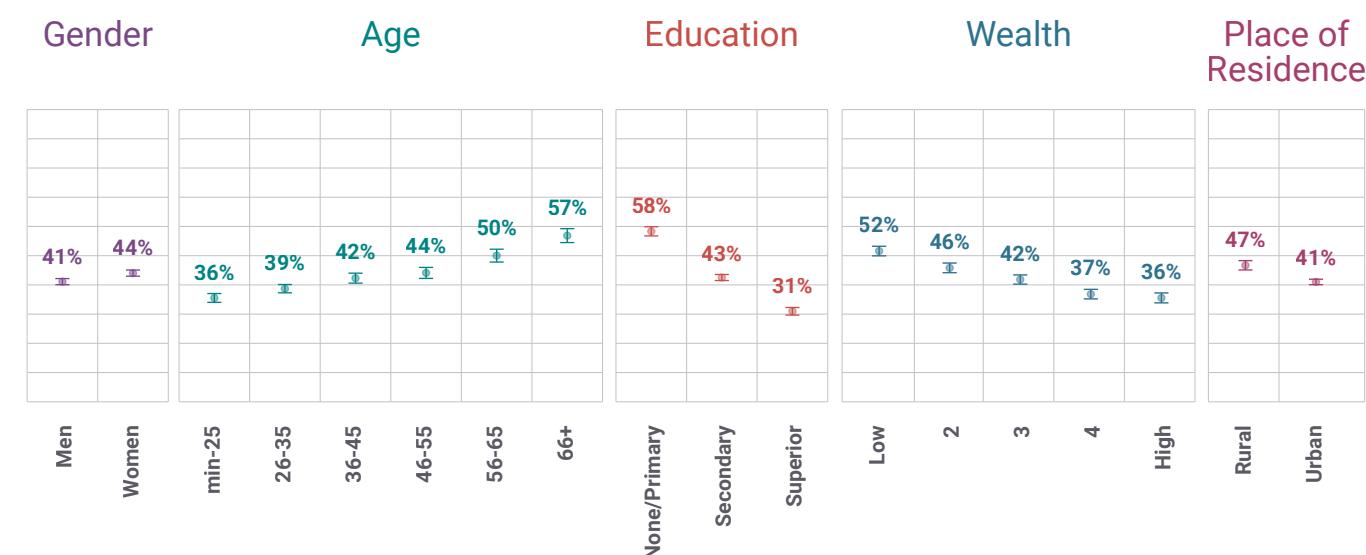


Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

More vulnerable subgroups give more priority to economic growth

* % who think economic growth should be given priority over environmental protection

|—| 95% confidence interval



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Notes

- Guilherme Fasolin is a PhD student in political science at Vanderbilt University and a LAPOP Lab Affiliate.
- In this Spotlight, original responses on a scale of 1 (environment should be the top priority) to 7 (economic growth should be the top priority) are recoded to consider only those who prioritize economic growth (answers 5-7).
- This question was asked only in 12 countries included in the 2023 AmericasBarometer.
- Delgado et al. 2022.

Public opinion on marriage equality for same-sex couples continues to trend upward, as documented by the 2023 AmericasBarometer.

Same-sex couples have the legal right to marry in 8 out of 33 LAC countries.² While the LAC region is one of the most accepting of sexual minorities in terms of laws,³ it is also one of the most dangerous for LGBTQ+ people.⁴

Across the region, approval of same-sex marriage varies. Uruguay leads the region in the acceptance of marriage equality, with 70% indicating approval. This is consistent with Uruguay's global reputation as a progressive leader in LGBTQ+ rights.⁵ Argentina, the first Latin American country to legalize same-sex marriage in 2010,⁶ ranks second in the region with about three in five (61%) approving of marriage equality. Chile—one of the most recent countries in Latin America to pass a marriage equality law⁷—is positioned close behind (55%). Some Caribbean countries have the lowest levels of approval of same-sex marriage, including Jamaica (12%), Grenada (11%), and The Bahamas (11%). The Caribbean is known for having low levels of acceptance for LGBTQ+ people and discriminatory laws prohibiting same-sex relations,^{8,9} some even punishable by prison.¹⁰

Approval of same-sex marriage increased in 2023, reaching its highest level ever recorded by the AmericasBarometer. This increase comes despite anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric by high-profile political candidates in the region¹¹ and a noted loss of momentum in the LGBTQ+ rights movement.¹² That said, the last few years have seen some advances for marriage equality in the LAC region. Since this question was last asked in the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer, three countries have passed legislation for marriage equality: Chile, Costa Rica, and Ecuador.¹³

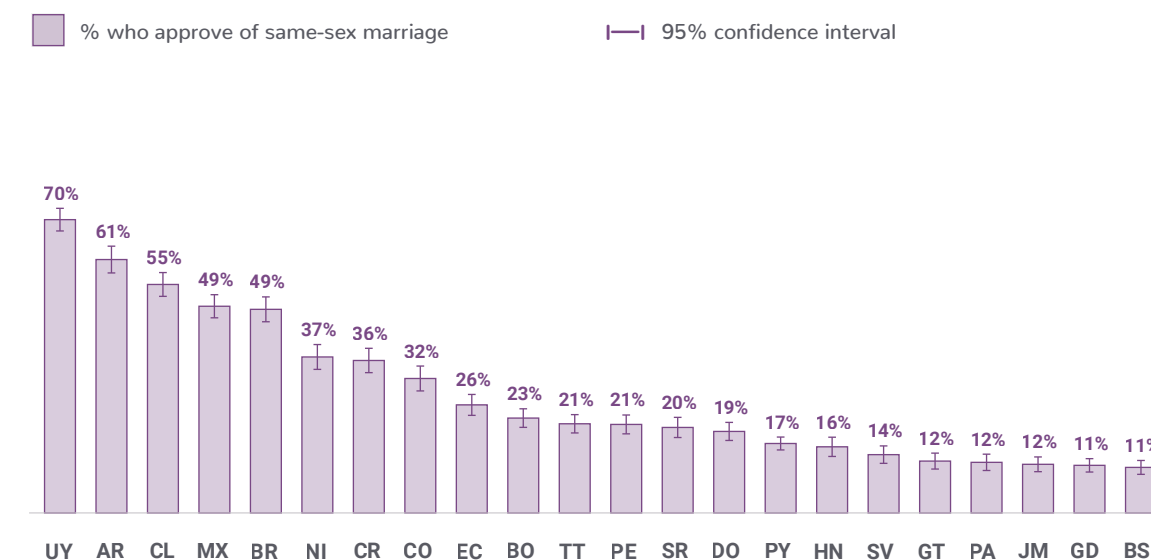
What characteristics of individuals predict approval of same-sex marriage? Approval is higher among women (31%) than men (25%). Those aged 25 and younger and 26-35 approve of same-sex marriage at a higher rate (39% and 31%, respectively) compared to their older counterparts. Higher education is associated with higher levels of approval for same-sex marriage. Similarly, the wealthier a person is, the more they approve of same-sex marriage. Finally, approval of same-sex marriage is higher among urban residents (32%) compared to rural residents (20%). These patterns of acceptance by gender, age, education, wealth, and urban residence are similar to other estimates around the world.¹⁴

Overall, the LAC region still has far to go in its approval of same-sex marriage. However, levels of approval are higher than they were about a decade ago. Approval

also varies greatly by country and different demographic groups, signaling that support for same-sex marriage in the LAC region could improve further.

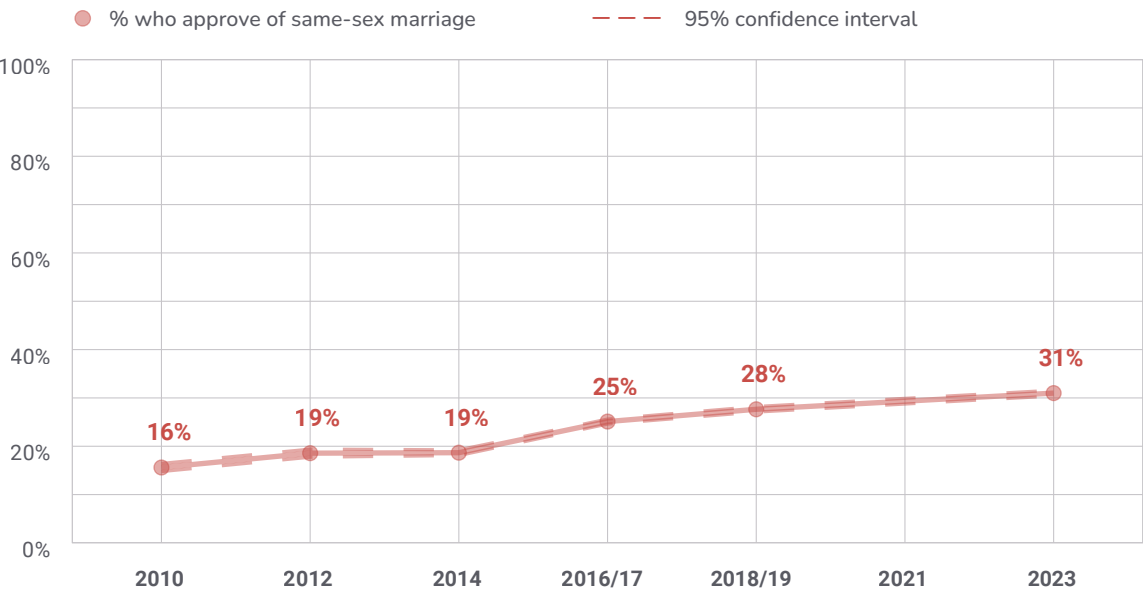
Approval of same-sex marriage has increased in recent years. The majority support marriage equality in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile.

Uruguay, Argentina lead the region in approval of same-sex marriage, while some Caribbean countries lag behind



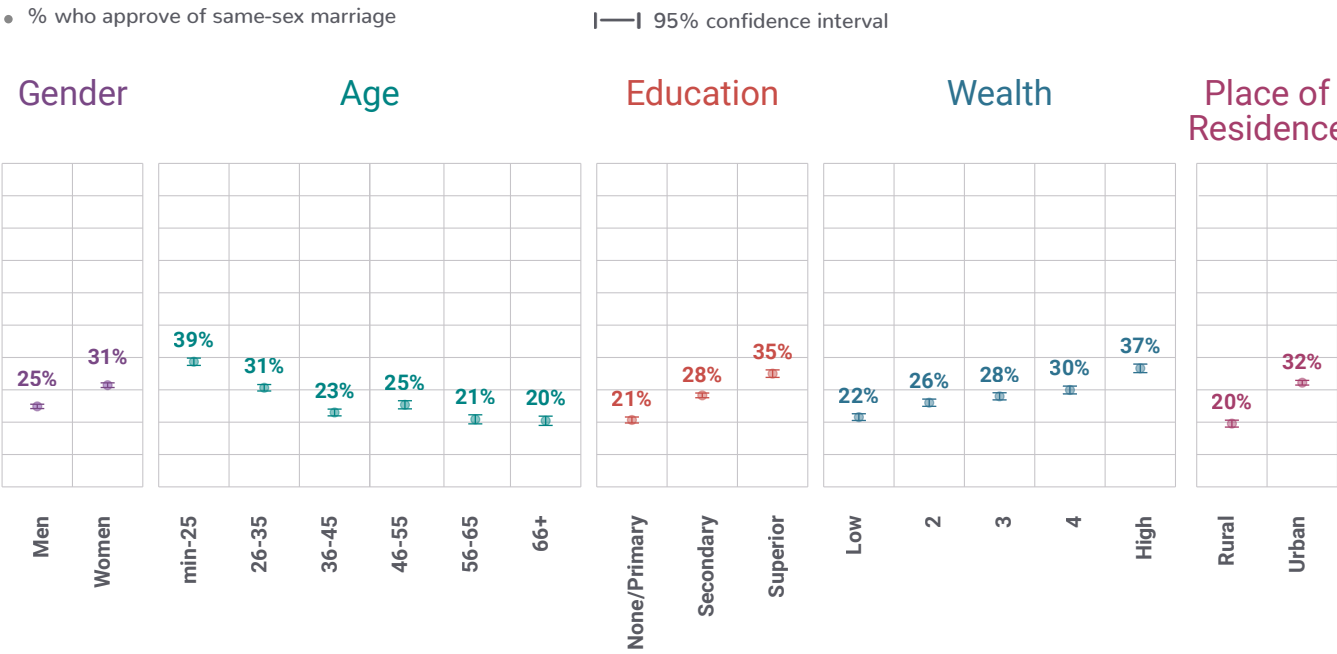
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

In the LAC region, approval of same-sex marriage continues to increase



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2010-2023

Women, the youngest, the most educated, the wealthiest, and urban residents approve of same-sex marriage at higher levels than their counterparts



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Notes

- 1 Valerie Schweizer-Robinson is a Statistician with LAPOP Lab.
- 2 See <https://www.hrc.org/resources/marriage-equality-around-the-world>
- 3 Farrell 2021.
- 4 Brocchetto 2017.
- 5 See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/07/21/uruguay-global-leader-lgbti-rights>
- 6 See <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/fact-sheet/gay-marriage-around-the-world/>
- 7 See <https://www.hrc.org/resources/marriage-equality-around-the-world>
- 8 CFR.org Editors 2022.
- 9 Malta et al. 2019.
- 10 See <https://database.ilga.org/criminalisation-consensual-same-sex-sexual-acts>
- 11 Farrell 2021.
- 12 Angelo and Bocci 2021.
- 13 Cuba also passed legislation but is not counted here because the AmericasBarometer does not have information about Cuba. See <https://www.hrc.org/resources/marriage-equality-around-the-world>
- 14 Poushter and Kent 2020; Parker et al. 2018.

Levels of approval of same-sex marriage are higher among women, the young, the more educated, the more wealthy, and urban residents.

Approval of Equal Rights for Gender Minorities

Valerie Schweizer-Robinson

More than two in five (43%) in the LAC region approve of equal rights for gender minorities in the 2023 AmericasBarometer survey. While many countries have made headway on more inclusive laws and policies supporting gender minorities, obstacles to equality remain.

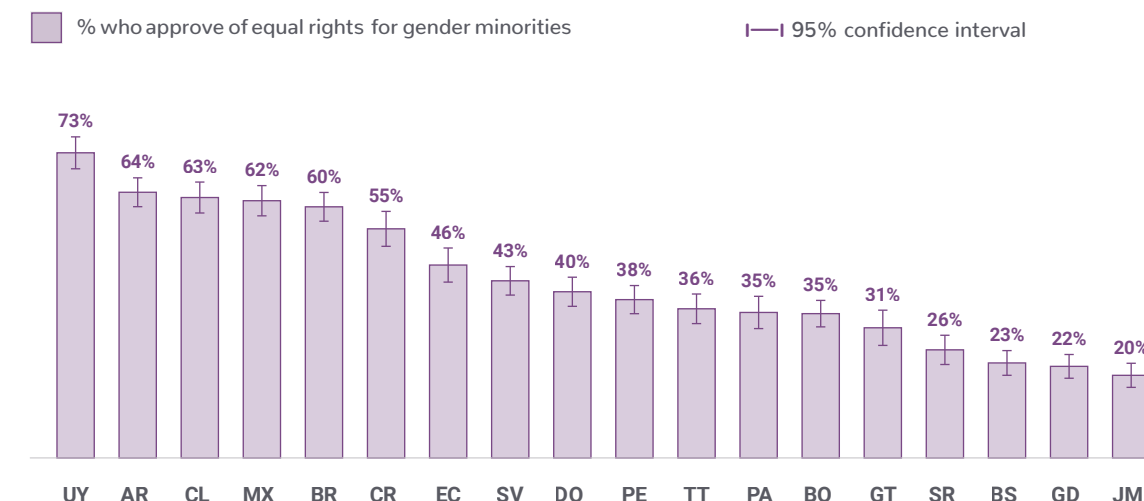
In the last decade or so, a number of countries in the LAC region have enacted more inclusive policies for transgender and non-binary people. Examples include Bolivia's 2016 Gender Identity Law, which allows for gender markers to change on current identification,¹ and Argentina's 2012 law which allows people to choose their own identity on official documents.² In 2018, Uruguay passed one of the broadest transgender affirmation laws in existence, which made hormone therapy and gender affirmation surgery a state-supported right. It further required one percent of public jobs be reserved for transgender individuals and set up a fund to pay reparations to gender minority people who had been persecuted prior to this law.³

Given the increased visibility of gender minorities in the region, LAPOP Lab included—for the first time—a measure of public approval of equal rights for gender minorities. Specifically, the 2023 AmericasBarometer introduced this question:

How strongly do you approve or disapprove of people from gender minorities, such as non-binary, transgender, etc., having the same rights as the majority of (nationality)?

On average, 43% of adults approve of equal rights for gender minorities.⁴ Public opinion on equal rights for transgender and non-binary people varies significantly by country. Unsurprisingly given its progressive laws, Uruguay is the most supportive of equal rights for gender minorities in the region, with almost three in four (73%) indicating approval. Argentina has the second-highest level of approval in the region (64%). Despite the law supporting transgender and non-binary people in Bolivia, only about one-third (35%) approve of equal rights for gender minorities. Some Caribbean countries—The Bahamas, Grenada, and Jamaica—have the lowest levels of approval in the region. Public reluctance to affirm gender rights in the Caribbean is mirrored by a restrictive legal context on these issues.^{5,6}

Approval of equal rights for gender minorities varies, and is highest in Uruguay and lowest in Jamaica



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

The majority approve of equal rights for gender minorities in Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Brazil, and Costa Rica.

What characteristics of individuals predict approval of equal rights for gender minorities? On average in the LAC region, approval is higher among women (46%) than men (40%).⁷ The youngest age cohort approves of gender minority rights at a higher rate (51%) compared to their older counterparts. Those with secondary and superior education have higher rates of approval (42% and 52%, respectively) than those with primary or no education (34%). Those in the top two highest levels of wealth have the highest approval of equal

rights for gender minorities (46% and 52%, respectively) compared to the lower wealth groups. Finally, approval for equal rights is higher among urban residents (47%) compared to rural residents (35%).

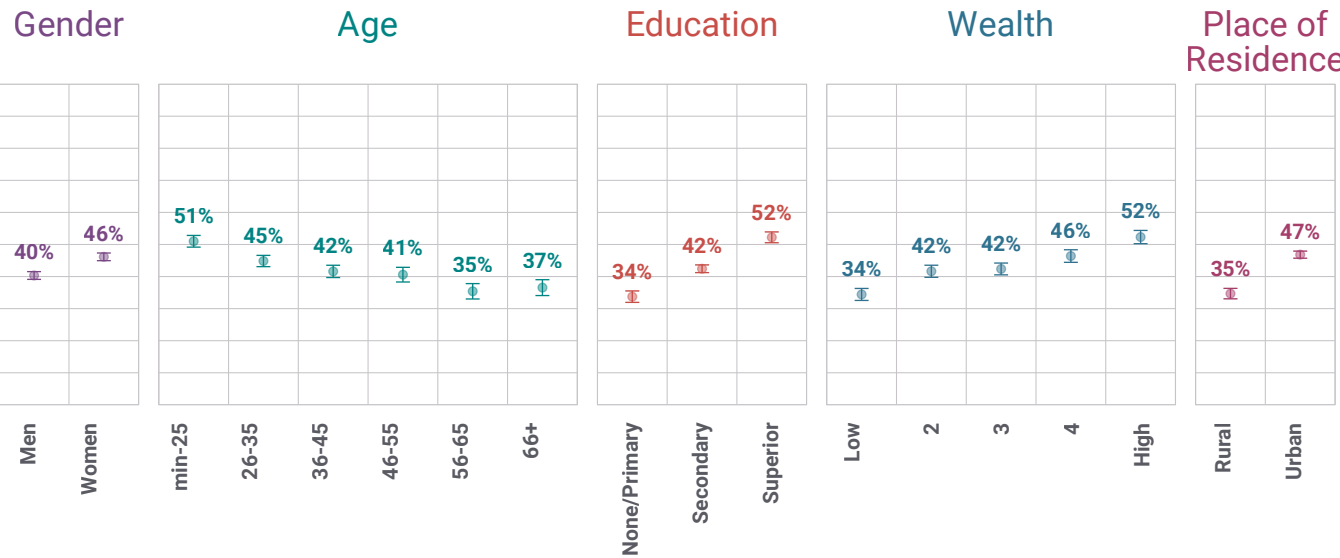
Within the LAC region, many groups and political leaders have been vocal in their disapproval of gender minorities.⁸ Additionally, the region remains one of the most violent toward sexual and gender minorities⁹ with some LAC countries having the highest incidence

43% of LAC citizens, on average, express support for equal rights for gender minorities in their country.

of transgender homicide in the world.¹⁰ Generally, the region has far to go in its recognition of equal rights for transgender and non-binary citizens, but there is reason to be optimistic. Countries like Uruguay and Argentina have high levels of approval of equal rights for gender minorities, and transgender politicians are entering the government space in many LAC countries.¹¹ While there is still ground to gain in terms of gender minority rights, there is a foundation of legal examples and public support to build on.

Women, the youngest, the higher educated, the wealthiest, and urban residents are more approving of equal rights for gender minorities

• % who approve of equal rights for gender minorities ── 95% confidence interval



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Notes

- 1 See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37295906>
- 2 Castillo 2012.
- 3 See <https://nowthisnews.com/videos/her/uruguay-passes-one-of-the-most-comprehensive-transgender-laws-ever>
- 4 In analyses here, responses clearly on the approve side of the 10-point response scale (i.e., 8-10) are coded as approving; the remaining responses (1 to 7) are coded into a baseline category.
- 5 Malta et al. 2019.
- 6 See <https://uctrans.org/2021/02/10/the-caribbean-overview-of-legal-gender-identity-recognition/>
- 7 It would be ideal for the analysis here to be inclusive of other gender identities. However, while LAPOP has developed an open-ended gender question (Castorena and Schweizer-Robinson 2023), there are too few individuals who identify outside the gender binary to analyze here as a separate category: .13% said neither a man nor a woman, .71% said they did not know, and .67% did not answer.
- 8 Farrell 2021.
- 9 Malta et al. 2019.
- 10 Mexico and Brazil are the countries referenced here. Transgender Europe & Balzer 2023.
- 11 Pulice 2022.

Emigration Intentions across the Americas

Jonathan T. Hiskey¹ and Mariana Rodríguez²

072

Migration flows across the Americas have soared in recent years with over 16 million immigrants living in the region in 2022, nearly double the number in 2010.³ From Haiti to Ecuador and Colombia to Honduras, a wide range of factors continue to push individuals toward the difficult, life-changing decision to leave their homes in search of a better life elsewhere.

Whether driven by governance crises such as those found in Haiti and Venezuela, increasing political persecution in Nicaragua, or extreme weather events like Hurricanes Eta and Iota that struck Central America in 2020, migration has become a regional phenomenon in ways that are fundamentally distinct from just a decade ago. In this chapter, we explore the 2023 AmericasBarometer data to better understand who wants to leave across the region and what factors appear to be most influential in their migration calculus.

073

MAIN FINDINGS

- Though emigration intentions declined slightly in 2023 from the pandemic year of 2021, intentions have increased since 2018/19 across most countries
- Nicaragua experienced a 20-percentage point jump between 2018 and 2023 in the percentage of adults reporting emigration plans
- Food insecurity, crime victimization, and natural disasters are the most consistent predictors of desire to leave one's home country
- A more nuanced measurement reveals substantial cross-national differences in the percentage of individuals classified as "most ready" to put their emigration plans into action: just 4% of all Haitians fall in this "most ready" emigrant category, while nearly one in four (23%) Nicaraguans are estimated as "most ready" to emigrate in the near future

32%

of LAC citizens, on average, express an aspiration to leave their country.

THERE HAS BEEN AN UPWARD TREND IN EMIGRATION INTENTIONS SINCE 2012

Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer has been measuring individuals’ emigration plans across the Americas by asking the following question:

Do you have intentions to go live or work in another country in the next three years?

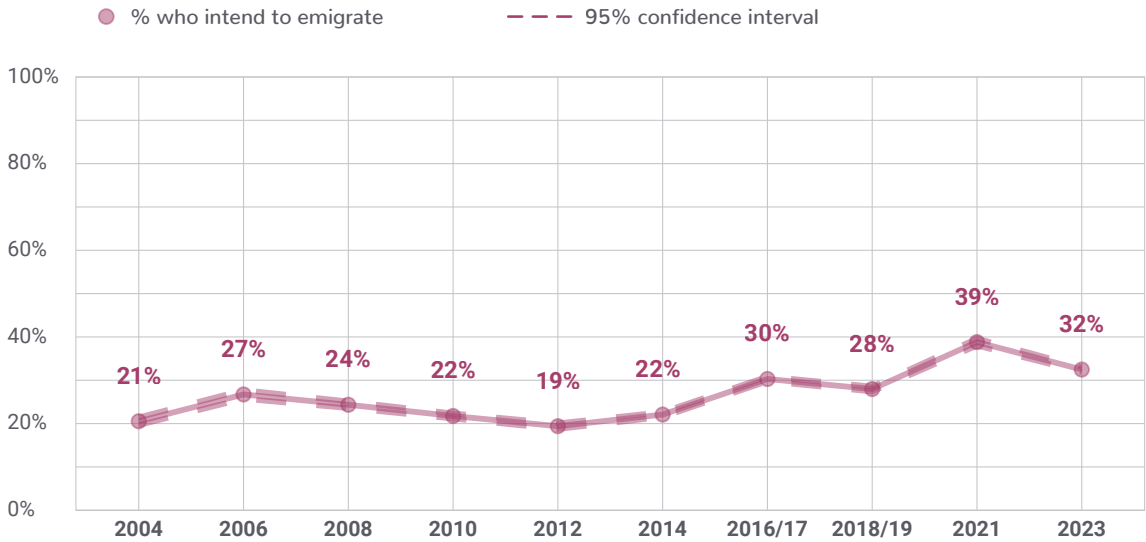
Emigration is a complex decision, but this item offers a consistent, long-term measure of an individual’s desire to emigrate, if not their capacity to do so. As displayed in **Figure 3.1**, there has been an upward trend since 2012 in the percentage of individuals in the region with plans to emigrate. Though the regional average peaked in 2021, the 2023 level is significantly higher than the pre-pandemic level recorded in the 2018/19 round of the AmericasBarometer.

These regional trends, however, mask sharply divergent cross-national patterns

over the past several years. While the 2021 AmericasBarometer round, conducted over phone in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, recorded unusually high levels of emigration intentions for most countries in the region, an examination of changes between the 2018/19 and 2023 rounds helps us identify certain countries that have become emigration “hot spots” and other countries that may be “cooling down.”⁴

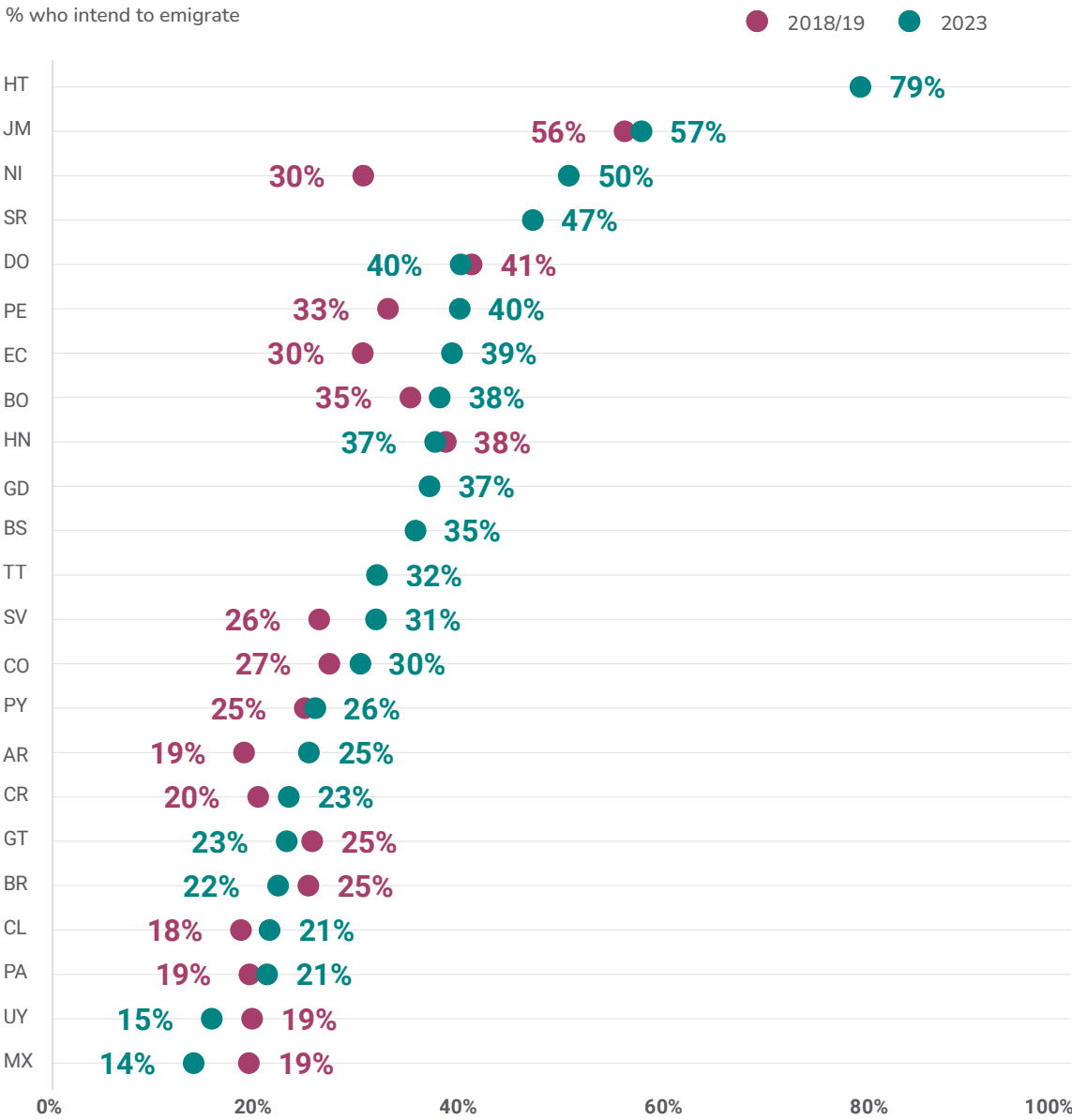
From **Figure 3.2**, we see that the percentage of individuals in the LAC region who aspire to leave their country increased in 13 of the 19 countries for which data are available, while it declined in the other 9. Among the former, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Peru stand out as cases with a striking jump in the number of individuals reporting emigration plans, while Brazil, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Honduras all recorded negligible declines during this period. While there are no data for Haiti for 2018/19, the rate of emigration intentions in 2023 in this country is the highest in the region.

Figure 3.1 On average in the LAC region, there has been an upward trend in emigration intentions since 2012



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2004-2023

Figure 3.2 Emigration intentions have increased since 2018/19 in most LAC countries



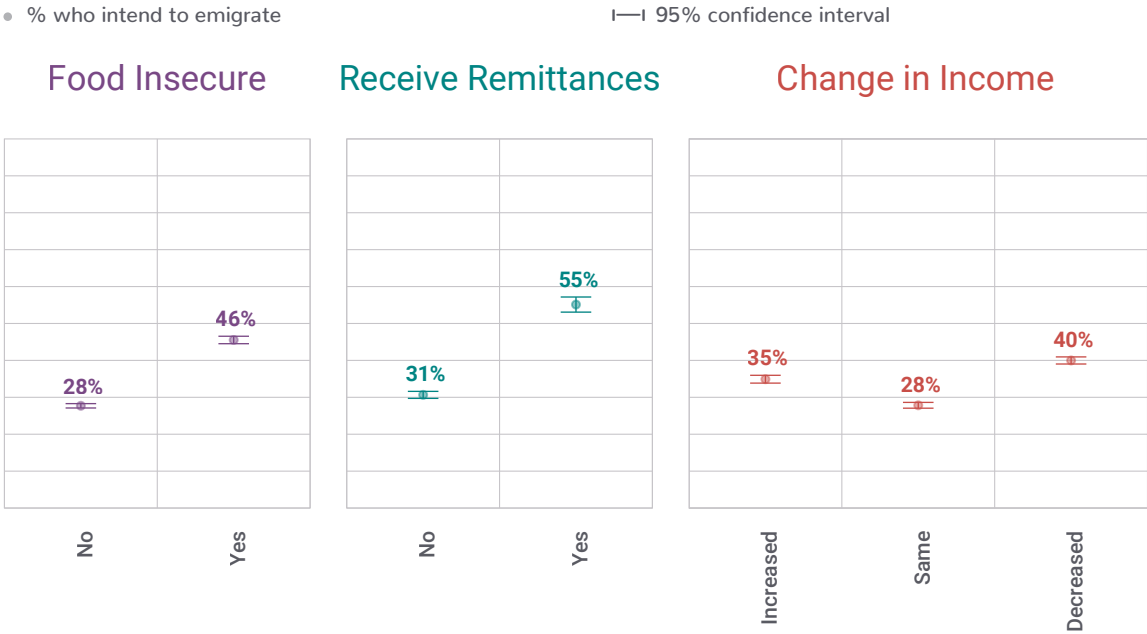
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2018-2023

PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC INSECURITY ARE MAJOR FACTORS IN THE DESIRE TO EMIGRATE

Threats to one’s physical and economic security consistently emerge as principal drivers of emigration intentions across the region.⁵ In **Figure 3.3**, we see substantial differences in emigration intentions between those who have been victimized by crime in the previous 12 months and those who were not victimized. More than two in five (43%) crime victims report plans to emigrate, while 31% of non-victims intend to leave, on average for the region. A similar gap emerges between those asked for bribes by police

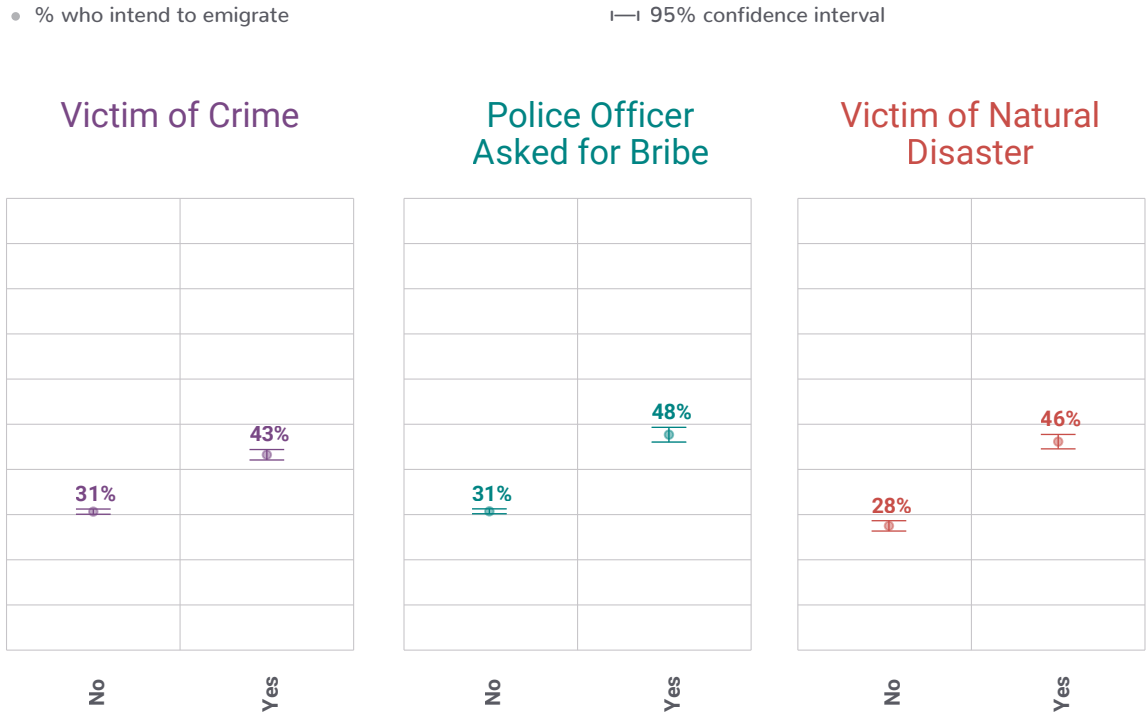
and those who did not experience this form of corruption in the previous 12 months. The significantly higher rates of emigration intentions among corruption victims are suggestive of the role that interactions with the state can play in the decision to leave one’s country. Even more striking, but perhaps not surprising, is the gap in emigration intentions between those affected by a natural disaster and those who were not. Close to half (46%) of those affected by a natural disaster report emigration plans in 2023, while less than 30% of those not suffering the consequences of a natural disaster had plans to emigrate.

Figure 3.4 Intentions to emigrate are higher among those who are food insecure, receive remittances, or have had income loss



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Figure 3.3 Intentions to emigrate are higher among victims of crime, corruption, or natural disasters



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

A man in Honduras carries his belongings along a flooded street on November 19, 2020. Hurricane Iota hit the Nicaraguan coast on November 16 as a category 4 storm. It was the second category 4 to make landfall in Nicaragua within two weeks and again brought catastrophic rainfall into Honduras. Seth Sidney Berry/ SOPA Images/ Shutterstock.



Moving to those factors most directly related to economic security, we also see significant differences in emigration plans between those who are more secure in economic terms and those who are less secure. A fundamental assessment of economic security is whether an individual has stable and sufficient access to food. The 2023 AmericasBarometer includes an item that asks individuals whether they have, in the past three months, ever been forced to go without food due to lack of resources. As can be seen in **Figure 3.4**, there is nearly a 20-percentage point gap in emigration intentions among the “food secure” and those who have experienced episodes of food insecurity, with 46% of the latter reporting plans to emigrate. An even larger gap exists between those reporting receipt of remittances in the prior 12 months and those who do not have such income streams. The majority of those receiving remittances (55%) report plans to emigrate, capturing not only the economic assistance remittances provide in financing a possible exit from one’s country, but also the reduction of

the information costs that are associated with emigrating. Having a friend or family member who has previously migrated and sends remittances typically entails frequent conversations between sender and recipient that can potentially facilitate future emigration on the part of the latter. This “friends and family effect”—that is, personally knowing someone who lives abroad—has long been a consistent and powerful predictor of emigration intentions and actual migration behavior.⁶

Finally, the data show that individuals experiencing economic instability in the form of income loss also demonstrate a higher likelihood of expressing a desire to emigrate. The 2023 AmericasBarometer asked individuals about changes in their income in the previous two years. Among those who report that their income decreased, 40% express intentions to emigrate, a significantly higher proportion than those whose income remained the same (28%) or increased (35%).

Experiences with natural disasters and food insecurity are two powerful drivers of intentions to emigrate.

46%

of those who have experienced natural disaster aspire to emigrate, compared to 28% of those who have not experienced disaster.

46%

of those who have experienced food insecurity aspire to emigrate, compared to 28% of those who have not experience food insecurity.

NEW AMERICASBAROMETER DATA ALLOW MEASUREMENTS OF THE LIKELIHOOD OF EMIGRATION BEYOND STATED INTENTIONS

The AmericasBarometer measure of emigration intentions is a survey question that has been commonly used in survey projects around the world and thus allows for comparisons of global emigration dynamics across distinct regional surveys. It also is easily understood by respondents across time and space and tends to map well to the actual migration flows of countries in the region.⁷ However, this measure of emigration intentions does not allow us to identify those who may have a strong desire to leave but lack the resources to translate those aspirations into reality, or those who have already begun preparing for their trip.

New survey questions from the 2023 AmericasBarometer give us further insight into those individuals who are more or less likely to emigrate in the near future. The following questions are asked as follow-ups for those who say they intend to emigrate:

How likely is it that you will go live or work in another country in the next three years? Very likely/Somewhat likely/A little likely/Not at all likely

In the last year, which of the following steps have you taken in preparation to go live or work in another country? Saved money for the trip/Applied for a passport or other document/Make arrangements for the trip/Decided on a date for the trip/Spoken to friends, relatives, or neighbors about your plans to leave/None of these

These questions allow us to distinguish between those who merely have aspirations to leave their country and

those who have that desire and, as well, believe they will put their plans into action and/or have taken concrete steps to do so. The following analysis is limited to the subset of countries in which these survey questions were included for the 2023 AmericasBarometer: Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua.

Figure 3.5 shows substantial variation in the percentage of individuals with emigration intentions who say it is “very likely” that they would follow through with those plans. Nicaragua and Honduras lead the way with at least half of those with emigration intentions expressing a high degree of confidence that they will, in fact, emigrate. This survey question was initially included in the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer round in some countries, allowing for a comparison across time. While this percentage remains unchanged in Honduras from 2018/19, in Nicaragua we see a significant increase in the percentage who say they are “very likely” to emigrate.

Alternatively, those with emigration intentions in Mexico and El Salvador—two countries with well-established migration histories—are significantly less certain about their stated emigration plans, with close to one in three saying that it was very likely they would emigrate within the next three years. In contrast to the temporal pattern in Nicaragua, we see for both Mexico and El Salvador (and to a lesser extent in Honduras) that the number of those who say it is very likely that they will emigrate declined between the 2018/19 and 2023 survey rounds.

Finally, we see that in Haiti (for which we do not have 2018/19 data), where 79% of people reported plans to emigrate, only 18% of these individuals were confident

that those plans to leave the country would come to fruition. This substantial gap between those reporting emigration intentions in Haiti and those who think it is “very likely” that they will in fact emigrate is indicative of the need to go beneath the surface of the “yes/no” emigration intentions item to better understand a country’s emigration dynamics.

A second emigration follow-up question included in the 2023 AmericasBarometer asks individuals who reported emigration plans to identify specific actions they have taken to prepare for their intended exit from the country. We first examine the percentage of individuals who have not taken any steps to determine the percentage of individuals with emigration intentions who seem most unlikely to put those plans into action.

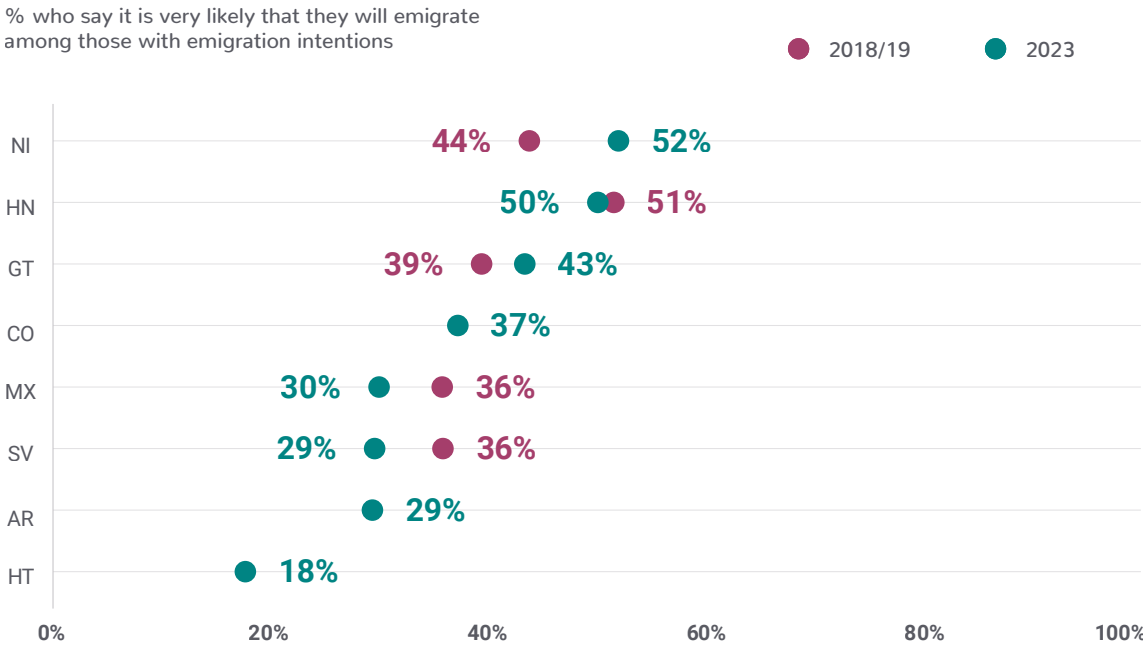
Figure 3.6 breaks down the percentage of individuals with intentions to emigrate who have not taken concrete steps to emigrate by their reported likelihood of leaving.⁸ With the exception of Haiti, we see a significant gap in the percentage of people not taking any steps when comparing the “less likely” and “more likely” groups of potential emigrants. Roughly 10% of the latter group in Argentina, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Colombia, and Mexico had not taken any steps to prepare for their intended trip, while more than 20% of the “less likely” group in most of these countries had not done anything to put their emigration plans into action. In Haiti, on the other hand, we see that substantial percentages of both the “less likely” (42%) and “more likely” (34%) groups had not taken any steps. These findings suggest that Haitians face myriad forces in their daily lives that lead them to aspire to leave the country, but they often lack the means necessary to put those plans into action.

Turning to an examination of those with emigration intentions who *did* report taking steps to prepare for their emigration trip, we cast our lens on three steps that involve concrete actions in preparing to emigrate, steps that are most suggestive that individuals have the capability of turning their emigration aspirations into action. These steps are saving money, making arrangements, and setting a departure date. **Figure 3.7** provides a country breakdown of the percentage of individuals with emigration plans who have taken one or more of these critical steps.

Among those with plans to emigrate, saving money is more common than making arrangements or setting a trip date, with Colombia (48%), Nicaragua (47%), and Mexico (46%) displaying the highest percentage of individuals with emigration intentions who have taken this step. Importantly, we see substantial cross-national variation. Only 6% of Haitians with emigration intentions report that they have saved money. El Salvador reports the second lowest rate at 18%.

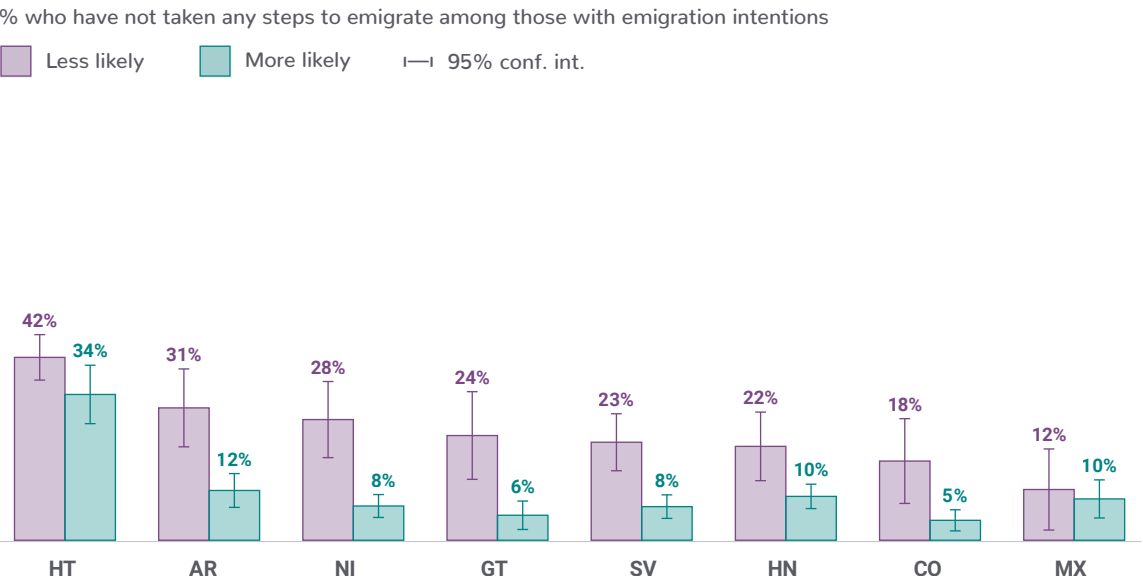
Notable cross-national variation emerges across the other two “key steps” as well, with adults with emigration intentions from Mexico and Honduras being those most likely to report having made arrangements or setting a date. Once again, Haitians with emigration intentions are the least likely to have taken any of these steps.

Figure 3.5 Among those with emigration intentions, the percentage who say they are very likely to emigrate increased in Nicaragua and Guatemala



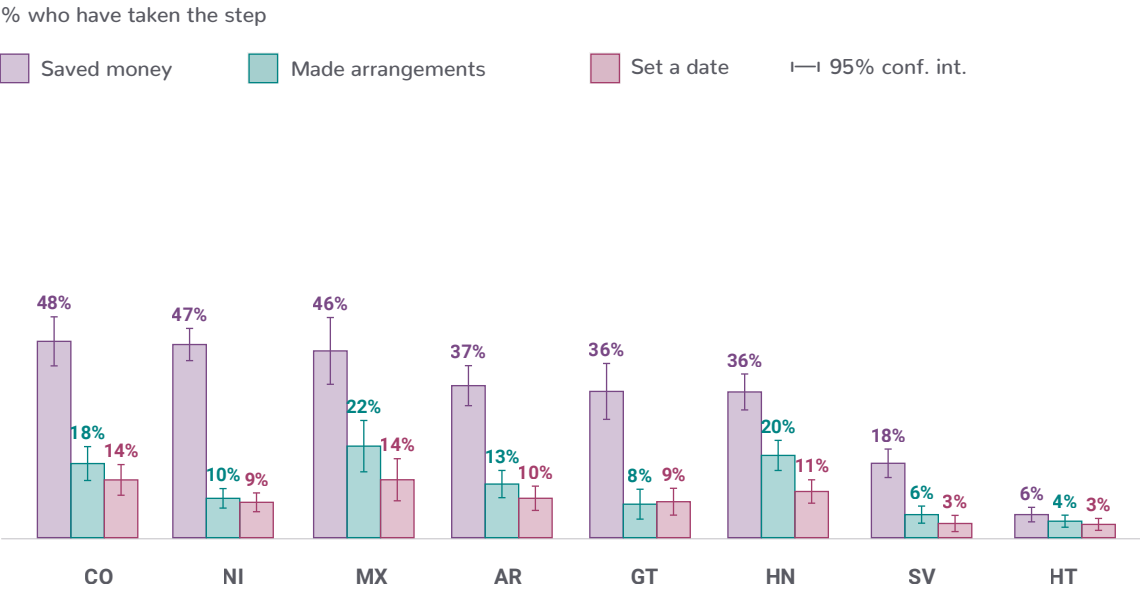
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2018-2023

Figure 3.6 A lower reported likelihood of emigrating is correlated with less preparation to do so



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Figure 3.7 Saving money is the most common step taken by those who intend to emigrate



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Interviewers from the Fundación Dr. Guillermo Manuel Ungo conduct qualitative pretesting of the 2023 AmericasBarometer country questionnaire in El Salvador. LAPOP Lab photo archives.



USING AMERICASBAROMETER DATA TO ASSESS EMIGRATION READINESS

One final step we can take in assessing who is most likely to put their emigration plans into action entails the creation of what we call the Emigration Readiness Score (ERS), which combines individual responses to the “How likely?” and “Steps taken?” questions. To create this measure, we posit that a person who says they are “very likely” to emigrate

and has taken multiple preparatory steps is more capable and, hence, more ready to emigrate than someone who says it is “not likely” and has taken no steps. Though it is impossible to know with certainty who among those surveyed in the AmericasBarometer survey will actually end up emigrating, we contend that by combining responses to these items, we can assess variation in the level of readiness across individuals who report intentions to emigrate. We construct our measure as follows:

0 = Least Ready

Those who say they do not have any plans to emigrate.

1 = Low Readiness

Those with emigration intentions who say it is “not likely” or “a little likely” that they would emigrate AND have not taken any of three key steps (save money, make arrangements, set a date)

2 = Medium Readiness

(a) Those with emigration intentions who say it is “not likely” or “a little likely” that they would emigrate but have taken one of the key steps; (b) Those with emigration intentions who say that it is “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that they would emigrate but have not taken any of the key steps.

3 = High Readiness

(a) Those with emigration intentions who say it is “not likely” or “a little likely” that they would emigrate and have taken two or more of the key steps; (b) Those with emigration intentions who say that it is “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that they would emigrate and have taken one or more of the key steps.

Figure 3.8 displays the country breakdown for our ERS in 2023. The bars represent the country’s entire respondent pool. For most countries, a substantial majority of individuals express no plans to emigrate within the next three years and thus are classified as “least ready” to emigrate.

We can also see from this figure substantial cross-national variation in the level of “emigration readiness” among those who reported emigration plans. While Mexico has the highest percentage of citizens with no reported emigration intentions (the “Least Ready” group), it has a similar percentage of individuals in the “High Readiness” category to that of El Salvador. Conversely, Haiti has an overwhelming rate of people who report emigration plans but has the lowest percentage of individuals in the “High

Readiness” group. Most notable among the six countries is Nicaragua—more than half of all individuals in this country harbor emigration intentions and nearly one in four of all Nicaraguans are in our “High Readiness” category.

When combining the insights gleaned from this brief look at responses to the “How likely?” and “Steps taken?” survey questions, a clearer picture of the emigration dynamics in these countries begins to emerge. Thinking in terms of the chances that individuals who report emigration intentions will put those plans into action, we find respondents from Haiti on one end of a continuum while—among those with a desire to leave—a greater proportion of those from Nicaragua, Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras appear far more likely—and prepared—to emigrate in the near future.

PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY INCREASE EMIGRATION INTENTIONS AND READINESS IN GENERAL, BUT INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES HAVE DISTINCT EMIGRATION STORIES

23%

of Nicaraguans fall into the “high readiness” category on the Emigration Readiness Score instrument.

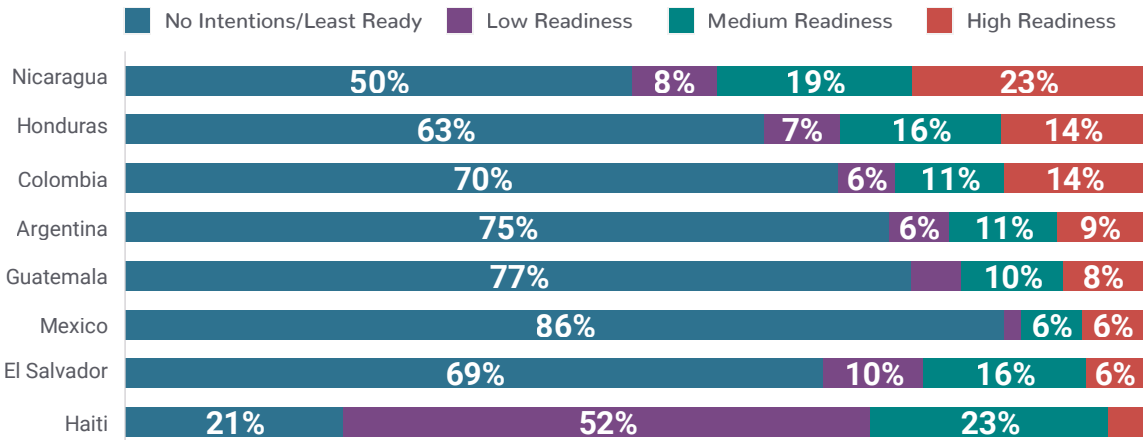
Crime victimization, corruption victimization, and experience with natural disaster—as well as food insecurity, remittances, and income loss—emerge as significant predictors of both a person reporting emigration intentions and their level of “emigration readiness” when we examine the drivers of emigration intentions and readiness across all the countries for which we have data.⁹ In brief, the factors that are significant in predicting whether someone has an intention to emigrate also influence the extent to which they are motivated and prepared to act on that intention.

Alongside these threats to one’s security, we also find one’s level of “hope for the future” is a significant predictor, with those more pessimistic about their future in the country being more likely to be willing and ready to emigrate than those with more optimistic outlooks (see **Figure 3.9**). A common sentiment expressed by many migrants when asked why they would undertake such a risky endeavor is that they simply had lost hope living in their home country and, thus, felt compelled to leave. One of many examples of this hopelessness being a strong correlate of emigration intentions comes from the 2015 UNHCR report, *Women on the Run*, which is based on interviews with over 150 women emigrants from Central America and Mexico conducted while most were in detention facilities in the United States. The report offers a summary of the common thread running through many of the interviews: “Nearly every woman spoke of multiple traumas throughout her

life. In some cases, the harm worsened or compounded over time until they reached a ‘breaking point’ and realized they had to leave as soon as possible” (UNHCR 2015, 16). In most of the countries we have analyzed for this chapter, one’s level of hope for the future is a consistent predictor of both emigration plans and readiness. This offers support for the idea that, for many individuals, living in dire situations can translate into a loss of hope, and in turn lead them to look elsewhere in hopes of starting a new future.

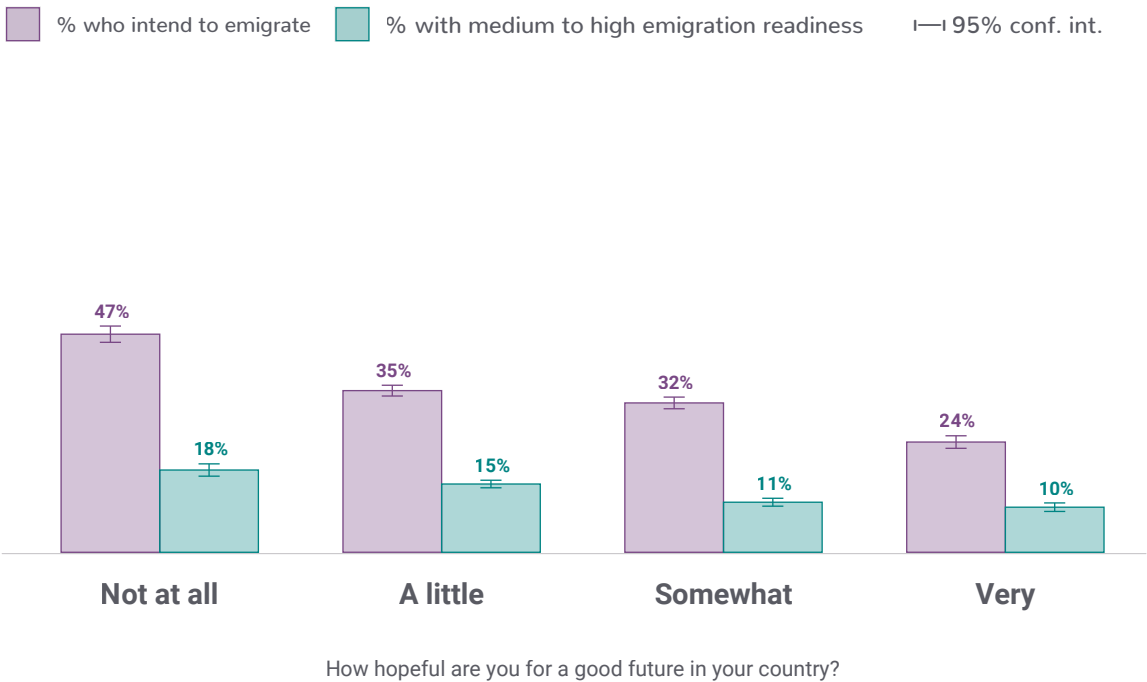
Hope is important—those more pessimistic about their future in the country are more likely to be willing and ready to emigrate than those with more optimistic outlooks.

Figure 3.8 Nicaragua has the highest percentage of individuals with emigration intentions who also have a high level of readiness to leave, while Haiti has the lowest



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Figure 3.9 Individuals with a pessimistic outlook about their future are more willing and ready to emigrate than those who are more hopeful



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

18%
of those with no hope rank medium to high on readiness to emigrate, compared to 10% of those with a lot of hope.

When we look at the drivers of emigration intentions and readiness for individual countries, however, the role of the country-specific context and circumstances in explaining the emigration story becomes clearer. As previously shown, Nicaragua appears to be a country in which many individuals aspire to emigrate and are ready to turn those plans into action. Haiti, on the other hand, is a country in which most aspire to leave but a comparatively small percentage of those would-be emigrants have translated those aspirations into action. The divergence between the two countries is striking and emphasizes the need to consider both individuals’ circumstances and a country’s conditions when assessing why and when people emigrate.

Data from the 2023 AmericasBarometer show that Haiti and Nicaragua rank highly when compared to other countries in the region in terms of crime victimization, incidents of bribery solicitation, and food insecurity. Unsurprisingly, these challenging circumstances tend to be associated with citizens’ desire to leave their country. In Nicaragua, food insecurity in particular emerges as a significant driver of both a desire to leave (emigration intentions) and one’s level of readiness to leave.

Another attitudinal factor associated with emigration plans in Nicaragua is the level of trust one has towards others in their neighborhood, with less trusting individuals more likely to want to leave the country and more prepared to put that

plan in action. In a country where political persecution has become more prevalent, trust among neighbors may begin to erode. This loss of trust, in turn, heightens the tendency to look for a future outside the borders of one’s country.

The story emerging from our analyses of emigration drivers in Haiti is quite distinct from what we find for Nicaragua. None of the common experiential factors associated with emigration intentions and readiness are helpful in identifying the many Haitians with an intention to emigrate or in distinguishing between those who are more or less ready to leave. Even though a vast majority of Haitians have suffered many forms of threats to their personal security, these do not emerge as significant predictors of either emigration intentions or readiness.

In Haiti, people’s experience with economic and physical insecurity are extreme. For example, 78% of Haitians report being food insecure, 85% report income loss, and 78% have been the victims of a natural disaster. These are all the highest rates of each indicator for the LAC region in 2023. At the same time, 25% of Haitians have been the victim of crime (8th highest in the region) and 11% have been solicited for a bribe (4th highest). These data suggest that Haitians face prohibitive barriers to economic stability and personal safety.

It is perhaps the very pervasiveness of these problems in Haiti that makes them less useful in identifying those with emigration intentions and those who appear ready to act on those plans. Rather, the factors that do emerge as significant are almost exclusively socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. Women are less likely to be “ready to emigrate” than men in Haiti. One’s level of wealth is a

predictor of emigration intentions, but not readiness. Those living in urban settings are less likely to be “ready to emigrate” than those living in rural areas. In short, while most living in the country encounter the daily obstacles that help us identify potential emigrants in other countries, in Haiti these factors are less useful precisely because they are so pervasive. Rather, the key factors appear to be related to the capacity of an individual to even think about emigration as a viable plan, much less take concrete steps to put that plan into action.

One factor that operates in a similar fashion in Haiti compared to most other countries is receipt of remittances. Receiving remittances is associated with both emigration intentions and readiness, perhaps due to the “lifeline” that receipt of remittances represents—both in terms of an income stream that is not dependent on the country’s collapsing economy *and* in terms of the connection abroad it provides to individuals trapped in Haiti’s current struggles. Receipt of remittances in Haiti may also represent those individuals for whom migrant family members and friends are working hard from abroad to provide a means of exit for those living in Haiti.

A final attitudinal measure associated with emigration intentions and readiness in Haiti is interpersonal trust. Here again, in a society that is permeated with violent gangs, corruption, and a state on the brink of collapse, it perhaps should not be a surprise that views of one’s fellow compatriots shed light on who is planning and preparing to emigrate. The more trusting one is in Haiti, the less likely she will be thinking about leaving, despite all the daily challenges she may face. In such a dire situation, trust among neighbors is likely essential to survival and thus

emerges as a key factor in understanding who among Haitians is less likely to make plans to emigrate and, conversely, who is ready to leave.

As we have noted throughout this chapter, these results highlight what migration scholars have long pointed to as an essential component of the emigration puzzle—the difference between emigration

aspirations and *emigration capabilities*.¹⁰ What we see in countries like Nicaragua appears to be a group of individuals with both the aspiration to leave and the ability to make it happen, while in Haiti we see, tragically, nearly an entire citizenry that wants desperately to leave their country but recognizes, almost in the same breath, that—for many—their aspirations will likely go unfulfilled.

Conclusion:
Understanding Emigration
Patterns Across the Americas

Data from the 2023 AmericasBarometer concerning the emigration plans of individuals in the region highlight the ongoing importance of this topic for governments across the Americas. For certain countries, such as Haiti, millions of citizens appear to have lost hope in the face of increasing violence, hunger, and poor governance. Many of these individuals express a desire to leave but seem unable to make those dreams a reality. Conversely, sizeable numbers of citizens in other countries in which government persecution, natural disaster, and episodes of food insecurity are pervasive, such as Nicaragua, appear not only willing to emigrate but ready to put their plans into action. More generally, the findings in this chapter highlight the myriad forces at work in driving millions to at least consider leaving their country in search of a better life elsewhere. With the inclusion of additional questions on emigration in 2023 we now have a better sense of where and why people are most likely to think about emigrating and, as well, to actually take steps to make it happen.

The findings in this chapter highlight the myriad forces at work in driving millions to at least consider leaving their country in search of a better life elsewhere.

A group of migrants of Central American origin waits on the railway line to get on a container train, known as ‘The Beast’, to go to the border of the United States and Mexico, between the states of Coahuila (Mexico) and Texas (USA). June 16, 2023. Photo Beto.



Notes

- 1 Jonathan T. Hiskey is Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University and LAPOP Lab Faculty Fellow.
- 2 Mariana Rodríguez is Director of Research & Engagement with LAPOP Lab.
- 3 Selee et al. 2023.
- 4 We should note, though, that emigration since the pandemic has been particularly volatile.
- 5 Based on a series of logit regression models of pooled data and individual-country models that control for the following factors (where possible): gender, age, education, wealth, place of residence (urban v. rural), employment status, marital status, whether someone is a parent or guardian, neighborhood insecurity, interpersonal trust, views of the future, trust in the police, satisfaction with democracy. The pooled models also control for country-fixed effects.
- 6 E.g., Massey 1990.
- 7 Tjaden et al. 2018.
- 8 The “Less likely” group includes individuals who say they are not or a little likely to emigrate. The “More likely” group includes individuals who say they are somewhat or very likely to emigrate.
- 9 Analyses are based on a series of regression models that include the independent variables in a model employed to analyze predictors of intentions to emigrate. Results also show that young, single males with relatively high levels of education and income are significantly more likely to both express emigration intentions and be at the high end of the ERS scale.
- 10 E.g., de Haas 2021.

Food insecurity has increased in the last decade in nearly every LAC country. About one in three (32%) now report having recently run out of food in their household. Levels of food insecurity are strikingly high in Haiti (78%).

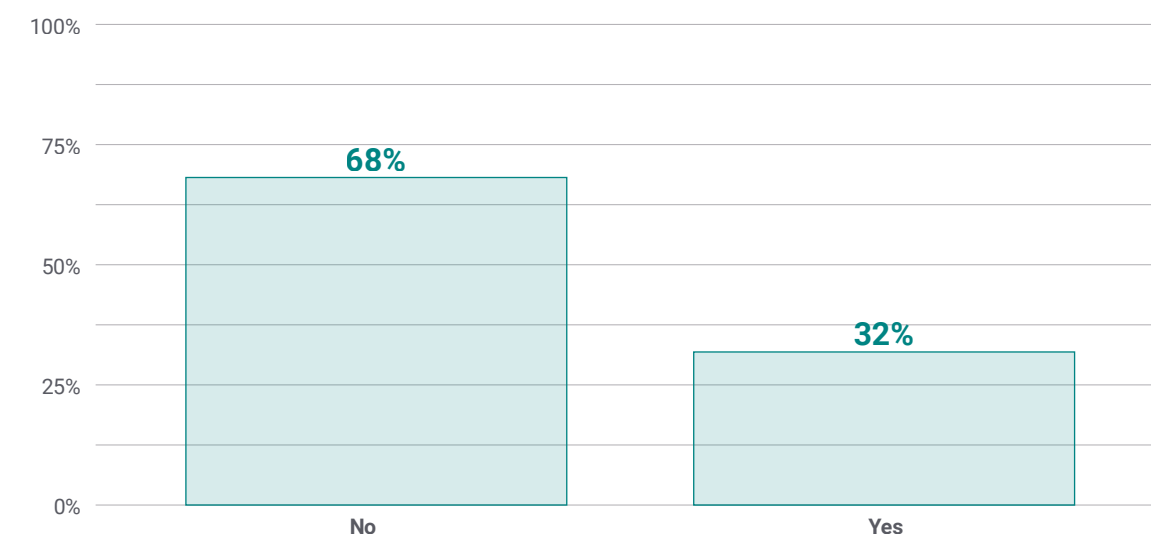
The LAC region has faced considerable food insecurity in the last decade. While experts predicted that the region was positioned to improve after 2014 due to economic growth and improved food production,¹ the prevalence of food insecurity increased between 2015 and 2017.² After a brief decrease before the pandemic, moderate and severe food insecurity worsened.³ The COVID-19 pandemic intensified already-prevalent food insecurity drivers in the region such as limited food, environmental effects, and tumultuous political situations.⁴ Similarly, AmericasBarometer data from 2021 illustrate that, among those who experienced food insecurity, over three in four said it was due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ Even though food insecurity eased slightly in 2022, the LAC region still ranked high compared to other regions.⁶ On average, in 2023, almost one in three adults in the LAC region (32%) have experienced food insecurity in the last three months.

Since 2012, food insecurity has increased in almost every LAC country surveyed by the AmericasBarometer. Haiti experienced the biggest increase between these two time points, moving from two in five (42%) to over three in four (78%). This exceedingly high level of food insecurity comes at a time when gang violence, displacement of residents, and a bleak economic and political situation are present in the country.⁷ Only two countries did not show a statistically significant increase between these two time points: Guatemala and El Salvador. After increasing in 2021, food insecurity in Guatemala has returned to levels similar to 2012. Rates of food insecurity in El Salvador have remained stable since 2012—even through the pandemic.⁸

About one in three LAC citizens, on average, reports that their household recently went without food. These days food insecurity is highest in Haiti, and lowest in Brazil and Chile.

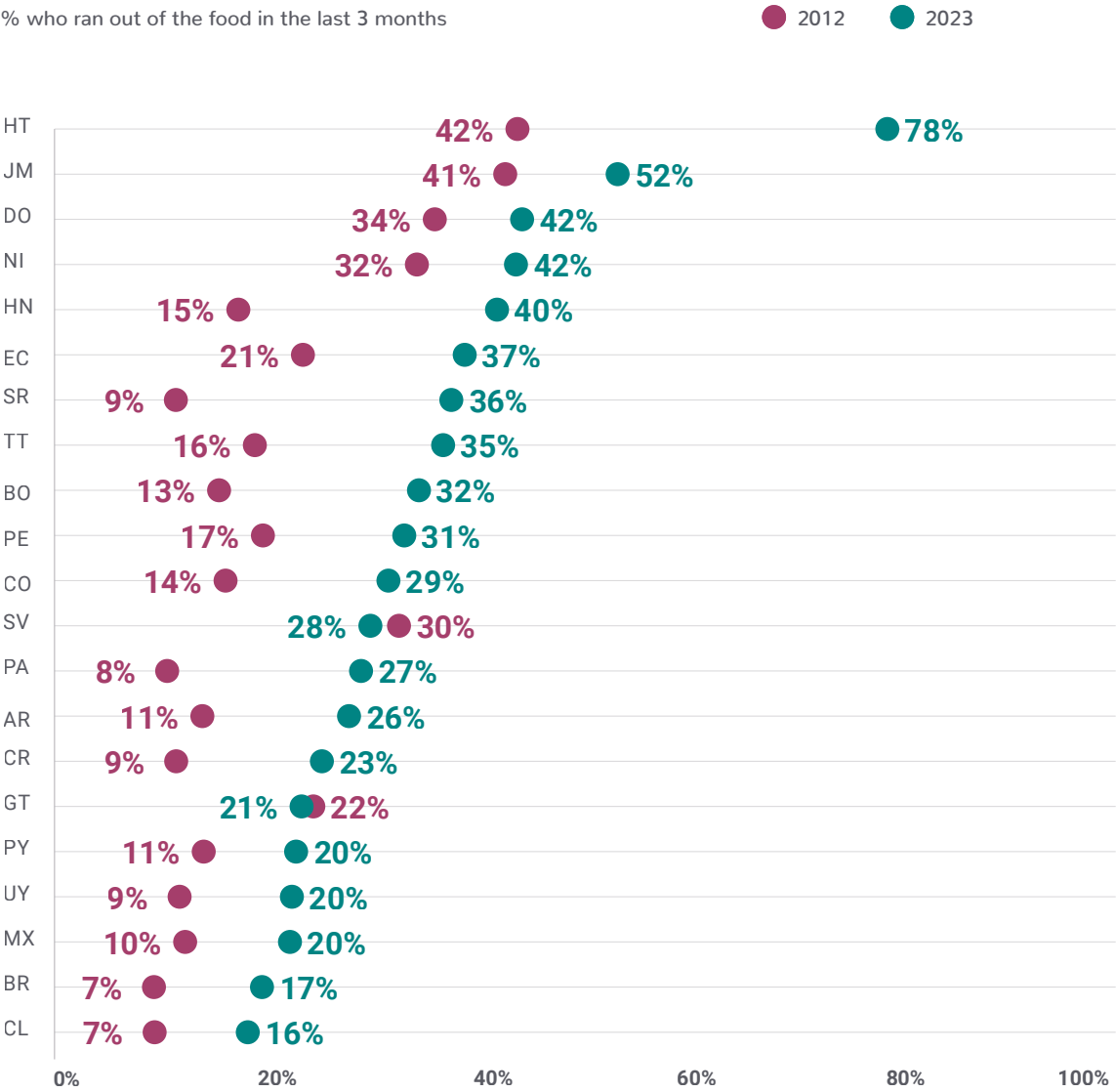
About one in three across the LAC region has experienced food insecurity

In the past three months, because of a lack of money or other resources, did your household ever run out of food?



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

From 2012 to 2023, food insecurity increased across the LAC region, with the exception of El Salvador and Guatemala



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

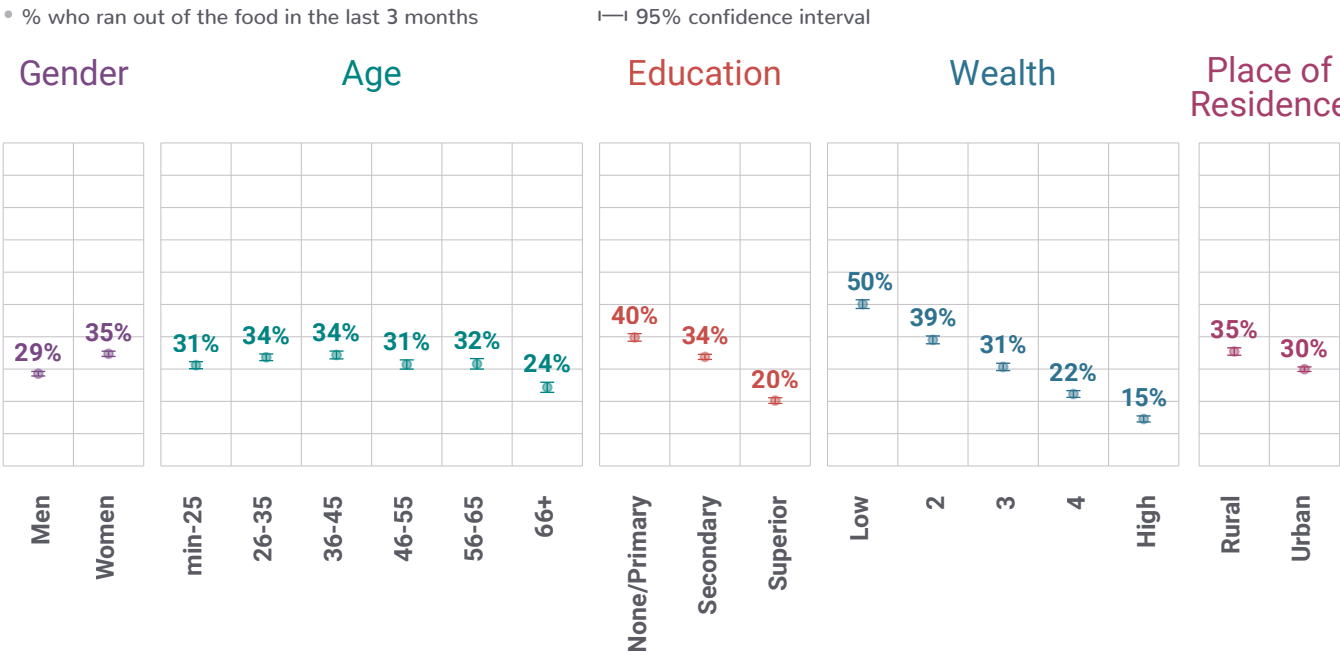
What characteristics of individuals predict food insecurity? Women (35%) experience higher levels of food insecurity than men (29%). Those aged 66 and older experience food insecurity at a lower rate (24%) than

their younger counterparts. As education and wealth increase, experience with food insecurity decreases. Finally, those who live in rural areas experience higher food insecurity (35%) than those who live in urban areas (30%).

Since 2012, food insecurity has increased in almost every country surveyed. Despite recent recovery from pandemic-era levels, food insecurity continues to be prevalent

in the LAC region, although it varies significantly by country. Across the region, those with low levels of education and wealth are particularly vulnerable.

Women, those 65 and younger, less educated, less wealthy, and rural individuals experience food insecurity at higher rates than their counterparts



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Notes

- 1 Rosen et al. 2014.
- 2 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO 2023. Chapter 2, Table 3.
- 3 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO 2023. Chapter 2, Table 3.
- 4 See <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-impact-covid-19-latin-america-and-caribbean>
- 5 Lupu et al. 2021.
- 6 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO 2023. Chapter 2, Table 3.
- 7 Pressoir and Birkbeck 2023.
- 8 Food insecurity levels in Grenada (36%) and The Bahamas (32%) for 2023 are excluded from this figure because these countries were not surveyed in 2012.

Crime victimization increased slightly on average in the LAC region in 2023, although there is significant variation across countries.

Crime and violence have been a defining feature of the LAC region since the 1980s, making some of the countries in the region among the most unsafe in the world.¹ Conditions of high crime and violence can have far-reaching consequences, threatening the safety and psychological well-being of a society’s population. The crime problem has thus become a central political issue in many LAC countries. Since 2010, the AmericasBarometer has used the following question to assess experiences with crime victimization over the previous year:

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?

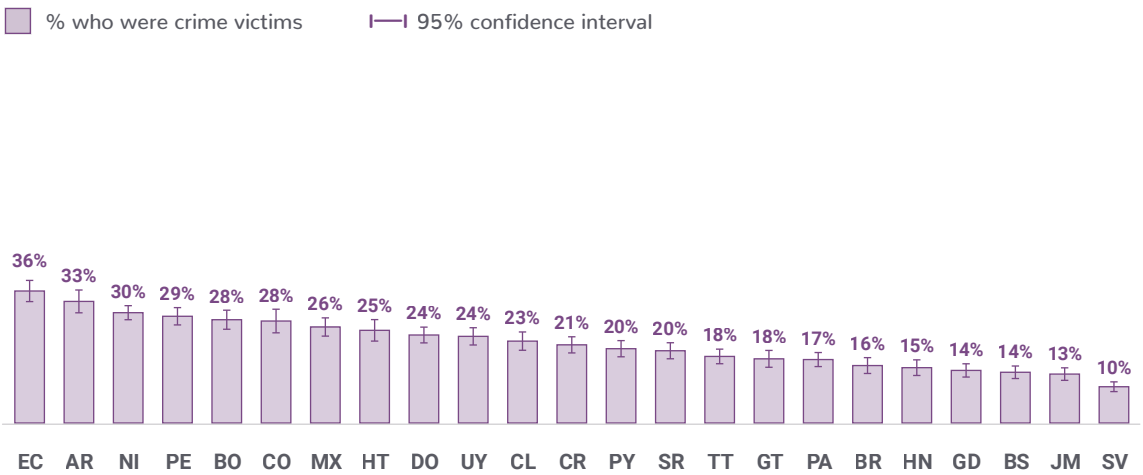
Respondents are given two answer choices, yes or no. The 2023 round included this item in 23 countries.

Crime victimization ranges from a high of over one in three (36%) in Ecuador, a record high for the AmericasBarometer survey in the country, to a low of one in ten (10%) in El Salvador, a record low. The rise in homicide rates in Ecuador is the fastest of the region in recent years.

Between 2016 and 2022, homicide rates increased by nearly 500%.² This surge in experiences with crime in Ecuador is alarming but not surprising given the rapid increase in crime rates attributed to rising organized crime associated with drug trafficking and gangs.³

Data from the 2023 AmericasBarometer also show that in eight other countries, more than a quarter of the population has been a victim of a crime in the past year. On average, Caribbean countries (Haiti, Dominican Republic, Suriname, Grenada, The Bahamas, Trinidad & Tobago, and Jamaica) report less crime victimization (19%) than those in Central, South, and North America (24%).

In most countries in the LAC region, at least one in five has been a victim of a crime



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Regionwide crime victimization increased in 2023



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2010-2023

From the time-series data, we can see that the average rate of crime victimization is nearly one in four (23%). This represents a 1.5-percentage point increase from the previous round, a statistically significant change. Despite the recent increase, crime victimization is lower today than it was in the 2016-2019 period when around a quarter experienced crime (24-25%). The dip in crime victimization rates in 2021 has often been attributed to the impact of lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴

The regionwide trend, showing a small but significant increase in crime rates, obscures important differences across different countries.

For example, El Salvador’s controversial crackdown on gangs seems to have reduced experiences with crime for everyday citizens, while Ecuador has skyrocketed to the top of the rankings. Both cases are critical situations to monitor for observers of democracy. Governments and communities must continue working together to implement effective strategies to reduce crime and provide safety for their citizens. This includes improving law enforcement, promoting social programs, and addressing the root causes of crime such as poverty and inequality. It is crucial that all governments and stakeholders commit themselves to creating safe environments for citizens in the LAC region.

Notes

- 1 E.g., Müller 2018; Singer et al. 2020.
- 2 Newton et al. 2023.
- 3 Posada and Loaiza 2023.
- 4 Moncada and Franco 2021; Muggah and Dudley 2021; Semple and Azam 2020.

“Guarding the Gringos” by Colleen McCoy. Vanderbilt University CLAXC Latin American Images Photography Competition 2018.



Bribe victimization by government employees has declined since 2021 and the incidence rate is in the single digits across most LAC countries.

Corruption hurts economic growth, political legitimacy, and human capital development.¹ Moreover, experiences with corruption at the hands of public officials can have a deleterious effect on citizens’ trust in government, as discussed in the *Confidence in Democratic Institutions* chapter of this report. As one measure of corruption victimization, the AmericasBarometer asks the following question:

In the last twelve months, did any government employee ask you for a bribe?

There are substantial cross-national differences in citizens’ experiences with corruption initiated by government employees. At one end, nearly one in five Nicaraguans reports being asked for such a bribe in the past year. At the other end, experiences with bribe solicitation are very rare in Uruguay (at only 1%). The modal country in the region exhibits a bribe incidence rate of 6%, when considering experiences with government employees.

Examining bribe solicitation across time, we find long-term stability with one notable deviation. Since the first wave of the AmericasBarometer survey in 2004, bribe solicitation at the hands of a

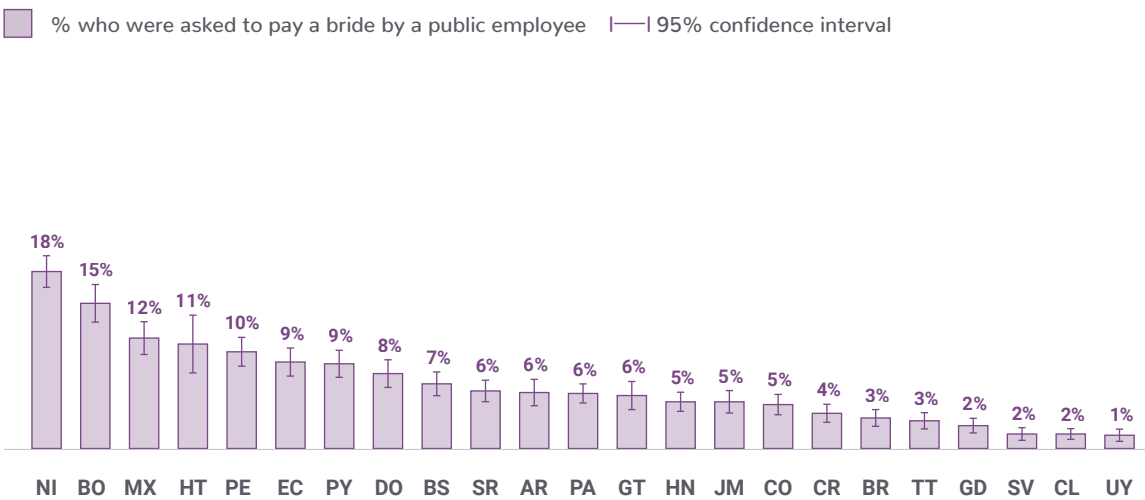
public employee has hovered between 7% and 6%. This surged in 2021 to 10% and has ebbed back to 7% in 2023. The 2021 surge could be explained in part by the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Corruption Perceptions Index 2020 report by Transparency International noted that the pandemic response provided ample opportunities for malfeasance through government activities such as testing, treatment, and procurement of medical supplies.²

Who is most likely to be solicited for a bribe? There are substantively significant differences across gender, age, education, and wealth groups. Men are four percentage points more likely than women to report being solicited for a bribe. There is a negative relationship between age and being solicited for a bribe: the oldest age group (66+) is six percentage points less likely to be asked for a bribe than those ages 26 to 35. Both education and household wealth are positively associated with the likelihood one is asked for a bribe. Finally, there is a small, though statistically significant, association between bribe solicitation and citizens’ place of residence, such that urban citizens are slightly more likely than rural residents to be asked for a bribe.

Bribe victimization by government employees has declined since 2021 and, across most LAC countries, the percentage of incidences is in the single digits. However, the analyses in the *Confidence in Democratic Institutions* chapter of this report provide evidence that bribe victimization can have substantial negative effects on citizens’ trust in the armed forces, police, courts, and other public institutions. This underscores the importance of continued efforts to tamp down on government malfeasance and the danger of tolerating even modest levels of bribery.

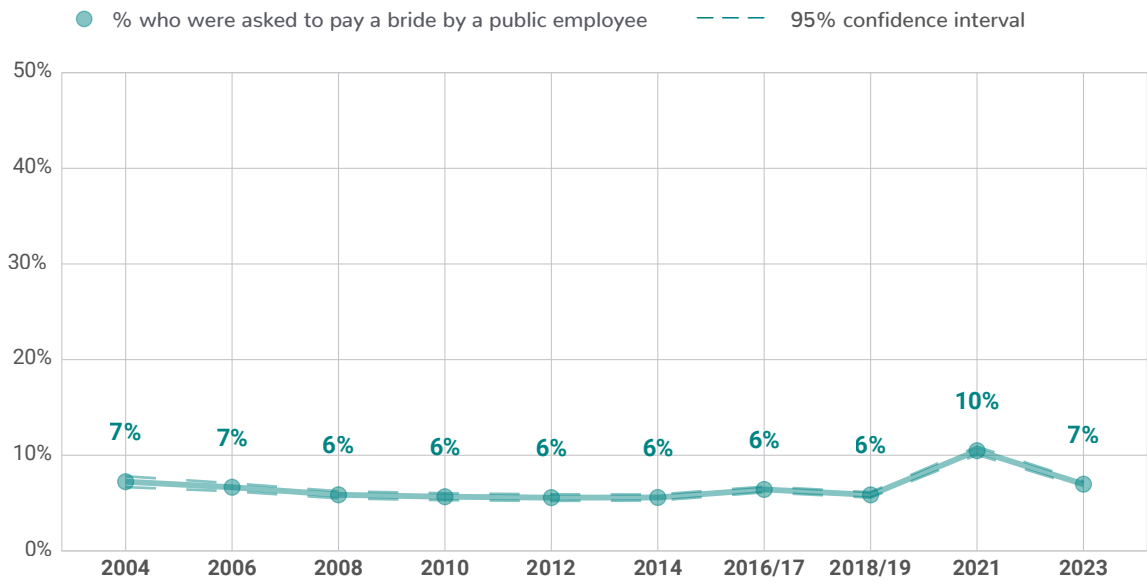
Bribe victimization by government employees has declined since 2021, on average for the LAC region.

Bribe solicitation is highest in Nicaragua and lowest in Uruguay



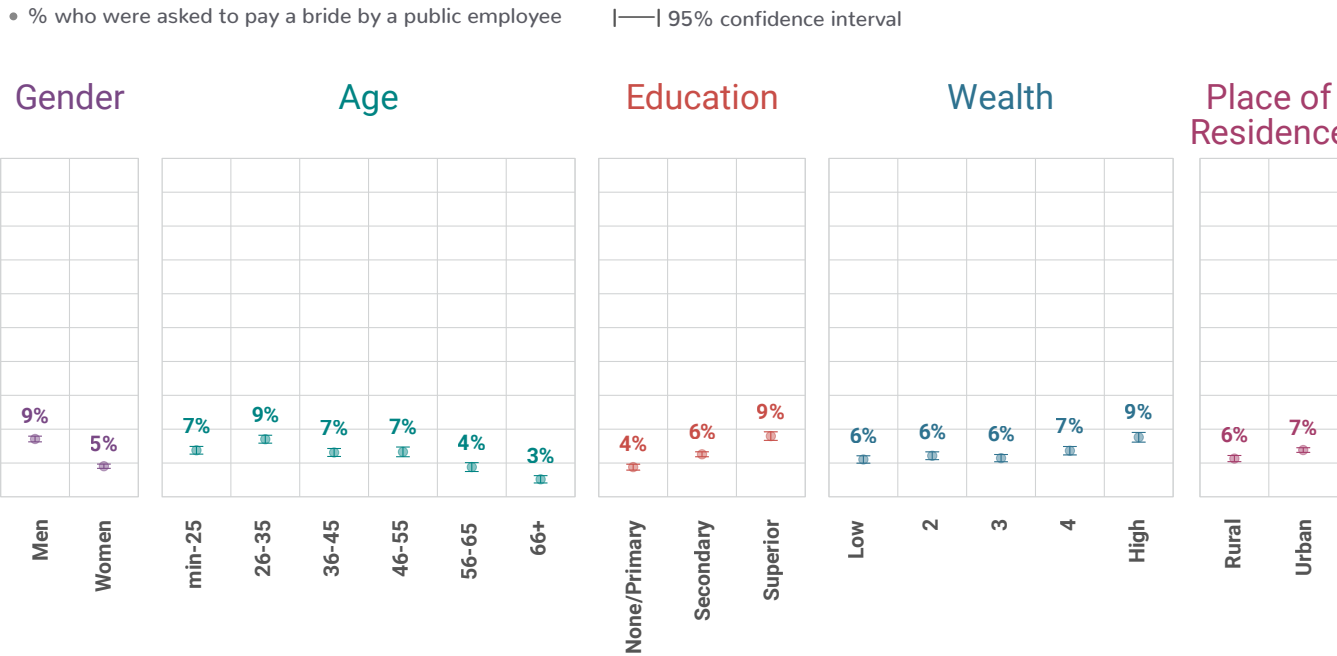
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Bribe solicitation has declined back to previous rates after a surge in 2021



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2004-2023

Wealthier, more educated, younger citizens, and men are more likely to be asked for a bribe



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023



Notes

- 1 Seligson 2006; Dimant and Tosato 2017.
- 2 Transparency International 2021.

Evaluations of National Economic Performance

Luke Plutowski

Evaluations of national economic performance are at an all-time low in the LAC region. In most countries, the majority of citizens feel their country's economic situation has declined.

The performance of a nation's economy is intricately tied to the well-being of the population as well as support for democracy and its institutions.¹ The AmericasBarometer gauges sociotropic economic perceptions with the following question:

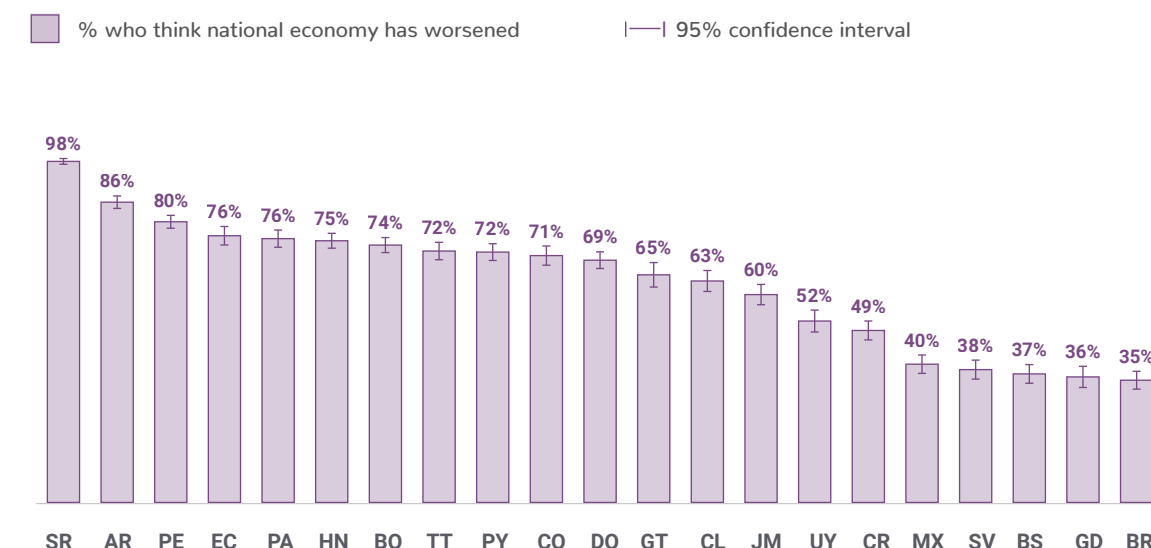
Do you think that the country's current economic situation is better than, the same as, or worse than it was 12 months ago?

This has been asked in all AmericasBarometer rounds with the exception of 2021, due to space constraints despite recognition of the severe economic toll from the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2023 wave included this item in 21 countries. In the results that follow, we show the percentage that said the economy has worsened; higher numbers indicate more negative evaluations.

In 15 countries, a majority report that their nation's economic situation has worsened over the past year. Nearly all (98%) adults in Suriname report the country's economy is worse than it was 12 months ago, while at the other end of the spectrum, only about one in three (35%) of Brazilians say so. Of all countries studied, the median value is 69% (Dominican Republic).

The proportion of the population saying the national economy has worsened is at the highest rate in the history of the AmericasBarometer series. Across the region, nearly two in three (64%) say that their national economic situation has worsened over the past year.

Most people think their country's economy is worse than it was 12 months ago



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

This represents a 7-percentage point increase from the 2018/19 round and a 28-percentage point increase from its nadir 11 years prior, when just 36% said the economy had worsened.

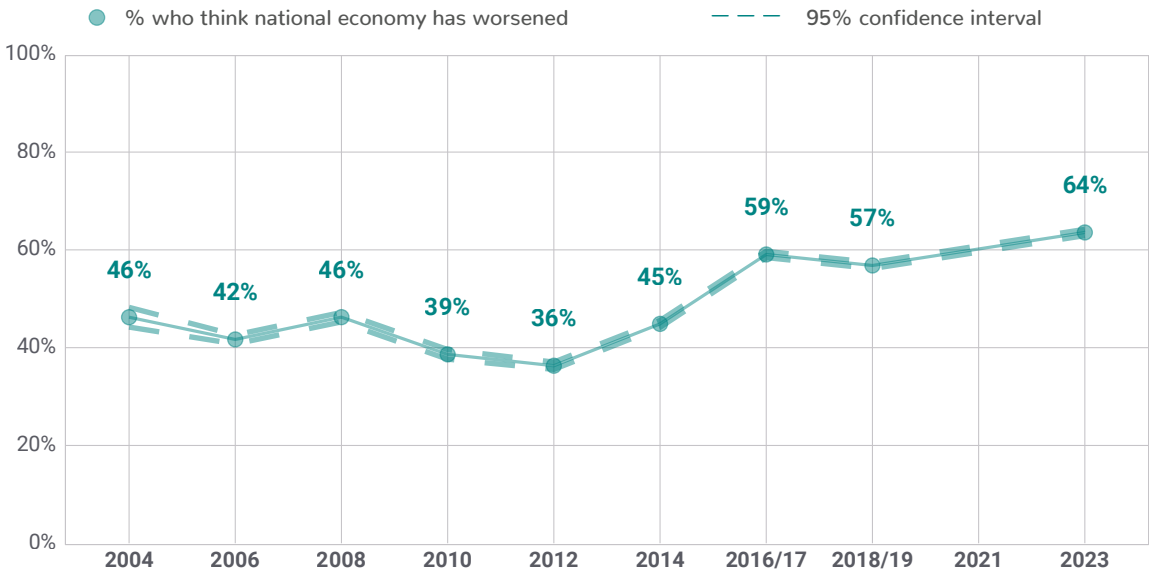
Though all demographic groups are inclined to think that the economy has worsened, some demographic groups are more likely to say so. Women are more likely than men to say that economic conditions have deteriorated, by a quite significant margin (67% versus 59%). With respect to age, the oldest and the youngest cohorts are least likely to say that the economy has worsened (60% and 61% respectively, compared to 63-66% for the other groups).

Beliefs about the economy are tied to socioeconomic status as well, with the lowest education group (None/Primary; 67%) and the lowest wealth group (68%) reporting the highest level of pessimism.

Finally, people from rural areas report more negative sociotropic economic evaluations than those in urban areas (65% versus 62%).

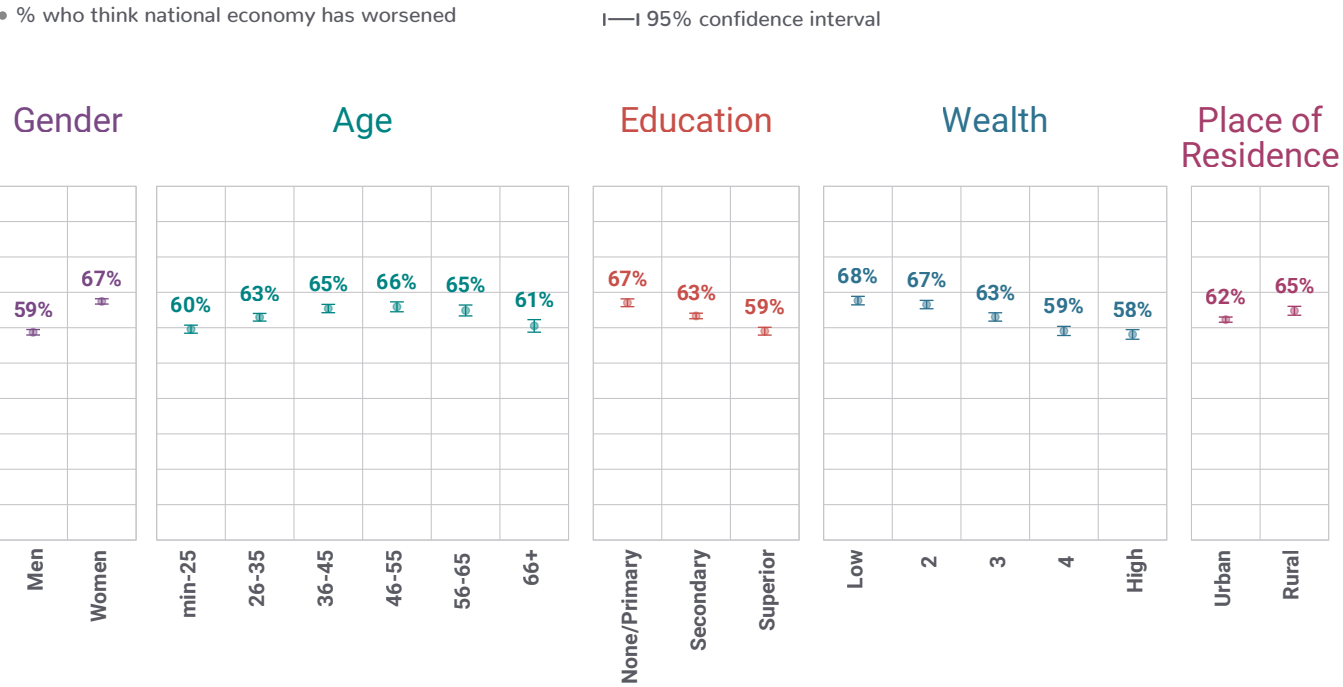
Concern over national economic performance has reached a new high. These results should concern policymakers across the LAC region, who could risk weakened rule of law and a disillusionment with democracy due to economic decline.² The situation is especially critical in countries like Argentina, Peru, and Suriname, where pessimism about the economy is quite extreme. It may also be wise to develop particular solutions for groups that have the most negative perceptions, like women and those with lower socioeconomic status.

Pessimism about national economic conditions is at an all-time high



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2004-2023

Women, the middle aged, those with lower socioeconomic status, and those living in rural areas are more likely to say the economy has worsened



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023



- Notes
- 1

Cordero and Simón 2016.
- 2

Morlino and Quaranta 2016.

Attitudes toward Venezuelan Immigrants

Alexander Tripp¹

Views of Venezuelan immigrants have become increasingly negative in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.

In recent years, LAC nations have facilitated the exodus and settlement of over seven million Venezuelan migrants in response to the collapse of Venezuela's economy and democracy.² Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru are top recipient countries of these migrants.³ How do individuals' attitudes toward Venezuelans in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru compare across countries and how have they changed over time?

The 2018/19 and 2023 rounds of the AmericasBarometer included the following question wording experiment,⁴ with random assignment to one of three conditions:

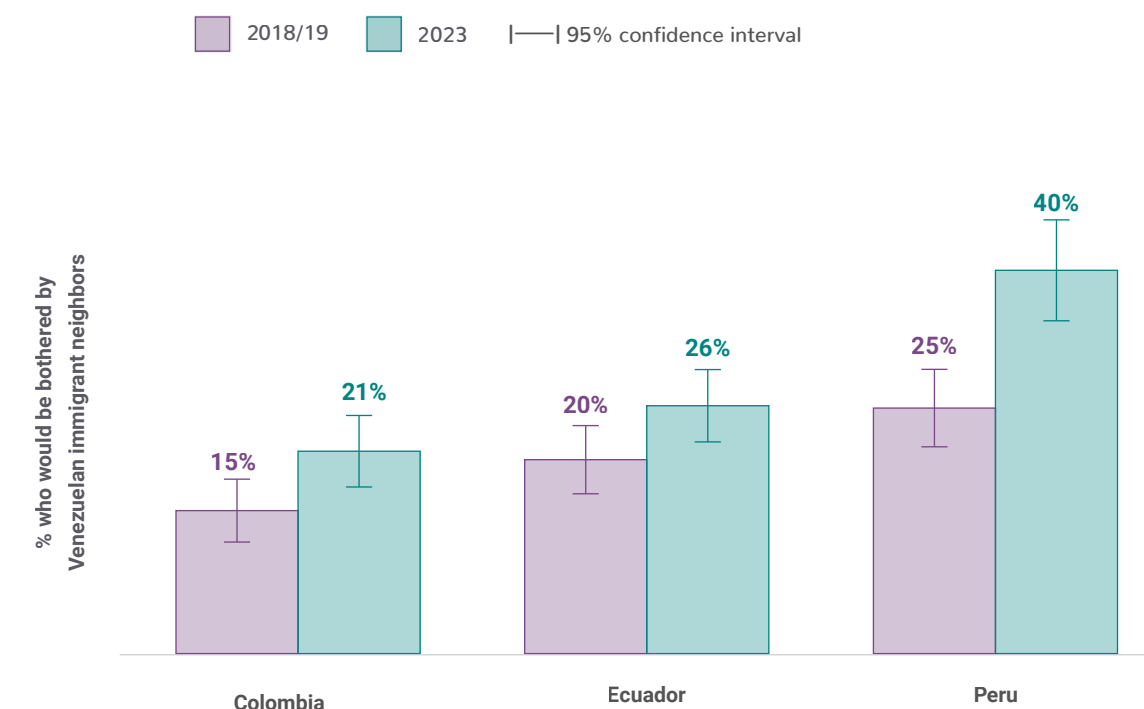
How much would it bother you to have a Venezuelan (condition 1)/immigrant (condition 2)/Spaniard (condition 3) as a neighbor? Would it bother you a lot, some, a little, or not at all?

In order to track negative views toward immigrants, the analysis in this report focuses on the proportion of interviewees who report they would be bothered "a lot" or "some" (compared to "a little" or "not at all").

The proportion of Colombians, Ecuadorians, and Peruvians who report they would be bothered "some" or "a lot" to have Venezuelan immigrants as neighbors increased significantly between 2018 and 2023. On average, across Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, two in ten adults (20%) reported they would be bothered to have Venezuelan immigrants as neighbors in 2018/19. This proportion rises to about three in ten (29%) in 2023. Across survey rounds, Peruvians express the most negative opinions about Venezuelans as neighbors, and Colombians the least.⁵

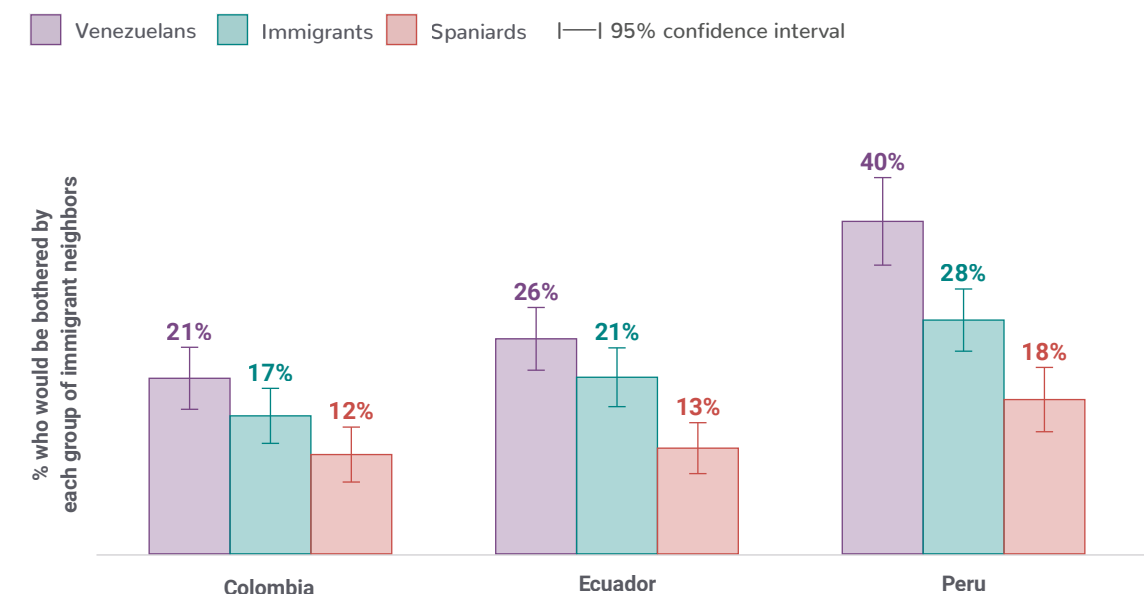
Peruvians are significantly more likely to report they would be bothered by a Venezuelan immigrant neighbor than other types of immigrants: an abstract "immigrant" or a Spaniard. Colombians' attitudes toward Venezuelan immigrants are significantly more negative than they are for Spaniards.

Negative views toward Venezuelan immigrants have increased in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2018-2023

People in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru have more negative views toward Venezuelan immigrants than "immigrants" and Spaniards



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

On the topic of having immigrants as neighbors, Peruvians hold the most negative attitudes—with views toward Venezuelan immigrants particularly negative—while Colombia has the most tolerant views toward Venezuelan immigrants and abstract “immigrants.” Specifically, in 2023 four in ten (40%) Peruvians report they would be bothered to have Venezuelan immigrants as neighbors, as opposed to over one in four (28%) for abstract “immigrants” and just under one in five (18%) for Spaniards. In comparison, about one in five (21%) Colombians in 2023 perceive Venezuelans as bothersome neighbors. Opinion in Ecuador falls between Colombia and Peru regarding negative views toward having Venezuelans, “immigrants,” and Spaniards as neighbors.

This analysis surveys how three of the countries that have received the bulk of Venezuelan migrants, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, view these immigrants over time and in comparison to other immigrant groups. It is notable that the public in Colombia—the country that has received the highest number of Venezuelan immigrants worldwide—expresses comparatively less concern about Venezuelans as neighbors.⁶ Overall, while Venezuelans continue to leave their homes in search of safer living conditions and better opportunities, attitudes toward them have soured between 2018/19 and 2023.

Notes

- 1
- Alexander Tripp is a PhD candidate in political science at Vanderbilt University and a LAPOP Lab Affiliate.
- 2
- See <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/venezuela/#:~:text=More%20than%20>
- 3
- See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/facts-figures-venezuelans-colombia-ecuador-peru-chile/#:~:text=Colombia%20is%20the%20largest%20>
- 4
- The module was developed in collaboration with researchers at the World Bank; LAPOP Lab is grateful to the Bank for partially supporting data collection in 2018/19.
- 5
- Additional analyses show that the proportion of Colombians and Peruvians who perceive “immigrants” as bothersome neighbors remains unchanged between 2018/19 to 2023. Among Ecuadorians, however, views toward “immigrants” grew more negative. Colombians and Ecuadorians have significantly more inclusive attitudes toward “immigrants” than Peruvians in both 2018/19 and 2023. Peruvians have the most disapproving attitudes toward “immigrants” in both 2018/19 and 2023. The proportion of Colombians, Ecuadorians, and Peruvians who find Spaniards bothersome as neighbors has not changed significantly from 2018/19 to 2023.
- 6
- See <https://www.r4v.info/en/refugeeandmigrants>

ATTITUDES TOWARD VENEZUELAN IMMIGRANTS

Venezuelan citizens wait for the process of characterization of 400 migrants promoted by the Mayor of Cali, in Cali, Colombia on July 31, 2018. In this way the authorities seek to identify people who wish to continue to Ecuador and Peru for whom the IOM (International Organization for Migration) funds buses that take them to these countries and those who stay in the city of Cali receive a permit able to work legally in Colombia. *Ernesto Guzman/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock.*



AMERICASBAROMETER DATA AND REPORTS AT A GLANCE

DATA

The AmericasBarometer datasets feature a common core set of questions that have 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.



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. Data Playground 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 reports from the *Insights* series for free [here](#).



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):

	2004	2006	2008	2010
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				
The Bahamas				
Barbados				
Grenada				
St. Lucia				
Dominica				
Antigua and Barbuda				
St. Vincent and the Grenadines				
St. Kitts and Nevis				
United States				
Canada				

*2023 AmericasBarometer country reports will be available in early 2024.

[illegible]

SURVEY METHODOLOGY FOR THE 2023 AMERICASBAROMETER

The AmericasBarometer is a multinational, multiregional, and multicultural (3MC) public opinion survey of democratic values and behaviors of voting-age citizens and permanent residents in the Western Hemisphere.

Respondents are selected through national probability samples in Latin America and the Caribbean, and through nonprobability panels in the United States and Canada. The project uses a standardized core questionnaire and country-specific modules to collect data via face-to-face household surveys, except in Haiti and Nicaragua, where the project uses computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), and in the United States and Canada, where the project uses self-administered Web surveys. The per-country average sample size of 1,512 respondents enables national and subnational estimations of key population variables.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The AmericasBarometer survey instruments consist of a core questionnaire and country-specific modules that measure attitudes regarding, experiences with, and behaviors within political, economic, and social systems. The core questionnaire is a set of structured items that permit valid comparisons across time and space. Country-specific modules measure opinion on context-specific sociopolitical phenomena. As in every round, new questions are designed through workshops with input from country experts and leading scholars in the field. While the average face-to-face questionnaire includes 152 questions and lasts 45 minutes, the average CATI questionnaire includes 77 questions and lasts 20 minutes. The main questionnaire topics in 2023 are democratic values, system support, the rule of law, gender, and migration intentions.

COGNITIVE PRETESTS

The core questionnaire and country-specific modules are thoroughly pretested with a three-stage iterative cognitive interviewing process. First, LAPOP cognitive interviewers carry out a handful of in-depth tests of new modules to develop early drafts of questionnaire items. Second, LAPOP extensively trains research assistants and consultants to conduct cognitive interviews of the full core questionnaire in selected countries from different regions of the Americas to ensure context variation. Third, a similar process is carried out in all countries for each country-customized questionnaire. For the 2023 AmericasBarometer, local survey institutions recruited pre-test participants, and, in some cases, a small incentive was offered for their participation. Most cognitive interviews were conducted remotely using video or phone calls.

SAMPLING

LAPOP uses a stratified, multistage, and clustered sampling strategy to draw national probability samples in countries where the survey is administered face-to-face. LAPOP-trained enumerators interview any eligible respondent available at the time of the survey. A single respondent is selected in each household and no revisits are required. In face-to-face studies, LAPOP uses “frequency matching,” a technique that ensures that the samples achieved mirror the national distributions of age and gender in the sampling frame. Frequency matching is implemented at the cluster level. In countries where the survey is conducted via CATI, LAPOP uses random-digit dialing (RDD) of mobile phones. In cases of unanswered calls, each number selected into the sample is called at least five times before it is discarded.

WEIGHTS

The 2023 AmericasBarometer sample design strategy in face-to-face studies produce self-weighted observations, with a few exceptions. Datasets in Ecuador, Trinidad & Tobago, The Bahamas, and Brazil use calibration weights to compensate for sample size deviations. LAPOP computes these weights using population distributions by strata for urban and rural population, gender, and age. Weights for Haiti and Nicaragua (CATI) are calculated by estimating baseline probabilities adjusted for eligibility and non-response, then calibrated to the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer country samples on gender, education, age, and region. Cross-time and cross-country weights are standardized so that each country/year has the same effective sample size.

INTERVIEWER, SUPERVISOR, AND AUDITOR TRAINING

In the 2023 AmericasBarometer is designed as an opportunity for fieldwork personnel to grow their knowledge base and to standardize data collection and monitoring practices. Training workshops include an in-person component, where LAPOP-trained fieldwork personnel instruct interviewers and quality control auditors on logistics, security protocols, and fieldwork monitoring; a virtual component, where LAPOP representatives review the full questionnaire and country samples with each team; a set of pre-recorded training videos that review best practices in survey research, ethical principles, and operations with the data collection platform; and a full pilot of the survey, where fieldwork personnel practice what they have learned before launching the actual survey. Training sessions typically last two full days and all trainings conclude with a learning assessment that interviewers have to pass (>80% correct answers) in order to be certified to work on the project.

QUALITY CONTROL

The 2023 AmericasBarometer uses LAPOP’s Fieldwork Algorithm for LAPOP Control over survey Operations and Norms (FALCON). FALCON collects multiple types of paradata, including voice recordings and interviewer images, 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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The AmericasBarometer is 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 network that spans the Americas. To complete each round, 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 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, and the Inter-American Development Bank. Over the years, the project has benefited from grants from the United States 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 2023 AmericasBarometer was carried out via face-to-face interviews in 22 Latin American and Caribbean countries, phone surveys in Haiti and Nicaragua, and online surveys in Canada and the United States.

All samples are designed to be nationally representative of voting-age adults. In all, more than 41,524 individuals were interviewed in this latest round of the survey. The complete 2004-2023 AmericasBarometer dataset contains responses from over 385,000 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. Individuals can also use that website to query the data via an 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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