

Views of Government and the Political System

Now that we have explored democratic and authoritarian norms in Latin American political culture, we want to understand other dimensions of citizens' connections to their political systems. We are particularly interested in how citizens relate to the political realm and how they conceive the role of government. For example, how much do Latin Americans know about the political system and the government? How interested are they in politics? Do they see their governments as problem solvers or problem creators? Do they think their political systems pay attention to them and their concerns? How ideological and connected to political parties are they? When we answer these questions, we will have a fuller grasp of the region's political culture.

HISTORICAL-CULTURAL BACKGROUND

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Iberian centralist tradition generally provided Latin American nations with relatively powerful national governments that shared little power with lower levels of government. Only four countries in our study have federal systems (Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela).¹ Even in those, local governments have typically suffered from centralization of power and weak financial and legislative resources. Throughout the region, provincial or departmental and local governments have depended heavily on national governments for revenues.

After World War I, Latin American nations turned to a highly activist state-led model of promoting economic development. They invested alone or jointly with private capital to support infrastructure, energy, transportation, tourism, and manufacturing. The public sector and employment in it expanded greatly. But in the late twentieth century, Latin America, pressured by international lenders, reversed course and every government in the region reduced its economic role. Latin American countries adopted more austere neoliberal development models under which almost all divested many public sector firms, curtailed public services, shrank public employee ranks, and lowered trade barriers.

Given the newness of this changed economic role, public support for the older activist state model may still exist. On the other hand, neoliberal policies may have been in place long enough to have shaped public attitudes about the roles of the state. We will investigate Latin Americans' contemporary attitudes toward the role of the state in this chapter.

The traditional political culture literature presents Latin Americans as relatively disengaged from and uninvolved in politics (see Chapter 1). If this is true, the region's citizens might be unable to identify problems whose solutions would require governmental intervention, identify less with political parties than citizens of countries with different political histories, and express disinterest in politics. (We examine actual civic and political participation in Chapter 6.) Another characteristic frequently ascribed to Latin Americans concerns their placing high value on personal connections and individual contacts. Latin Americans use various expressions to describe this "it's who you know," including *palanca* (literally, "a lever") and *enganche* ("a plug" or "connection"). One political culture correlate of such an orientation would be comparatively low levels of generalized trust of others in the community. We explore whether Latin Americans indeed exhibit such traits.

VIEWS ABOUT POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

As the previous section illuminates, governmental structure and the type and level of engagement in the economy are widely shared in Latin America. On the other hand, individual countries differ greatly in wealth, size of their economies, governmental performance, and many other factors. Thus, citizen views about politics and government may differ by country. We scrutinize a number of themes to capture attitudes about politics and government: what are the biggest problems citizens perceive, how much do they care about politics, how much do they think their governments care about them, how do they relate to each other in terms of trust, ideology, and political party identification, and what expectations do they have of government. When we have learned about these views, we will have a fuller and more nuanced grasp of Latin American political culture.

Latin Americans' "Most Serious Problems":

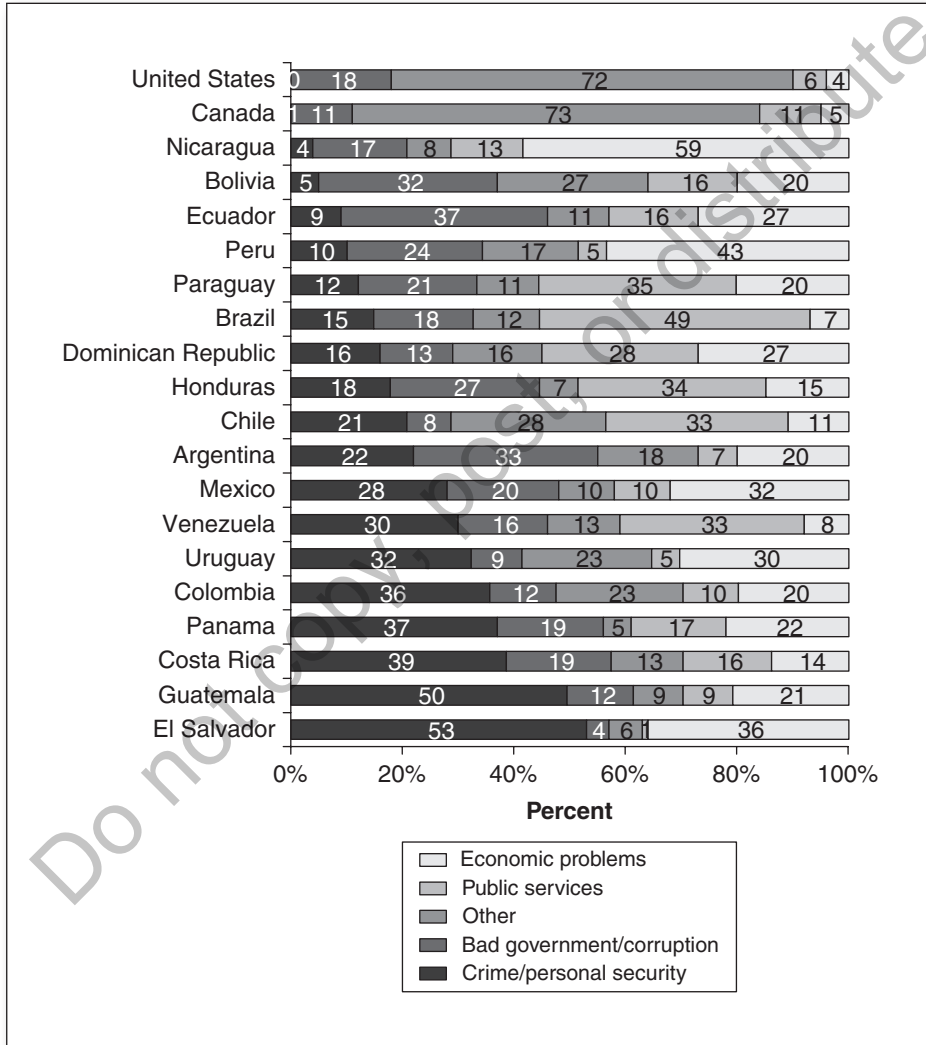
Widely Varied Concerns by Country

We begin at a fundamental level of citizens' relationship to government: How aware of national problems are Latin Americans, especially of problems that the government has relevance for causing, managing, or solving? When asked "*In your opinion, what is the most serious problem faced by the country?*" virtually everyone engaged—99% of the 18-country sample identified a national problem. Thus, the region's citizenries are cognizant of problems for which government has relevance.

Respondents gave a variety of answers about the most serious problem they saw. We have grouped these into broad categories: economic problems ("economic crisis," "poverty," or "unemployment"), problems with public services (roads, education, health services, utilities), bad government (e.g., "politicians," "corruption"), and crime and personal security, and combined all the rest as "other."

Figure 4.1 demonstrates that the problems perceived vary substantially by country. A few examples highlight the divergences. About 59% of Nicaraguans cited economic problems, understandable because Nicaragua is very poor, in

FIGURE 4.1 **Biggest National Problem**



Source: AmericasBarometer 2010 surveys, www.LapopSurveys.org.

Note: Cases weighted for equal size per country.

fact, the poorest country in the study. Over half of Salvadorans mentioned crime and personal security, a finding in keeping with that nation having one of the highest murder rates in the world and a very bad criminal gang problem. Brazilians viewed public services as the dominant problem, presaging the 2013 protests about such services (see the case study below).

Figure 4.1 underscores that these four broad types of problems—economy, crime/security, bad government, and inadequate public services—predominated nearly everywhere in the region in 2010. Nicaraguans, Mexicans, and Peruvians cited economic problems most frequently; Argentines, Bolivians, Peruvians, Ecuadorians, and Hondurans bad government and corruption; Brazilians and Venezuelans public services; Salvadorans, Panamanians, Guatemalans, Uruguayans, and Costa Ricans crime and security. Chile, one of Latin America's most economically developed countries, is the exception. Like the United States and Canada, very many of its citizens cited problems in the "other" category. This surface resemblance is deceptive, however, because 28% of Chileans specified problems related to the terrible earthquake and tsunami that struck just a few weeks before the survey was conducted. The figure also shows that the United States would fall at the Latin American regional average of the proportion naming bad government and corruption as the worst national problem.

Two other questions, about crime and corruption, addressed government-relevant problems. The first concerned individuals' sense of personal safety from crime: "*Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being assaulted or robbed, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?*" Using a zero (low fear/very safe) to 100 (high fear/very unsafe) scale as a gauge of personal insecurity, we found a regional mean of 42.6, a value that seems quite high to us (see online Supplement G at <http://study.sagepub.com/booth1e>). The scale responses ranged from 33 for Costa Ricans to highs of 55 and 53 among Argentinians and Peruvians, respectively. Because Costa Rica and Peru had similar levels of violent crime in 2008–2009,² we investigated further. We discovered that perceived insecurity from crime has little to do with a crime index, such as the national murder rate, even controlling for levels of development.³ Instead, having a member of one's household who was a crime victim, living in an urban environment, and family poverty constituted the main drivers of Latin Americans' sense of insecurity from violent crime.

Ensuring public safety is a principal responsibility of government. Such high levels of fear of being a victim of violent crime signal that many Latin Americans view their governments as not providing acceptable levels of personal security. Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina resemble the United States and Canada in their low violent crime levels, but their citizens express very high fear of violent crime. Indeed, fear of a violent crime in one's neighborhood is at least twice as high in these three countries as in the United States and Canada (low 20s). In parts of Latin America, homes in prosperous neighborhoods offer tangible evidence of this fear—they sport high walls topped with

loops of razor wire (a technological step “up” from the ubiquitous broken glass bottles used in previous decades). The virtual omnipresence of companies providing private security and guard services to those who can afford them in many parts of Latin America indicates the failings of many governments in supplying public safety. Poorer Latin Americans, who cannot afford to hire private security or live in safer neighborhoods, express more fear.

The second item about problems of or for government asked about perceived levels of government corruption: “Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption among public officials is very common, common, or uncommon.” Again we used a 0 (corruption uncommon) to 100 (corruption very common) scale to measure of citizens’ sense of the integrity of their public officials. Here, we encountered a conspicuously high regional mean of 73.4, indicating widespread perception of corruption. Average national responses ranged from 63 in Uruguay to 79 in Peru, that is, in every country corruption by public officials was seen as common. Latin Americans do not personally experience petty corruption at a very high rate (about one person in five reported being asked to pay a bribe to a public official in the year before the 2010 survey). But media frequently expose investigations of major corruption cases, some involving considerable public funds. Thus, respondents impute that governmental corruption is rife, even if they themselves had not been suborned for a bribe by a police officer or permit office. (This item was not used in the U.S. and Canada surveys so we are unable to make comparisons.)

In sum, Latin Americans recognize national problems that involve government as the source or as their possible solution. The main problem, and its dominance, differs across the 18 countries, suggesting respondents’ answers reflect real situations. Concern about being victims of violent crime and the perception of official corruption are prevalent. While Latin Americans may embrace democratic norms more than authoritarian ones, they signal that their governments do not meet high standards. It is a small leap from these opinions to the conclusion that Latin Americans’ expectations of their governments may not be fulfilled. We address aspects of this later in this chapter and also in Chapter 5.

We turn next to some factors that may affect how likely people are to be engaged citizens, including interest in politics and knowledge about the political system. We look too at whether respondents think they understand their political world and whether their government takes their views into account.

Interest in Politics: Moderate and Lower Than in the United States

Politics determines the creation and delivery of policies (government’s outputs), including those that might address some of the issues described in the previous section. Research has shown that interest in politics plays an important role in shaping many other political attitudes and behaviors.⁴ Those interested in politics tend to be attentive to policy issues, to elections, and to have greater expectations of government, and therefore participate more in politics. We converted

answers to “*How much interest do you have in politics: a lot, some, little or none?*” into a 0 to 100 scale, with “none” represented by 0 and “a lot” by 100.

Latin Americans express much less interest in politics than citizens of the United States. Their mean score is only 38.4 out of 100, while in the United States it is nearly double that at 73. Uruguayans score highest at 51, comparable to Canada, followed by Dominicans (45) and Argentines (44). Chileans report the least interest in politics (28), followed by Ecuadorians, Brazilians, and Guatemalans who are tied at 32. We see that, when compared to U.S. citizens at least, there is some truth to the idea that Latin Americans are not very interested in politics.

When we explored factors that might explain interest levels, we found no important relationships with macro level conditions. Individual demographic variables account for almost all variation: in descending order, more education, being male, being older, and having a higher living standard.⁵ Thus, personal social position and resources—education, sex, and income— influence political interest.

Political Information: Do Revolutions Lower and Coups Increase Knowledge?

It is widely assumed that people are more effective citizens if they know how the political system works. The AmericasBarometer surveys include three widely used items to measure political information levels: identify the president of the United States, the number of provinces/departments/states in their country, and the length of their president’s term. Correct answers were summed and converted into a measure of basic political knowledge ranging from 0 (missed all three questions) to 100 (all correct) scale. This rough measure of individuals’ political information provides us, when averaged by country, a view of relative levels of information.⁶

U.S. citizens stand at the top of the basic political information heap with a score of 88, followed closely by Uruguayans (86), Hondurans and Costa Ricans (at about 85), and Salvadorans (82).⁷ The regional mean score is 68.7. On the lower end of the political information scale we find Nicaraguans (44), Venezuelans (55), Canadians (59), and Paraguayans and Dominicans (61).

Considering the very low score for Nicaraguans, we wondered whether a country’s position on the information scale might result from relatively low individual educational attainment or wealth. As noted earlier, Nicaragua is very poor and its citizens have the third lowest educational attainment in the region.⁸ Its school system has been disrupted over recent decades by budget problems and ideological fights over education. For the region as a whole, individual educational attainment is the best predictor of political information, with living standard contributing as well. But while educational attainment may explain something about Nicaraguans’ position on the scale, it fails to account for the contrasting high score of neighboring Hondurans, who have the lowest educational attainment of our 18 countries and are also poor. Despite this, Hondurans rank second among Latin Americans on political

information. We suspected Hondurans' information levels might have risen because of the 2009 coup d'état, a crisis that would have focused citizens' attention on government. However, Hondurans also ranked very high on political information in 2008 (see the case study in Chapter 3).

Seeking factors that influence the level of political information, we used multiple regression analysis to find that a nation's democracy score contributed to more political information. We also discovered that education has a large positive effect, followed by family living standard. Women score lower than men, indicative of the separate spheres notion that politics is "a man's affair" (Chapter 7 provides further discussion). Extrapolating from these findings, enhanced education and wealth levels in these populations, along with the diminished sex roles resulting from women's greater education and workforce participation, should result in increased political information.

POLITICAL EFFICACY AND TRUST

We next evaluate attitudes that bear on whether Latin Americans engage in politics. There are structural barriers to participation, such as poverty and political rules, and there are psychological barriers. We consider three of these, beginning with how well Latin Americans believe they understand national problems. This differs from political information, or factual knowledge. The next two opinions concern individuals' views about whether public officials care what they think and their evaluations of the trustworthiness of their neighbors. To engage in politics, people need some confidence of their own knowledge, some notion that officials might be responsive, and some trust in other citizens.

Political Efficacy: Latin Americans Are More Confident Than U.S. Citizens That Government Cares What They Think

To comprehend Latin Americans' relationship with their political systems, we need to discover whether they see themselves as politically competent and their governments as responsive. Political efficacy involves these two related perceptions. *Internal efficacy* centers on a belief in one's own capabilities to understand and act in the political world, while *external efficacy* involves the perception that government cares about or responds to citizen concerns. Considerable prior research has found that both forms of efficacy affect citizens' attitudes and behavior.⁹ Two AmericasBarometer questions address internal and external efficacy:

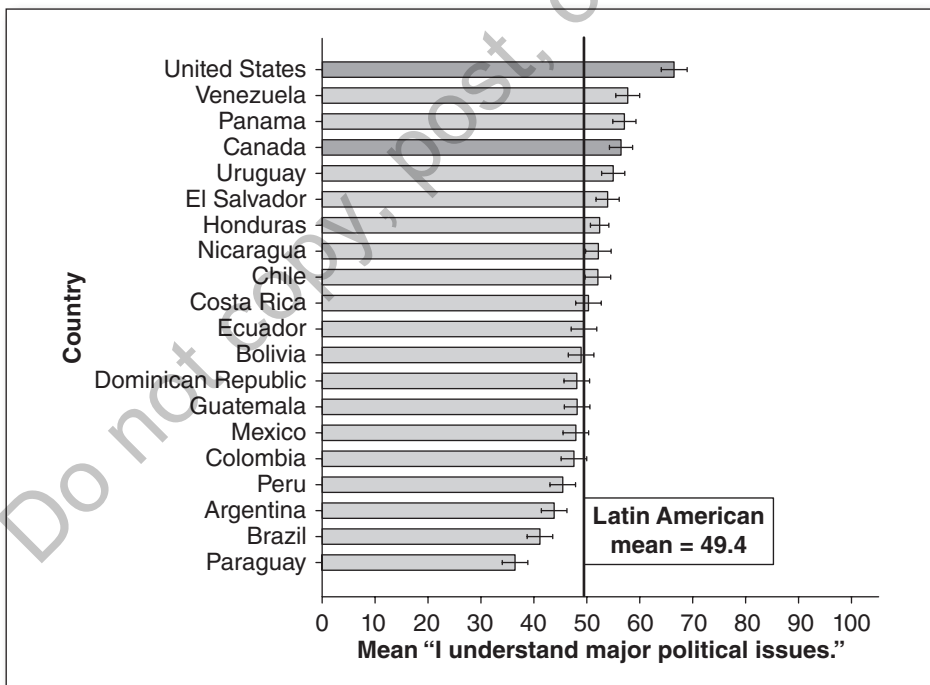
"How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

- *You feel that you understand the most important political issues of this country.*
- *Those who govern this country are interested in what people like you think."*

The survey's answers were on a 7-point scale, which we have converted into our usual 0 to 100 scale. Figure 4.2 and 4.3 present the national means of internal and external efficacy, respectively. We reiterate that internal efficacy is a self-estimate of understanding of political problems and distinct from actual political knowledge. The simple correlation between internal efficacy and actual political knowledge, only .16 (a 2.4% overlap) for the whole Latin American sample, proves this. What we think we know and what we actually know are not the same.¹⁰

Latin Americans' sense of internal efficacy averages 49.4 out of 100 (Figure 4.2), with Paraguayans low (36) and Venezuelans and Panamanians high (about 57). Latin Americans have a somewhat lower sense that they understand major political issues than U.S. citizens and Canadians. We again find that occupying an advantaged position, that is, having more education, being older and more prosperous, and being a male, correlates with a greater

FIGURE 4.2 **Internal Efficacy**



Source: AmericasBarometer 2010 surveys, www.LapopSurveys.org.

Note: Cases weighted for equal size per country.

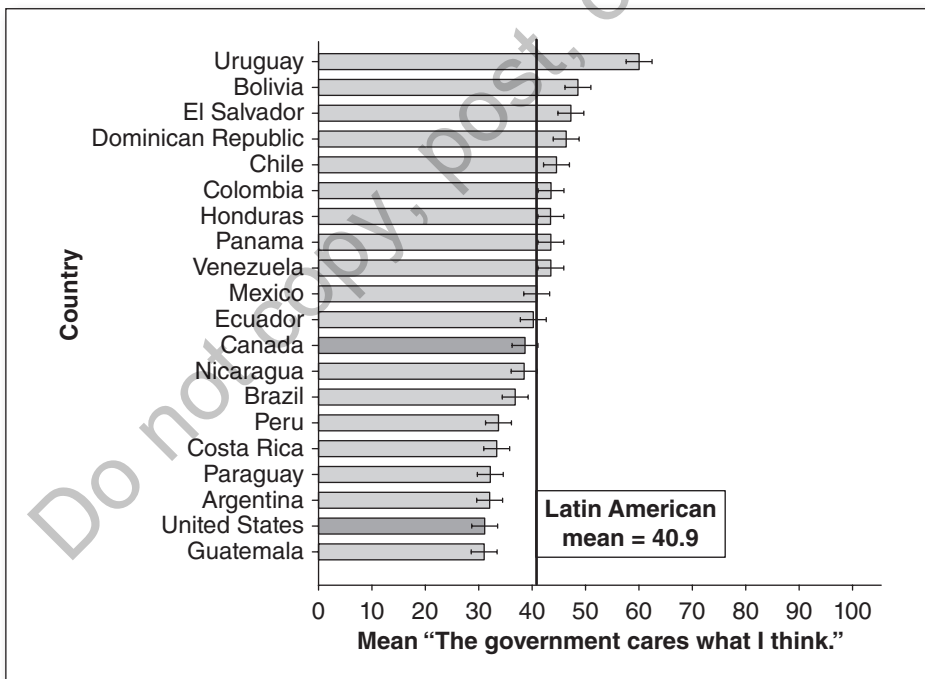
Error bars: 99% CI.

sense that one understands important problems in the country. System-level effects are modest and negative—richer countries and older democracies have citizens with less confidence that they understand national problems.

Compared to their belief that they understand national problems, Latin Americans display a lesser sense of external efficacy (Figure 4.3). The regional average is 40.9, with Uruguayans, at 60, the only country above the scale midpoint in believing public officials attend to their views. In an unusual contrast, citizens of both Canada (38) and the United States (32) fall well below the Latin American average, with the latter tied with Guatemalans for the lowest external efficacy level in the hemisphere. The essential idea of democracy as rule by the people apparently seems distant from lived reality for most of these populations. The majority seem to doubt that public officials care about their ideas.

We find a weakly positive association between internal and external efficacy (.26). Given that both kinds of efficacy average in the negative end of their

FIGURE 4.3 External Efficacy



Source: AmericasBarometer 2010 surveys, www.LapopSurveys.org.

Note: Cases weighted for equal size per country.

Error bars: 99% CI.

scales, we wonder whether Latin American governments' political legitimacy may be low, a question we address in Chapter 5.

We are struck that Canadians and U.S. citizens have a much larger gap in the average difference between internal and external efficacy than Latin Americans, Canadians at 18 scale points, tied with the highest gap seen in the Latin American countries, and U.S. citizens at a whopping 36 scale points, 4 times greater than the Latin American average. Latin Americans clearly perceive some discrepancy between what they believe they know about national problems and how much the government cares about their views, but not nearly so much as Canadian and, especially, U.S. citizens. North Americans think they know a lot about politics but are also soundly convinced the government pays little attention to their opinions. What does this suggest about the political cultures of these countries? Does this divergence have implications for the relative stability of the political systems? Do individuals feel frustrated when they think they know a lot about national problems but also believe the government ignores their views? Might this motivate distrust in political systems, or inspire protest? And, if so, might the United States and Canada have more to worry about with a discontented citizenry than most Latin American nations? We consider this in our case study in this chapter.

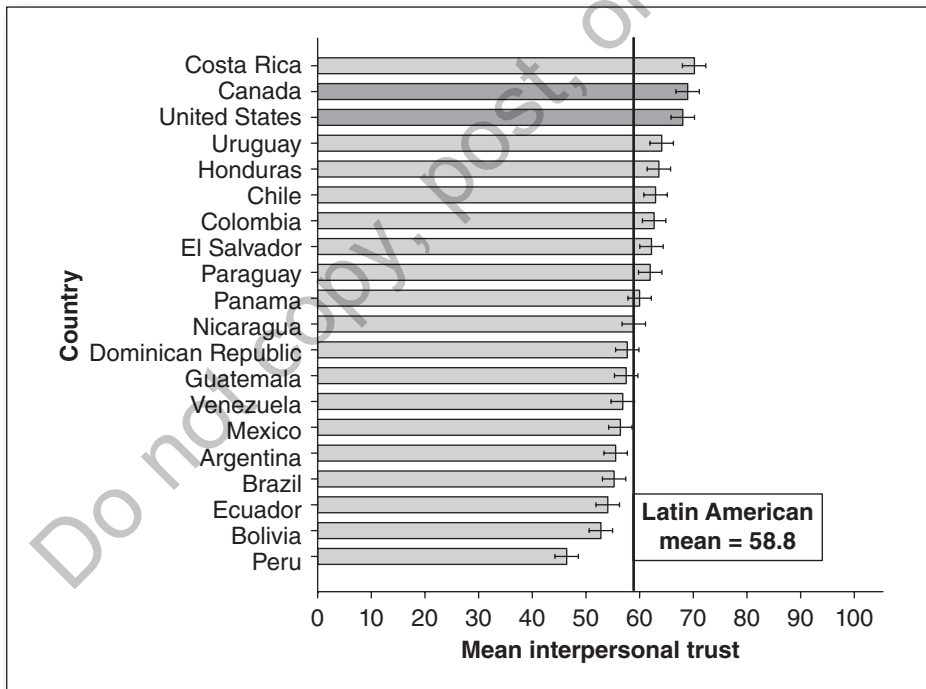
Interpersonal Trust: May Be Increasing

Generalized trust that citizens place in each other has been recognized as a norm that facilitates cooperation, allowing people to work together to solve common problems.¹¹ Such *interpersonal trust*, as we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3, associates positively with democratic attitudes and negatively with authoritarian and confrontational norms. (On the other hand, we will show in Chapter 9 that interpersonal trust failed to contribute to increasing democracy or economic growth in several Latin American nations in the first decade of the 2000s.) Using the AmericasBarometer item, "*Now speaking of the people from around here, would you say that people in this community are very, somewhat, not very trustworthy, or untrustworthy?*," we coded the replies into a scale ranging from 0 (untrustworthy) to 100 (very trustworthy). Our earlier review of the literature on Latin America suggested that trust might be low. One piece of empirical evidence (a late 1990s study) pegged interpersonal trust among Latin Americans at "one third" the levels prevalent in Europe.¹²

Figure 4.4 compares interpersonal trust among Latin Americans with that of citizens of Canada and the United States. Costa Ricans, Canadians, and citizens of the United States all have scores close to 70 out of 100. The Latin American mean is 58.8, with Peruvians least trusting, followed by their Andean-area neighbors, Bolivia and Ecuador. Muller and Seligson have argued that trust may arise from good performance by government.¹³ If so, we should find higher trust among citizens who express confidence in the government and especially in the courts, where individuals must go to get redress for grievances. A multiple regression analysis of individual-level determinants of trust revealed that, in addition to age and education,

confidence that the political system protects individual rights, confidence in the national judicial system, confidence in the election system, and confidence in the national government all contributed to greater interpersonal trust. The low-trust countries, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, all experienced proximate or ongoing institutional turmoil before the 2010 surveys. Bolivia and Ecuador had populist presidents who pressed constitutional reforms that affected citizens' rights and the structure and jurisdiction of courts. These changes and their implications likely disrupted public confidence in rights and the judiciary. Peru's presidency under Alberto Fujimori ended in 2000 with his flight to Japan and resignation. After returning to Peru in disgrace, he was subsequently prosecuted for human rights violations committed by his national intelligence service. We are not surprised to find low trust among Peruvians given the institutional corruption revealed in the years prior to the survey.

FIGURE 4.4 Interpersonal Trust



Source: AmericasBarometer 2010 surveys, www.LapopSurveys.org.

Note: Cases weighted for equal size per country.

Error bars: 99% CI.

We mentioned above that an earlier study suggested that Latin Americans' trust lagged far behind Europeans.⁹ That study used the Latinobarometer, which employs a similar but not identical item to gauge trust from that of the AmericasBarometer. The former's item, "*in general most people can be trusted,*" is broader than the one we use, which refers to trusting "people in this community," a narrower context. Thus, we must interpret with caution. The Latinobarometer cross-national study of the 1990s¹⁴ shows lower trust in people "in general" than the AmericasBarometer has subsequently, referring to people "in this community."¹⁵ It may be that people are more likely to trust their own community members than people in general; people obviously know more about their neighbors than about people in general.

Some of the difference, though, may result from a real increase in trust. The institutionalist view of political culture proposes that democracy breeds trust: Individuals living in less repressive regimes should be less wary of arbitrary or oppressive authorities and worry less about being denounced as subversives. This in turn may boost trust in people around them. Less repression under democracy and longer experience of democracy may explain apparently rising interpersonal trust scores in Latin America. Indeed, a multiple regression analysis reveals that Latin America's older democracies have higher trust levels. Costa Rica, the region's oldest continuous democracy has the highest trust, while Peru, one of the younger democracies, reveals the least trust.

PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND IDEOLOGY

We have so far explored Latin Americans' ideas about national problems, their interest in and knowledge of politics, their efficacy and interpersonal trust, all of which can shape their inclination and ability to enter the civic and political arenas. In this section, we examine attitudes toward important, specific political phenomena—willingness to identify with political parties and placement on the left-right ideological spectrum.

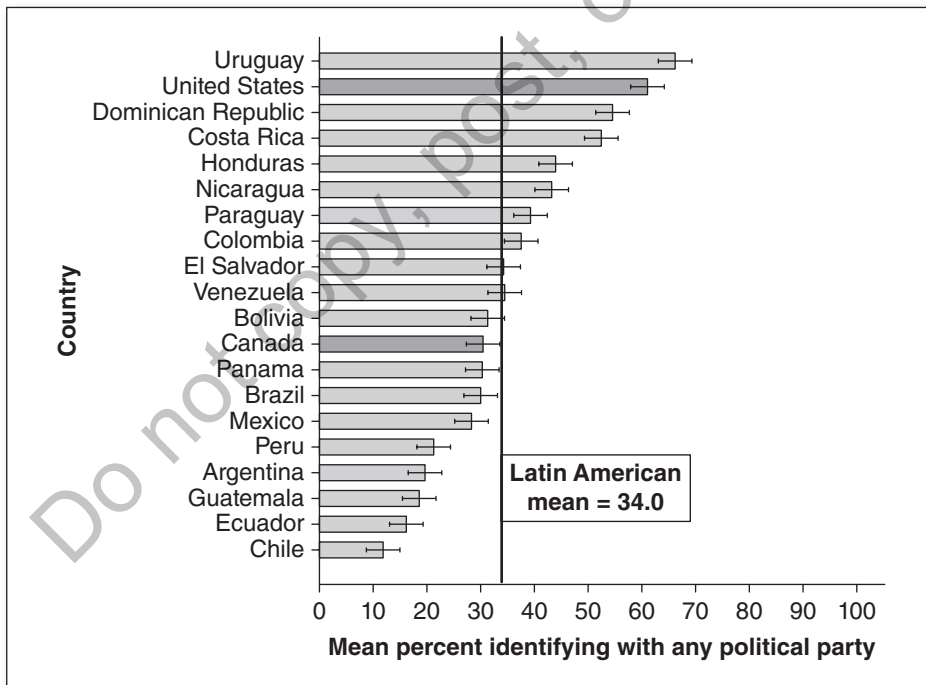
Party Identification: In Older Democracies More Citizens Identify With a Party

An aspect of citizens' relationship to their political systems concerns the contest for political power. In democracies, this usually involves political parties. Latin America's party systems have been changing rapidly in recent decades, with old Conservative and Liberal parties eroding or disappearing (as in Nicaragua and Uruguay), party systems becoming unstable (as in Costa Rica), and new parties appearing with frequency (especially true of contemporary Guatemala).¹⁶ Even with so much party system change, many citizens nevertheless identify with a party. The AmericasBarometer surveys disclose that interest in politics contributes to higher levels of party identification, and that interest and identification are among the strongest predictors of campaign and partisan activism, discussed in Chapter 6.¹⁷

In the surveys, respondents were asked “*At this time, do you sympathize with [support] a political party?*”¹⁸ A regional average of 34% reported such a party identification.¹⁹ Figure 4.5 shows that fewer Latin Americans (except Uruguayans) identify with parties than do U.S. citizens (62%), while Canadians’ party identification level falls below the Latin American average. The stability of the U.S. two-party system, with the same two parties for 150 years, and the fluctuations in many of Latin America’s party systems likely account for the discrepant fractions of party identifiers. Latin American nations diverge considerably on this measure: Seventy-six percent of Uruguayans identified with parties while only 12% of Chileans did so.

Seeking to explain the large variation in party identification, we conducted two multiple regression analyses, one using system-level characteristics, the other individual-level variables.²⁰ Greater democratic longevity contributed most to higher party identification in the system-level model. At the individual level, interest in politics generated the largest effect, with being older having

FIGURE 4.5 Identification With a Political Party



Source: AmericasBarometer 2010 surveys, www.LapopSurveys.org.

Note: Cases weighted for equal size per country.

Error bars: 99% CI.

the second biggest influence. Satisfaction with presidential performance, with government economic performance, and with democracy itself also contributed to higher party identification.

Left-Right Orientation: Uruguayans Lean Farthest Left and Nicaraguans Are the Most Polarized

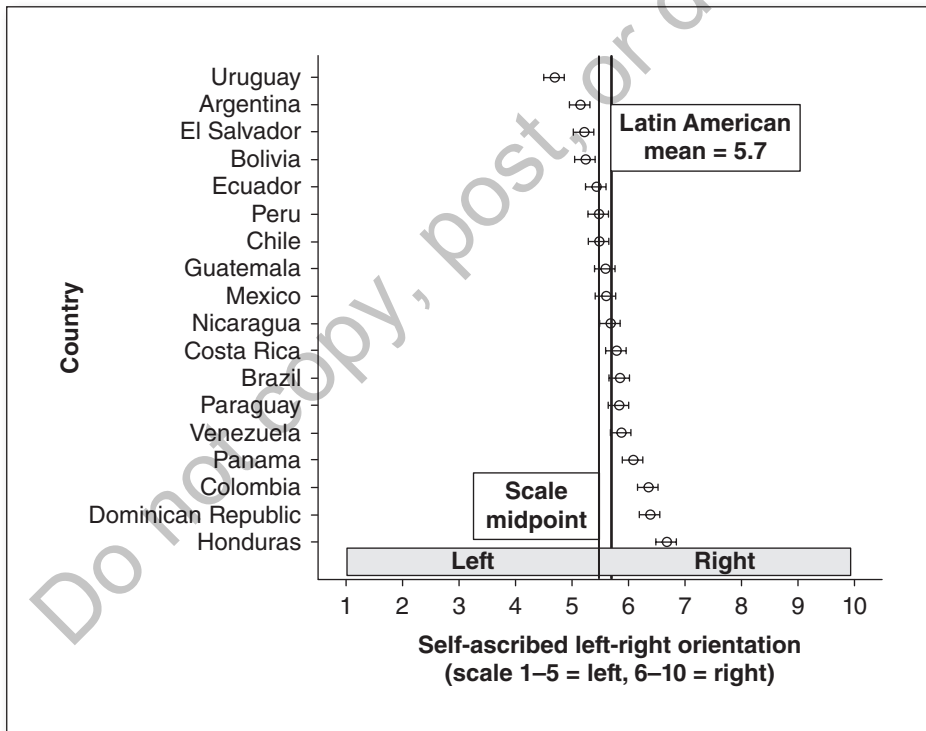
Sympathizing with a political party provides a person with an organizational vehicle to become involved in voting and campaigning. Parties often adopt a political ideology, as do individuals. Ideologies provide a way of placing oneself within a spectrum of policy preferences. Both political party and ideological orientation provide clues to assessing the political environment. One common way of conceiving of ideology is along a left-right continuum concerning the economic role of the state, that is, from communists on the left through conservatives on the right.²¹ Any such scheme risks oversimplifying complex matters. Other important dimensions (such as personal liberty and autonomy and the proper role of religion in public affairs) also carry expectations about the state and its role, and these dimensions may not map neatly onto each other.

Bitter political conflict has been waged over party ideologies and the programs they imply. Ideological arguments between left and right contributed to intense outbursts of political violence in Latin America, with revolutionaries on the left challenging establishment politicians on the right for the right to rule. Between 1950 and 2000, for example, such revolutionary insurrections occurred in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay, Colombia, and Argentina, to name some of the more significant cases. Ideological views have often shaped U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America as well. American foreign policy makers have persistently and consistently seen threats to U.S. interests in Latin American political movements that appear more than slightly left of center. Leftist parties bring more regulation of business, a larger public sector, and greater public expenditures—positions the United States generally opposes. A rightward shift, in contrast, would constrain social welfare spending, rein in the rights of organized labor, and promote “business-friendly” policies—policies often favored by U.S. policy makers and investors, provided they do not move so far that they foment unrest.

The AmericasBarometer’s question designed to capture left-right orientation uses a scale from 1 (left) to 10 (right): “*Today when one talks about political tendencies, many people speak of those who sympathize more with the left or with the right. According to the meaning the terms “left” and “right” have for you, and thinking of your own political leanings, where would you place yourself on this scale? [“left” = 1 to 5, “right” = 6 to 10].*”²² Figure 4.6 presents the average score of the 18 countries based on the respondents who placed themselves on the scale (seven out of eight), with the regional mean just to the right of center, at 5.7, an ideologically centrist position.²³ In Uruguay, Argentina, El Salvador, and Bolivia, the national average is to the

left of the scale midpoint. In eight nations, the average is to the right of center. Uruguay and Honduras have the most divergent positions. On balance, more national average positions are on the right side of the scale. Governments and these positions are not always in synchrony: Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and El Salvador had leftist governments (or at least their presidents were from leftist parties), but Venezuelans reported a mean ideology slightly on the right side of the scale, Nicaraguans were not significantly different from the mean, and Salvadorans were slightly to the left. Uruguay, which we discussed in Chapter 2's case study, again distinguishes itself: Not only does it have the highest level of party identification but it also stands as the most liberal country.

FIGURE 4.6 Mean Left-Right Ideological Position of Citizens



Source: AmericasBarometer 2010 surveys, www.LapopSurveys.org.

Notes: Brackets around the circles marking the mean positions represent 99% confidence intervals.

Cases weighted for equal size per country.

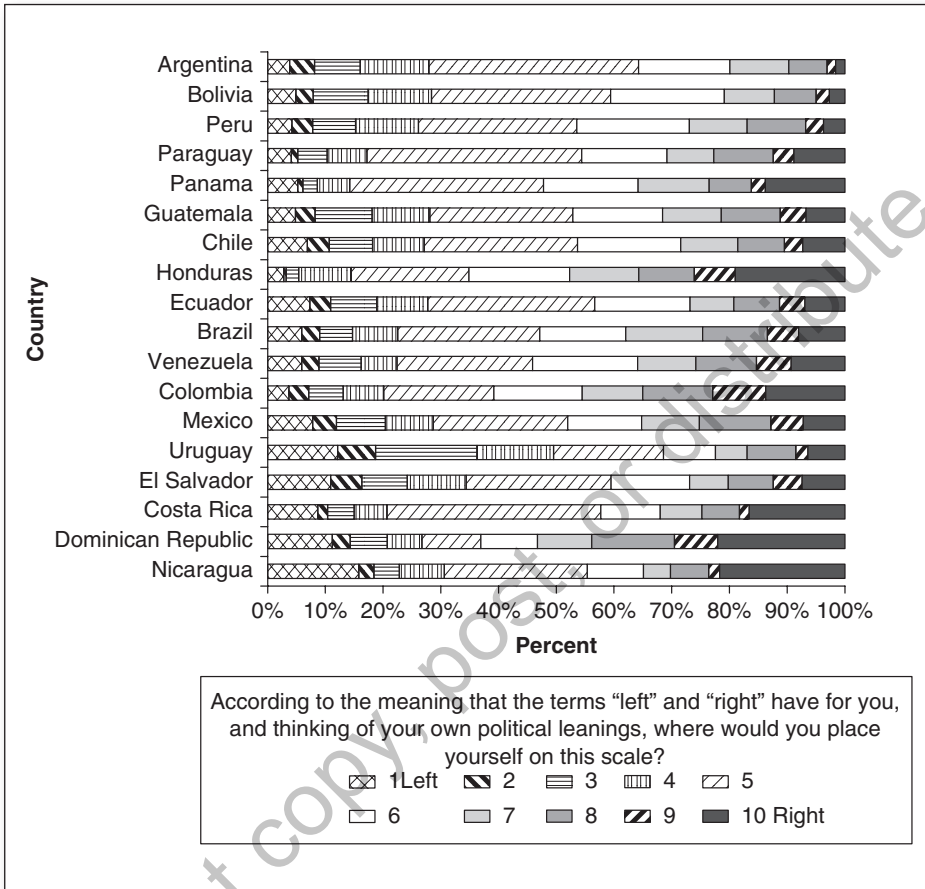
Mean ideological positions, however, do not tell us how polarized Latin Americans might be. Equal numbers of extreme right and left positions produce a mean at the middle of the scale. So would a distribution right around the center. It is an axiom of political science that national opinion distributions with more moderates tend to have more stable policies because politicians need to attract votes from the middle of the spectrum where most voters are. Countries with disparate ideological views (clumping farther out on both ends of the left-right scale) may have more severe political conflict and gridlock, or boomerang policies as governments reflecting the contrasting ideological views succeed each other in power. We find most Latin Americans located near the center of the continuum with small bulges on the far left and far right (see Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7 arrays the countries from top to bottom by increasing levels of polarization based on respondents' left to right self-location—those at the top are the least ideologically polarized, those at the bottom the most polarized. The patterns indicate the distribution of ideological tendencies. The dividing line for left and right falls between 5 (right-slanted cross hatching) and 6 (white). The most extreme leftist position (a value of 1 on the scale) is white with black x-marks and is located on the graph's left. The most extreme rightist position (10 on the scale), tinted solid charcoal, is on the graph's right. The most polarized countries have the greatest percentages of citizens in these extreme end positions and their neighboring values.

We first scrutinize comparative polarization. Argentines, Bolivians, and Peruvians are the least polarized, with less than 10% of their citizens identifying with either the extreme left or extreme right. All three exhibit strong ideological centers. In contrast, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic are the most polarized, followed closely by Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Uruguay (see standard deviations in online Supplement H at <http://study.sagepub.com/booth1e>). In three countries with leftist presidents, each representing a once-revolutionary leftist party, a majority placed itself on the left in 2010: Nicaragua (55%), El Salvador (59%), and Uruguay (72%). Peru, Chile, Costa Rica, and Guatemala are rather evenly divided between right and left. Countries where self-described rightists predominate among citizens are Honduras (73%), Panama, and Colombia (at 62% each). (See online Supplement I at <http://study.sagepub.com/booth1e>.)

The most interesting case of ideological polarization as we wrote this in early 2014 was Venezuela, where President Nicolás Maduro's government faced a broad challenge from opponents. In 2010 and with Hugo Chávez still president, 64% of Venezuelans self-located on the left end of the ideological scale, but by 2012, left identifiers had declined to 58%. Ailing with cancer, President Chávez won reelection by an 11-point margin in 2012. Following his death a few months later, however, his chosen successor and interim president, Maduro, squeaked by the opposition's Hugo Capriles to win the presidency by only 200,000 votes out of 15 million cast. The case study below describes Venezuela's history and recent political events.

FIGURE 4.7 **Left-Right Ideological Position**



Source: AmericasBarometer 2010 surveys, www.LapopSurveys.org.

Note: Cases weighted for equal size per country.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM: GOVERNMENT AND WELFARE AND DIVISIONS ON THE RULE OF LAW

We turn now to Latin Americans' views of their government's responsibilities. We look at what respondents think the economic role of the state should be and whether they believe that public officials should comply with the law.

Economic Role of the State: Consensus That Government Should Promote General Welfare

As we described earlier in this chapter, ideas about the role of the state in the economy have shifted between two contrasting approaches—a state-centric one with much government economic involvement and regulation, and a Liberal/neoliberal one with a smaller state, more open trade, and financial freedom. To what extent has either laid claim to Latin Americans' views of the role of the state? Six items tap into this question (Table 4.1).

We factor analyzed these six items and discovered two attitude dimensions (see online Supplement J at <http://study.sagepub.com/booth1e>). One consists solely of the first item about government ownership of principal industries, the second of all the remaining items. We designate these as the *public ownership* and *welfare* orientations on the role of the state. We have converted each into a scale ranging from 0 (completely disagree) to 100 (completely agree). The two dimensions correlate only slightly with each other, which indicates they are almost entirely independent of each other.²⁴

Figure 4.8 compares average views on the two state roles. Latin Americans strikingly concur that governments should promote the general welfare by reducing inequality, providing health care and pensions, and creating jobs. The region's mean scale score, 81.3, almost doubles the score for U.S. citizens.

TABLE 4.1 AmericasBarometer Questions About the Economic Role of the State

[Here are] some statements about the role of the State. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with them . . . [on a] scale from 1 [completely disagree] to 7 [completely agree].

- *The ____ state, instead of the private sector, should be the owner of the most important industries in the country. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?*
- *The ____ state, more than individuals, should be most responsible for assuring the well-being of the people.*
- *The ____ state, more than private enterprise, should be primarily responsible for creating jobs.*
- *The ____ state should implement strong policies to reduce inequality of incomes between the rich and the poor.*
- *The ____ state, more than the private sector, should be primarily responsible for providing retirement pension.*
- *The ____ state, more than the private sector, should be primarily responsible for providing health services.*

Source: AmericasBarometer 2010 surveys; www.LapopSurveys.org.

(Canadians hold a position much closer to Latin Americans on this item than their U.S. neighbors to the south.) The standard deviation (see the note in the box below for an explanation) of the welfare role question is only 19.1 out of 100, which indicates only modest dispersal of opinion on this attitude.

BOX 4.1 Statistical Note on Measuring Dispersion—Standard Deviation

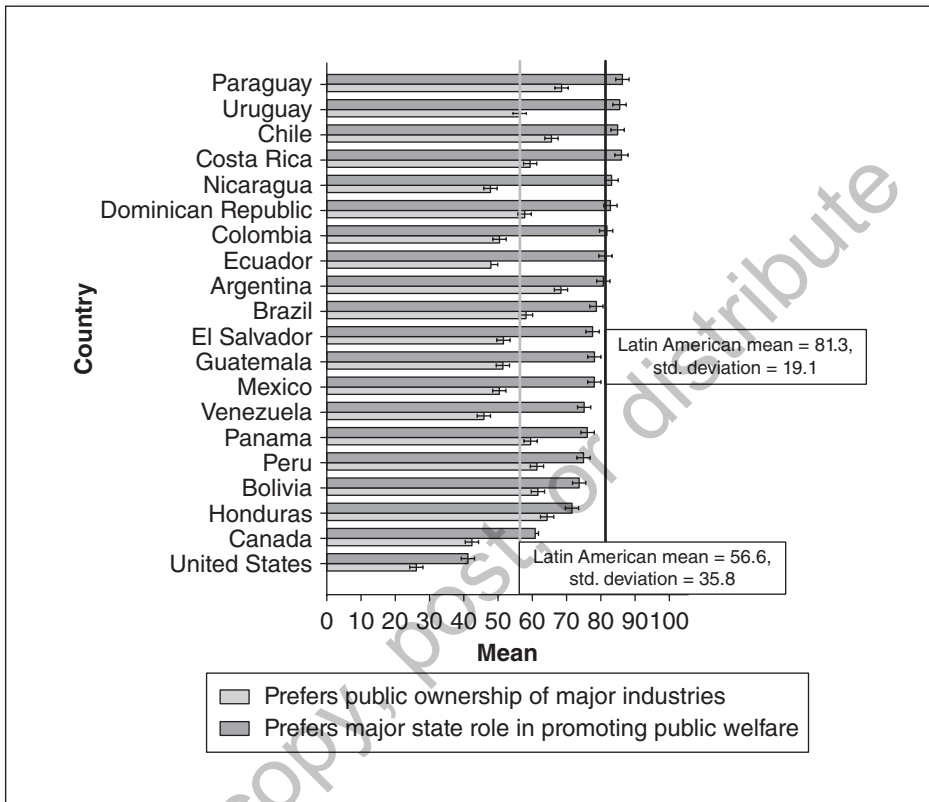
Standard deviation is a measure that tells how closely clustered a set of individual values are around the sample mean. The more spread out they are, the higher is the standard deviation. In this case, the larger the value of standard deviation, the greater is the disagreement among a country's citizens in answering the particular item.

We performed multiple regression analysis on the entire sample to seek out individual-level and contextual-level factors that might influence support for a strong government public welfare role.²⁵ Those who are older, satisfied with the president's performance, and satisfied with the government's economic performance are modestly friendlier to a strong welfare role for government. Those who view the national economy and their own family's economic situation negatively also tilt in favor of a more robust government welfare role. At the contextual level, the citizens of older democracies and of countries with a higher human development index, higher health spending, and greater language and religious fractionalization offer more support for promoting the public welfare.

Attitudes toward state ownership of major industries vary substantially more (standard deviation = 35.8) than those toward the government's welfare role. The Latin American mean support for government ownership, 56.5, stands almost 25 points below the welfare role mean (Figure 4.8). Latin Americans favor public ownership of major industries much more than U.S. citizens and Canadians. We suspect that this region-wide attitude owes in part to the legacy of public ownership of major industries established during the era of state economic intervention.

One fascinating finding of Figure 4.8 is that support for state ownership of major industries is at its lowest in Venezuela (46), Nicaragua, and Ecuador (each at 47 out of 100). Thus, citizens of two nations with openly leftist governments (Venezuela and Nicaragua) and another with a strong populist-oriented leader (Ecuador), hold mildly antistatist views on government ownership, well below the regional mean. In Venezuela's case, press reports in 2014 indicate dissatisfaction with nationalized firms among the middle and upper classes. Moreover, Venezuela suffered from limited availability of basic products and rising price inflation.²⁶

FIGURE 4.8 Views of the Public Ownership and Social Welfare Roles of the State



Source: AmericasBarometer 2010 surveys, www.LapopSurveys.org.

Note: Cases weighted for equal size per country.

Error bars: 99% CI.

Paraguayans, Argentines, Chileans, Hondurans, Bolivians, and Peruvians favor public ownership with scores of 60 or higher. This high-support group includes relatively prosperous countries as well as two of Latin America's poorest, Paraguay and Honduras, so development levels alone are not a sufficient explanation. Some of these countries have experienced major episodes of direct state involvement in owning industries. Argentina significantly invested state funds in enterprises during the 1940s through the 1960s. Chile nationalized foreign-owned copper mines from the 1950s through the early 1970s. Honduran military regimes in the 1960s and 1970s also heavily invested in business enterprises. In contrast to these countries, where a statist economic tradition may have shaped public attitudes to favor government ownership,

Paraguay's economy has been dominated by private agriculture and informal sector commerce, while its public sector investments have been relatively modest. Neither economic development nor ownership patterns account well for the Paraguayans' favorable attitudes on state ownership of industries.

We again performed regression analysis on the 18-country sample to seek possible individual-level and contextual-level factors connected to attitudes toward public ownership of major industries.²⁷ Greater age, education, living standard, and perception of personal insecurity all contributed to lower support for public ownership. Those who viewed their family economic situation as having improved were less favorable toward public ownership. People satisfied with the government's economic performance held strongly more positive attitudes about government ownership of industries while those satisfied with the president's performance and more interested in politics were a bit more supportive. Three national-level factors had a positive influence: the national democracy score,²⁸ public education spending as percentage of GDP, and language fractionalization. The democracy level influence suggests that Latin Americans trust more democratic governments with economic ownership. Finally, greater ethnic divisions reduced support for government ownership of important industries.

In summary, we discovered several important things about Latin Americans' view of government's proper economic role. First, a large majority of Latin Americans consider the state responsible for general welfare. Even where this preference is weakest, in Honduras, the scale mean is 73 out of 100. This finding suggests that the regional tradition of a strong state with a wide economic reach still influences Latin Americans attitudes and that recent neoliberalism did not undermine this cultural norm. Second, while Latin Americans show less enthusiasm about state ownership of major industries, the region averages above the scale midpoint on this norm. Third, Canadians lie somewhere between Latin Americans and U.S. citizens on each of these attitudes. Finally, we have illuminated the chasm between Latin Americans' and U.S. citizens' views concerning both government's welfare promotion role and government ownership.

This profound cultural difference between the United States and Latin America almost certainly has affected and will likely continue to influence political and economic relations. Latin Americans clearly expect their governments to promote prosperity and well-being. U.S. policy tends to prescribe that Latin American states take on less economic responsibility and employ fewer people. This stance shaped the neoliberal policy stipulations that the U.S. government and international lenders required for providing economic assistance to address the debt crises of the late twentieth century. But, in fact, Latin American countries often failed to comply fully or consistently with the deals they made because of strong pressure and cultural biases prevalent among citizens and policy makers in the region.²⁹

Government Compliance With the Law: The Vulnerable Prefer a Law-Abiding State

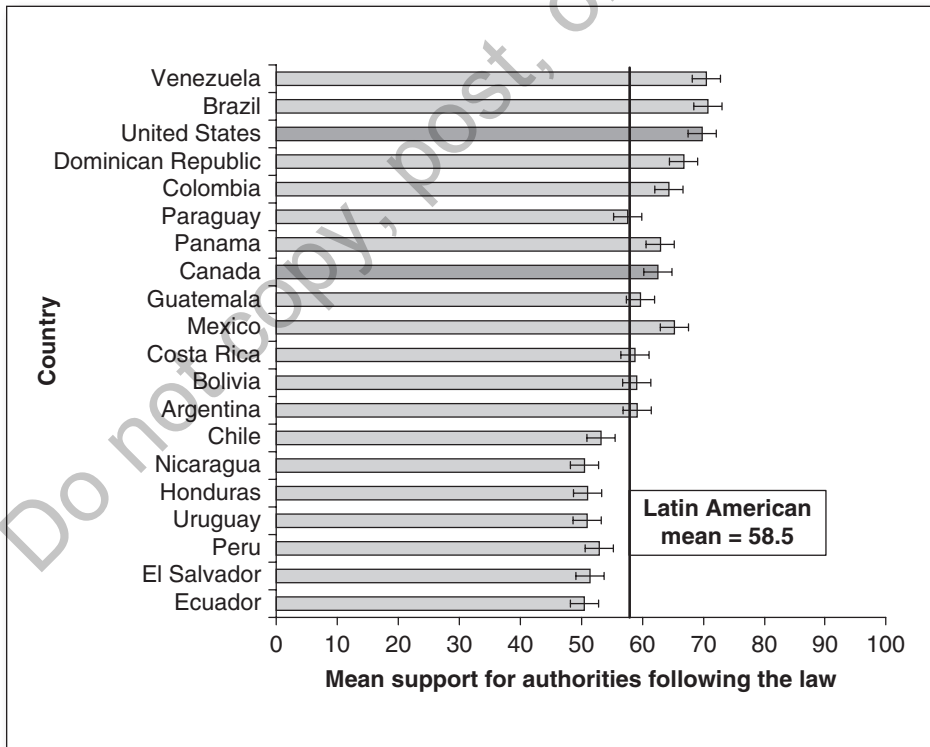
Another dimension of expectations of the government concerns whether it should, when pursuing the public interest, abide by its own laws. It is an important principle of constitutional democracy that governments should be

restrained by laws. Criminal procedure rules and citizens' rights provisions intend to offer protection from abuse by authorities.

The AmericasBarometer surveys asked, "In order to catch criminals, do you believe that the authorities should always abide by the law or that occasionally they can cross the line? Yes or no?" (Since the response choices are dichotomous [yes or no] rather than graded in a multipoint scale, we converted the national average scores to percentages of agreement/disagreement on a 100-point scale.) Figure 4.9 presents the national averages of agreement with the notion that authorities should obey the law when pursuing criminals.

Support for government compliance with the law when pursuing criminals is 58.5% across the region, highest in Venezuela and Brazil, where over 70% agree with the proposition, and lowest in Ecuador (45%) and El Salvador (47%). El Salvador has experienced a terrible crime wave related to drug trafficking in the 2000s, as have Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Venezuela.

FIGURE 4.9 Support for Authorities Following the Law When Pursuing Criminals



Source: AmericasBarometer 2010 surveys, www.LapopSurveys.org.

Note: Cases weighted for equal size per country.

Error bars: 99% CI.

This experience cannot account for differences in this attitude, however, because, while Salvadorans and Hondurans fall in the lower end of preference for official compliance with the law in pursuing criminals (arguably a predictable response to rampant crime), Venezuelans, Mexicans, and Guatemalans express mean support for compliance well above the regional mean. In the more recent 2012 AmericasBarometer survey, the regional mean of support for police compliance with the law rose by more than 5 scale points to 64, from 59 in 2010, indicating movement toward greater support for the rule of law.

In the 2012 AmericasBarometer survey, additional items asked to what extent did respondents “*approve, understand but not approve, or neither understand nor approve*” of the police torturing a criminal to obtain information about a “*dangerous organized crime group*” and of “*some group conducting ‘social cleansing’ (executing without benefit of law) of undesirables*.” We include this item in the rule of law discussion because, when they have appeared and operated (examples include Honduras, Guatemala, and Brazil), such groups typically involved police or military personnel acting covertly. On the two new items, disapproval of “social cleansing” scored 72. Disapproval of police torture to get information on a criminal gang was 55, close to the scale midpoint. Tolerance for police using torture in fighting violent crime was highest in several Central American countries experiencing very high murder rates and drug crime.

Regression analysis³⁰ on the 2010 surveys revealed very few significant correlates for preference that public authorities comply with the law when pursuing criminals. Women gave 14% greater support while three contextual effects made some difference: a higher human development index and both linguistic and ethnic fractionalization. Thus, the greater the level of national socioeconomic development, the more likely a country’s citizens favor law abiding officials. We interpret the strong positive association between linguistic and religious divisions and support for the rule of law as arising from concerns among citizens of fragmented societies (and perhaps especially their minorities) that they not be subjected to abuse by authorities acting on behalf of dominant sectors. Indeed, members of both racial and ethnic minorities in Latin America and citizens with darker skin color express significantly higher support for official compliance with the law than whites, mestizos, and lighter skin-toned people³¹ (see Chapter 7 for a longer discussion). In short, more socially vulnerable people, including women, prefer officials who comply with the law, likely because such behavior would potentially afford them some protection.

To this point, we have found Latin Americans to be aware of national problems and to expect their governments to promote the general welfare. They show less interest in politics than U.S. citizens but considerably more optimism about public officials’ attentiveness to their concerns. They are generally ideologically centrist, with considerable variation among countries. Ideological polarization ranges widely across the region. We turn now to a case study of Venezuela, where expectations of the government became

increasingly fraught. Polarization on many attitudes intensified across the 13-year presidency of the charismatic populist President Hugo Chávez and his successor Nicolás Maduro.

CASE STUDY: CAUDILLISMO, CONFRONTATION, AND VENEZUELA'S CRISIS IN THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION

Venezuela lies along South America's Caribbean Coast, with the Andes in the west and highlands in the south, and roughly twice the size of California. About 95% of its 28.5 million people in 2013 resided in cities, making it Latin America's most urban nation.³² Once agriculturally diverse, the rise of the oil industry in the early twentieth century drove both urbanization and a decline of agriculture and other industry. Venezuela became and has remained one of the world's top petroleum producers/exporters, and ranks at the top in oil reserves, with much of its oil going to the United States. For decades foreign companies dominated Venezuela's oil industry, but it was nationalized in 1976.³³

Venezuela virtually defines the model for some of Latin America's most clichéd political culture stereotypes. Turmoil dominated Venezuela's history after independence from Gran Colombia in 1830 as Liberal and Conservative *caudillos* wrested control of the presidency from each other for decades.³⁴ Stability improved after 1913: General Juan Vicente Gómez took power and modernized the government and the oil boom pumped revenue into the treasury. At the end of World War II, emerging middle-class parties and oil workers' unions backed a prodemocracy movement that rode a civilian-military coup to power in 1945. Three years later, General Marcos Pérez Jiménez overthrew the democratic regime and established a military dictatorship. Prodemocracy forces regrouped and backed another civilian-military coup to oust Pérez Jiménez and restart democracy in 1958.

Two parties dominated the democratic regime—the social democratic Acción Democrática (Democratic Action, AD) and the social Christian-oriented Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (Committee for Independent Electoral Organization, COPEI). A shared social democratic development strategy, funded by oil revenue, muted social conflict while at the same time increasingly rewarding entrenched economic and political elites. Falling oil prices brought a fiscal crisis and popular unrest in the 1980s. The army violently suppressed protests against neoliberal economic reforms in 1989. In 1992, Lieutenant-Colonel Hugo Chávez led a failed military coup in the name of the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200), motivated by complaints of corruption under AD President Carlos Andrés Pérez. The latter, whose grandiose spending came to symbolize the flaws of the AD-COPEI system, was impeached and removed from office for corruption in 1993.

Upon his release from prison in 1994, Chávez began organizing an electoral movement by appealing to Venezuelans whom the AD-COPEI system had failed. His political acumen and skill proved remarkable. In the 1998 election, Chávez's Movimiento V República (Fifth Republic Movement), in coalition with other leftist parties, won the presidency with 57% of the vote and captured many other offices. In 2000, Venezuelans elected Chavistas to over half the seats in the Chamber of Deputies, giving the president enormous new power and virtually destroying both AD and COPEI. Subsequent constitutional revisions and court appointments enhanced executive power by dismantling checks and balances and allowing multiple presidential reelections.³⁵ President Chávez pursued socialist economic policies intended to benefit Venezuela's poor majority, and indeed poverty levels fell by almost half between 1999 and 2011, undoubtedly contributing to his own reelections. Chávez's presidency brought unpredictable economic policies, nationalizations, and government intervention in supply chains, among other factors, and increasing economic turmoil. Many business people and professionals emigrated, exerting a further drag on the economy. Inflation increased dramatically and crime rose sharply.

President Chávez's caudillistic style, ties to Cuba and other authoritarian regimes, heavy reliance on governing by decree, efforts to take over the trade union movement, constraints on the media, and intimidation generated growing resentment among a fragmented opposition while simultaneously increasing his popularity among Venezuela's poor. In April 2002, a coalition with military backing attempted a coup against him and the Bush administration in the U.S. maladroitly expressed approval. The coup's failure strengthened Chávez. Deploying tricks and threatening his opponents, he survived a 2004 recall vote, and won reelection in 2006 and 2012, although Venezuelans grew increasingly divided about the project of the Bolivarian Revolution.

We examined AmericasBarometer data for Venezuela from 2008 to 2012 (the last survey a few months before President Chávez died). Only a few opinions moved in synchrony: Both Chávez supporters and opponents became less populist,³⁶ less approving of a hypothetical military coup, and less confrontational by 2012, although Chávez voters remained much more populist than those supporting other candidates. Support for the government promoting public welfare actually increased on both sides as the economy deteriorated. Venezuelans' comparatively skeptical view of socialism fluctuated upward in 2010 and back to 2008 levels in 2012 as the government ineptly implemented it in the economy.

On several opinions, the two camps remained highly polarized or grew further apart over this four year span. Government supporters in 2012 reported 28 points greater approval of public ownership of major firms than its opponents. The gap between Chávez and opposition voters on political tolerance widened. Not surprisingly, government supporters were far less tolerant of system critics than opposition supporters. Diffuse support for the political system, approval of President Chávez's job performance, and evaluations of the

government's poverty-fighting efforts, all already in the positive end of the scale in 2008, increased by 2012. On each of these, the opinion gap between pro- and anti-government camps widened (respectively to differences of 33, 47, and 38 points out of 100 in 2012). Finally, fewer Venezuelans located themselves on the left end of the spectrum over time.³⁷

When he took office, President Maduro, lacking Chávez's political skill and charisma, heavy-handedly clamped down on the opposition and the media, blaming "fascists" and the United States for the country's ills. Following violent protests in February 2014, he arrested opposition leader Leopoldo López, former mayor of a section of Caracas, and charged him with arson and conspiracy. A few days later, Venezuelan protest movement expert Margarita López Maya commented on the shrinking of political space and hardening of pro- and anti-government opinion: "If you have a society that has no institutional channels to raise its complaints, make demands, form policy, the tradition in Venezuela and in Latin America . . . is to take to the streets."³⁸ With opinions increasingly polarized and with cultural models of heavy-handed leaders and mass resistance to draw upon, Venezuelans' demonstrations, by both supporters and opponents of the government, ominously escalated in early 2014 as the government's response became increasingly violent.³⁹

CONCLUSIONS

We began this chapter about Latin Americans' views of government and the political system by recalling some history, including the pattern of government involvement in the economy and the proposed association of Latin Americans with low interest in politics, low interpersonal trust, and low political efficacy. We wanted to explore how this background might influence contemporary Latin American political culture.

Our data reveal that Latin Americans recognize national problems and that these problems vary by country according to local political and economic realities. The problems identified fell into four rubrics: economic woes, inadequate public services, bad government/corruption, and personal security/crime. These issues involve government for their solution or are in fact problems of governance itself. Thus, we have found Latin Americans directly or indirectly invoking governmental relevance to national problems. Intriguingly, Latin Americans mention bad government far less than their neighbors in the United States.

When we looked at attitudes that can encourage political engagement, we found Latin Americans moderately interested in politics and moderately politically informed, in each case noticeably less so than U.S. citizens. Contrary to what the literature suggested, Latin Americans have reasonably high interpersonal trust levels. They express only moderate belief in their ability to understand national political problems (internal efficacy) and hold still lower expectations that officials care about their views (external efficacy). On balance, we see citizenries that are neither passionately concerned about politics

nor alienated and politically disabled. Latin Americans hold more positive views of their governments—as more attentive and less “bad” on average—than do U.S. citizens.

Latin Americas’ party systems have been in flux in recent decades, with old and well-established parties changing rapidly and even breaking down. The proportion of citizens’ identification with political parties ranges widely, from percentages in the low teens to the mid-sixties. We suspect that low commitment to specific political parties would tend to encourage party system volatility and instability in public policy in countries like Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Argentina, and Peru. In terms of ideological orientations, Latin Americans tend on average to be centrists. Panamanians, Dominicans, and Colombians trend more conservative, while Uruguayans, Argentines, Salvadorans, and Bolivians tilt more toward the left. Nicaraguans and the Dominicans are the most ideologically polarized, with more people clustering at the ideological extremes. Argentines, Bolivians, and Peruvians, in contrast, tend to hew toward the ideological center.

In contrast to ideology and party allegiance, remarkable consensus exists across the region about the appropriate roles for the state. Our data disclose Latin Americans’ strong belief that their governments should promote the general welfare by reducing inequality, providing health care and pensions, and creating jobs. They are divided more evenly over whether the government should own major firms. While recognizing that national variations exist, we can nevertheless summarize the regional culture as occupying a social democratic position (supporting welfare promotion and moderate government involvement in owning firms) as opposed to a socialist (preferring extensive welfare promotion plus government ownership of major industries) or neoliberal one (preferring low welfare promotion and low state economic involvement). Latin Americans support a significantly stronger state role than do U.S. citizens.

Finally, Latin Americans modestly favor the proposition that the police should follow the law, which we interpret as a measure of insistence on the rule of law. Only Ecuador fell into the negative end of the agreement scale. Other measures of support for the rule of law, from 2012, reveal disagreement with “social cleansing” (killing) of undesirables but ambivalence about police use of torture against dangerous criminal gangs.

We leave this chapter on Latin Americans’ views of the political system and their place in it having found them aware of and moderately sure of their knowledge of important national problems. They are modestly interested in and informed about politics, not cynical, but rather trusting of each other and somewhat confident of their governments’ attentiveness to their opinions. On average, Latin Americans are not ideologically extreme and many do not identify with political parties. They take a social democratic stance on the role of the state rather than a socialist or neoliberal view.

FURTHER ANALYSIS EXERCISES

- Explore the ideological distributions of the populations in the 18 countries in Figure 4.7. Investigate the parties in power and their ideological positions in one or more of the countries. Do they correspond with that of the citizenry? When was the last change in party control?
- The United States diverges from Latin America in a number of views on the political system and government, on fear of crime and role of government, for example. What political cultural and other factors might account for this?
- Examine current and former public ownership of industries in several Latin American countries. Does the experience with and/or level of such ownership correspond with the degree of support of such ownership? What does this mean for the institutionalist view of political culture?

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