AmericasBarometer
The public speaks on democracy and governance in the Americas

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Mitchell Seligson – Vanderbilt University

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Boston MA
May 19, 2013
AmericasBarometer

- Multi-country public opinion survey on democracy, governance and political engagement
- Conducted by consortium of academic and think tank partners (Latin American Public Opinion Project - LAPOP)
- Started with Costa Rica in 1979; now encompasses 26 countries (99% of hemisphere’s population)
- Most comprehensive public opinion project in the western hemisphere
- Unique research used extensively by academics and decision-makers (World Bank, OAS, UNDP)
Topics covered (2012)

- Civic and political engagement
- Participation in the electoral process
- Attitudes about democracy
- Confidence in the political system and institutions
- Tolerance for political dissent
- Democratic and human rights
- Confidence in the justice system and the rule of law
- Corruption in government
- Experience with crime and community safety
- The role of government in addressing income inequality
- National economy and household financial circumstances
- Overall life satisfaction
• Only household survey spanning the hemisphere
• Ongoing research program, with multiple waves to track trends
• Sample sizes of 1,500 respondents minimum per country
• In-depth face-to-face interviews (online in Canada and USA)
• Interviews in 15 indigenous languages
• Extensive, year-long pretests: (1,116 versions for 2012)
• 2004-2012: 178,864 Interviews
Nationally representative surveys, covering easy-to-access urban centers . . .
And remote villages
Interviews using handheld devices with custom-designed software
Public dissemination and media coverage
Free reports available online

Regional Reports


Report Editors:
Mitchell A. Seligson, Ph.D.
Vanderbilt University

Amy Erica Smith, Ph.D.
Iowa State University

Elizabeth J. Zeckmeister, Ph.D.
Vanderbilt University

Country Reports

Cultura política de la democracia en Bolivia, 2012: Hacia la igualdad de oportunidades

Ciudadanía
Comunidad de Estudios Sociales y Acción Pública

LAPOP
Proyecto de Opinión Pública en América Latina
World-wide free access to data sets

www.LapopSurveys.org
International consortium of research organizations

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Why does a hemispheric perspective matter?

- Place USA in a broader international context
- Latin America is an emerging but poorly understood region
- Myths and stereotypes are limiting and problematic
- Public opinion research essential to getting the full picture
Selected Results
AmericasBarometer 2012
Economic well-being
Confidence in the national economy has been steadily increasing across the hemisphere.

How would you describe the country's economic situation?

[figure shows mean values on a 0-100 scale where 0=very bad and 100=very good]

Source: ©AmericasBarometer by LAPOP

*Trend in 10 countries in 2004*
How would you describe the country’s economic situation? Would you say that it is very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad or very bad?

Numbers are mean values on 0 – 100 scale

But confidence varies across countries – strongest in South America
Household wealth inequality has decreased in almost all countries

Index based on household ownership of the following items:

- TV
- Refrigerator
- Landline
- Cellphone
- Vehicle
- Washing machine
- Microwave
- Motorcycle
- Indoor plumbing
- Indoor bathroom
- Computer

Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP
Despite economic progress, many are affected by food insecurity.

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

In the past three months, because of lack of money or other resources, did you or some other adult in the household ever eat only once a day or go without eating all day?

Source: ©AmericasBarometer by LAPOP
Government corruption
Perceptions of government corruption are widespread in most countries.

Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption among public officials is: very common, common, uncommon, or very uncommon.

Source: ©AmericasBarometer by LAPOP
Some people say that under some circumstances it would be justified for the military of this country to take power by a coup d’état (military coup).

In your opinion would a military coup be justified when there is a lot of corruption? (Yes – No)

For many, perceptions of corruption decrease support for democracy.
Some people say that under some circumstances it would be justified for the military of this country to take power by a coup d'état (military coup).

In your opinion would a military coup be justified when there is a lot of corruption? (Yes – No)

Source: AmericasBarometer of LAPOP, 2012.
In most countries, actual experience with corruption is much lower than perceptions.

**Index of Corruption Victimization:**

- **Has a police officer asked you for a bribe in the last twelve months?**
- **In the last twelve months, did any government employee ask you for a bribe?**
- **In the last twelve months, to process any kind of document in your municipal government, like a permit for example, did you have to pay any money above that required by law?**
- **In your work, have you been asked to pay a bribe in the last twelve months?**
- **Did you have to pay a bribe to the courts in the last twelve months?**
- **In order to be seen in a hospital or a clinic in the last twelve months, did you have to pay a bribe?**
- **Have you had to pay a bribe at school in the last twelve months?**

Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP
Role of government & legitimacy of the state
Role of the State:
(1-7 scale)

The (Country) government, more than individuals, should be primarily responsible for ensuring the well-being of the people.

The (Country) government, more than the private sector, should be primarily responsible for creating jobs.

The (Country) government should implement strong policies to reduce income inequality between the rich and the poor.

The (Country) government, more than the private sector should be primarily responsible for providing health care services.

Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP
Legitimacy of political system and institutions varies by country

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<th>Country</th>
<th>Legitimacy Score</th>
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Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP
US citizens are among the least respectful of their political institutions . . .

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

Scale 1 – 7 (converted to 0-100 scale)

Source: ©AmericasBarometer by LAPOP
And least trusting in their mass media

To what extent do you trust the mass media?

Scale 1 – 7 (converted to 0-100 scale)

Source: ©AmericasBarometer by LAPOP
“Those who govern this country are interested in what people like you think. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?”

(Scale 1 – 7, converted to 0 – 100 scale)

Venezuelans - under Chavez - are the most positive about being heard by those in power.
But Americans are the strongest proponents of free speech
LAPOP indicator of “democracy at risk” – varies across the hemisphere

Source: ©AmericasBarometer by LAPOP
Changes in support for stable democracy: 2010 - 2012
Concluding remarks

- Exemplar of independent, collaborative, locally-sourced international research

- A public opinion window into an emerging world region
Concluding remarks

• Exemplar of independent, collaborative, locally-sourced international research

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• Open-source data to researchers world-wide
Concluding remarks

- Exemplar of independent, collaborative, locally-sourced international research
- A public opinion window into an emerging world region
- Open-source data to researchers world-wide
- USA data yet to be examined
For more information: www.lapopsurveys.org

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