



LAPOP Lab's
AmericasBarometer takes the

Pulse of Democracy

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20
26



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Global Democracy
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LAPOP

The *2026 Pulse of Democracy* is a joint publication of the Center for Global Democracy at Vanderbilt University and the Kellogg Institute for International Studies, part of the Keough School of Global Affairs at the University of Notre Dame. Drawing on data from the AmericasBarometer, the report provides rigorous, comparative evidence on how citizens across the Americas perceive, experience, and evaluate democracy and governance.

The AmericasBarometer is the flagship survey project of Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy and its LAPOP Lab, a global leader in comparative public opinion research. Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer has become the leading source of comparative public opinion data on democracy and governance across the Americas.

Conducted in regular rounds using nationally representative samples of voting-age adults, the AmericasBarometer enables rigorous comparisons across countries and over time. The surveys examine how citizens perceive, experience, and evaluate democracy and governance, covering topics such as democratic legitimacy, trust in institutions, corruption, citizen security, migration, political participation, and government performance.

The 2026 AmericasBarometer was carried out through a partnership between the Center for Global Democracy at Vanderbilt University and the Kellogg Institute for International Studies, part of the Keough School of Global Affairs at the University of Notre Dame, together with an international network of researchers, universities, survey organizations, and institutional partners spanning North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean. These collaborations strengthen questionnaire design, survey implementation, methodological innovation, and the dissemination of research findings.

The 2026 AmericasBarometer includes 21 nationally representative surveys across the Americas. Since its launch in 2004, the project has collected more than 433,000 interviews across 35 countries, making it the largest comparative public opinion survey on democracy and governance in the hemisphere.

AmericasBarometer data, reports, and interactive tools are freely available through the Center for Global Democracy's website, reflecting the project's commitment to open, accessible, and policy-relevant research. Users can explore the data through the Data Playground or download datasets, country reports, regional reports, and other publications.

Through their partnership on the *2026 Pulse of Democracy*, the Center for Global Democracy and the Kellogg Institute combine the AmericasBarometer's leading comparative public opinion data with interdisciplinary scholarship on democracy to generate rigorous, policy-relevant evidence. Together, they seek to inform public debate and help policymakers, practitioners, journalists, civil society organizations, and scholars better understand and strengthen democratic governance throughout the Americas.

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

Generative AI tools were used to assist with editing, coding support, data visualization, and other production tasks during the preparation of this report. All research design, statistical analyses, interpretation of results, and substantive conclusions were conducted and reviewed by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of this report.

PLEASE CITE THIS REPORT AS FOLLOWS

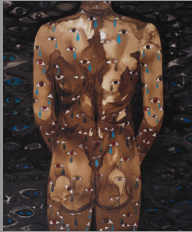
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This report was developed by Editalo, an editorial consulting firm based in Lima, Peru. Its team was responsible for the editorial design, text editing, layout, and cover design, in close collaboration with CGD and LAPOP Lab. / www.editalo.pe

COVER ART

María Magdalena Campos-Pons, *Testigo*, 2023.
Archival pigment print hand-embellished with
ink, watercolor, and gouache, 21 × 18 inches.
Image courtesy of the artist.



About the Partners

CENTER FOR GLOBAL DEMOCRACY

The Center for Global Democracy (CGD) is Vanderbilt University's leading social science institute dedicated to research and innovation in democratic politics. The Center's research examines how citizens perceive, experience, and support democracy across countries and over time, helping answer some of the most pressing questions facing democracies today: Why do citizens lose trust? When do they tolerate democratic backsliding? What strengthens public commitment to democratic institutions?

The cornerstone of CGD's research portfolio is LAPOP Lab, a global leader in international survey research and the home of the AmericasBarometer, the leading source of comparative public opinion data on democracy and governance in the Americas. Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer has collected more than 433,000 interviews across the hemisphere, providing policymakers, researchers, journalists, and civil society organizations with rigorous evidence on democratic governance and citizen attitudes.

Through scientific excellence, global collaboration, and open-access data, CGD generates research that informs public debate and supports evidence-based democratic policy and practice around the world.

KELLOGG INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

The Kellogg Institute for International Studies, part of the Keough School of Global Affairs, is the University of Notre Dame's leading interdisciplinary center for research on democracy, governance, and human development. Building on more than four decades of scholarship, the Institute brings together faculty, students, and visiting scholars from across the social sciences, humanities, and related fields to advance research on how democratic institutions emerge, function, and adapt to contemporary global challenges.

Kellogg's research connects rigorous academic inquiry with real-world policy and practice. Through its global network of researchers, visiting fellows, students, and practitioners, the Institute promotes evidence-based understanding of democratic resilience, political institutions, inclusion, and governance, while fostering dialogue between scholars and those working to strengthen democracy around the world.

The *2026 Pulse of Democracy* reflects a collaborative partnership between the Kellogg Institute and Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy. Combining the AmericasBarometer's leading comparative public opinion data with Kellogg's expertise in democracy research, the partnership advances rigorous, policy-relevant research that informs public debate and strengthens democratic governance throughout the Americas.



Understanding the Figures in this Report

AmericasBarometer data are based on national samples of respondents from each country. As with any survey, estimates are subject to a margin of error. It is important to understand that each estimate (for example, the percentage of citizens in a country who support democracy) has a confidence interval, expressed as a range around that estimate. Many figures in this report display 95% confidence intervals to reflect this sampling uncertainty. When the confidence intervals for two estimates overlap substantially, the difference between them is typically not statistically significant. Conversely, when two confidence intervals do not overlap, readers can be confident that the difference is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Estimates for the 2026 AmericasBarometer are based on weighted data where applicable. Calibration weights are applied in countries where necessary to adjust for differences between the achieved sample distribution and the national population distribution. For face-to-face surveys, these weights are based on variables such as urban/rural residence, gender, and age. Weights for telephone surveys are calculated by estimating baseline probabilities, adjusting for eligibility and nonresponse, and then calibrating them to the most recent available benchmark data. Cross-country and cross-time weights are standardized so that each country-year contributes equally to regional analyses.

Unless otherwise noted, regional analyses include only the 18 Latin American countries surveyed in the 2026 AmericasBarometer. The United States and Canada are included only in country comparison figures when comparable data are available.

Data for this report are based on the prerelease dataset. Analysts using the publicly released data may observe minor differences in some estimates due to ongoing data cleaning and quality-control procedures.

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The Pulse of Democracy in 2026

Noam Lupu and Ann Mische

Democratic commitment rests on two foundations. The first is good governance—government that is effective, responsive, and free of corruption. The second is inclusive growth—economic development that reaches ordinary households.

Three years ago, the AmericasBarometer found the region falling short on both counts: economic pessimism was at an all-time high, household food insecurity was rising, and confidence in government was eroding. As a result, support for democracy had been sliding for more than a decade. The 2026 AmericasBarometer brings welcome good news—but the region still has far to go.

The clearest improvement is economic. In 2023, pessimism about national economies reached record levels across the region. Some of that pessimism has since eased. In most countries, fewer people report that their economy has worsened, and fewer families are going hungry. Household food insecurity has retreated from its pandemic-era peak. Yet these are improvements from a dismal baseline. In many countries, majorities still say their economy has worsened over the past year, and roughly one in four households in the region still cannot reliably put food on

the table. The gains we see are also unevenly shared: in Haiti, state collapse has left the overwhelming majority of the population food insecure. The economic news is better than it has been, but it is not yet good.

On the region's other major source of anxiety—crime and insecurity—the pattern is similar: modest relief atop a still-worrying baseline. The share of people who say they feel unsafe in their own neighborhoods has been drifting downward for nearly a decade and fell again this year. But this easing owes little to any real retreat in crime: rates of criminal victimization have barely changed across the region. Here again, the regional average masks wide variation from one country to the next, and the general sense of insecurity remains pervasive.

Governance is where citizens see the least progress and where discontent runs deepest. The street-level corruption that

ordinary people encounter—being asked to pay a bribe by a police officer or a public servant—has scarcely changed in two decades. Satisfaction with the local services that governments deliver has inched upward since the pandemic, but it remains low. And citizens' assessments of their leaders are both anemic and extraordinarily uneven, ranging from a handful of presidents who command overwhelming approval to others whom almost no one supports. Whatever gains the region has made in economic and physical security, it has made little progress in the quality and responsiveness of government itself.

Even as governance lags, easing economic and physical hardships are shaping one of the most consequential choices families make: whether to emigrate. After reaching near-record highs in the wake of the pandemic, the share of adults who intend to emigrate has fallen sharply—from 31% in 2023 to 25% in

2026, roughly its pre-pandemic level. Tighter U.S. immigration policy is surely part of the story, but easing hardship at home appears to have dulled the incentive to leave as well. The relief is uneven—readiness to depart has actually risen in some countries even as intentions have fallen across the region—and the forces that drive migration—from hunger and economic hardship to crime, corruption, natural disasters, and remittances—remain as powerful as ever. Here, as elsewhere, the region's underlying problems have been eased rather than solved.

Against this mixed backdrop, this report's most consequential finding is that after more than a decade of steady erosion, support for democracy has stopped falling and has begun to recover, albeit modestly. Democratic goodwill increased between 2023 and 2026 across nearly every country in the Americas—the first broad upturn in the region's commitment to democracy in a



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generation. This is genuinely encouraging. Yet it should not be mistaken for a return to democratic health. Support for democracy remains alarmingly low by historical standards, well below the levels recorded when the AmericasBarometer began monitoring the region two decades ago. The region seems to have arrested a long slide and taken a first step back from the brink.

What accounts for even this partial recovery? Two patterns stand out. First, it is broad-based. The uptick is not due to generational turnover or the region's rising education. Democratic support rose across age groups, levels of schooling, and countries. Second, it documents improvements in the lived conditions most closely associated with democratic support. Household economic conditions, food security, and public safety improved across much of the region between 2023 and 2026, coinciding with the regional increase in democratic support. Citizens are responding to a sense that their daily lives are moving in a better direction.

It would be a mistake, however, to read this as evidence that democratic commitment is merely transactional—that citizens back democracy only when the economy delivers and abandon it when it does not. The persistently low level of that commitment precludes any such conclusion. Even as

conditions improve, citizens across the Americas continue to report that they are not receiving the governance or representation they want. That unmet demand is a major reason support for democracy, though rising, remains so low. Improving material conditions appear to have lifted democratic goodwill, but the continued failures of governance appear to be holding it back. Both foundations—inclusive growth and good governance—matter, and the region has begun to deliver on the former while still largely failing on the latter.

The lesson is a demanding one. Democratic commitment reflects whether people believe their governments are honest, capable, and responsive. On that count, the region's citizens remain unconvinced. The modest recovery documented in this report is real and welcome. Yet it is fragile, incomplete, and easily reversed, and it rests atop a level of democratic support that ought to alarm rather than reassure. Deepening it will take more than a cyclical upturn in conditions; it will require the harder, slower work of building government that citizens can trust and representation they recognize as their own. The chapters that follow take the pulse of democracy in the Americas at a moment that invites cautious hope and continued vigilance in equal measure.



BY THE NUMBERS

2026

AMERICASBAROMETER

25,282

interviews

21

countries surveyed

Argentina

Bolivia

Brazil

Canada

Chile

Colombia

Costa Rica

Cuba

Dominican Republic

Ecuador

El Salvador

Guatemala

Haiti

Honduras

Mexico

Nicaragua

Panama

Paraguay

Peru

United States

Uruguay

INTERVIEWER TRAINING

30

local firm
trainings plus

INTERVIEWERS

882

total
interviewers

QUESTIONNAIRES

121

core questions
included in most
countries

166

country-specific
questions

THE AMERICASBAROMETER SERIES

11

survey
rounds in
22 years

35

countries
surveyed
across all
rounds

433,000+

total interviews since 2004

Improving Perceptions of the Status Quo

Noam Lupu¹

CircaHabana Cirkus – LAIPC 2022
Havana, Cuba by Eli Crenshaw-Smith

010

MAIN FINDINGS

- **Economies in the region have improved but still have a long way to go.** In most countries, fewer people say their economy is getting worse than in 2023, and fewer families are food insecure than a few years ago. But this is a recovery from a low point: in many countries, most people still say the economy has worsened, and roughly one in four still faces food insecurity.
- **People feel somewhat safer, while crime victimization has declined only slightly.** The share of people who feel unsafe in their own neighborhood has been declining steadily for nearly a decade. Crime victimization also declines between 2023 and 2026, although the regional change is modest and masks substantial differences across countries.
- **Government performance remains a source of discontent.** Bribe solicitation remains largely stable over the past two decades. Satisfaction with local services has inched up since the pandemic, but views of leaders remain low and highly uneven, ranging from a few presidents with overwhelming support to others almost no one approves of.

Discontent with the status quo has been a defining feature of politics across the Americas for more than a decade. Voters have repeatedly punished incumbent governments, toppling leaders of every ideological stripe. Against this backdrop, the 2026 AmericasBarometer offers a surprising counterpoint. Across a wide range of indicators, people across the Americas are noticeably more positive than in 2023. Still, these gains emerge from a very low base. Improvement is not the same as contentment, and large shares of citizens remain deeply unhappy.

011

Citizens in the Americas have rarely been content with those who govern them, and the clearest evidence appears at the ballot box. Across roughly 134 competitive presidential elections in the region since 1990, the governing party's candidate lost first-round vote share in three of every four (see **Figure 1.1**).²

Across most of the Americas, incumbency is more often a liability than an asset. Moreover, the penalty for governing has grown over time. The average incumbent lost

about 6 percentage points of vote share in the 1990s, 8 in the 2000s, and nearly 11 in elections held since 2010. Whatever citizens have wanted from their leaders, they have increasingly concluded that incumbents were not delivering it. Political scientists have long interpreted these swings as a form of retrospective accountability: with limited information about the fine print of policy, voters reward or punish whoever holds power based on the broad conditions they experience most directly, and above all on the state of the economy.³

This anti-incumbent reflex hardened into a remarkable streak in the years around the pandemic, when ruling parties lost nearly every competitive presidential contest in the region between 2018 and 2023. Discontent with the status quo, in other words, is neither new nor shallow. It has been the defining feature of the region's politics for over a decade, toppling governments of every ideological stripe.

Figure 1.1 Most governing parties in the Americas lose vote share between elections

Change in first-round vote share for incumbent parties in presidential elections (percentage points), by year



Note: First-round vote share of the incumbent party's candidate, relative to that party's share at the prior election. Excludes cases where the incumbent party fielded no candidate (caretaker presidencies, party collapse). Venezuela and Nicaragua excluded as elections from the 2010s onward were non-competitive. Canada coded on federal-election popular vote.

Sources: Wikipedia, IFES Election Guide, Nohlen, OAS observation reports, national electoral commissions.

3 in 4
governing
parties lost
first-round
vote share.

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Against this backdrop, the 2026 round of the AmericasBarometer offers a surprising counterpoint. Across a wide range of indicators—how citizens evaluate the economy, whether their households have enough to eat, how safe they feel, and how they rate the services their governments provide—people across the Americas are noticeably more positive than in 2023. On several of these measures, the improvement is not a one-off bounce but the continuation of a trend that began after the regional low point in 2018/19. After years in which nearly everything seemed to be getting worse, the mood has begun to lift.

There is still a long way to go. These gains emerge from a very low base. Improvement is not the same as contentment, and on most of these indicators, large shares—often outright majorities—remain deeply unhappy. Roughly four in ten citizens still feel unsafe in their neighborhoods; a quarter still run short of food; and in many countries, most people still say the economy is worse than it was a year ago. The upward trend is encouraging, but the region is climbing out of a deep hole. At the same time, the regional average conceals striking outliers. Brazil appears to be moving against the economic tide; Honduras and Peru remain consumed by political instability; Haiti remains mired in a humanitarian crisis; and El Salvador shows gains in citizen security unlike anything else in the hemisphere. While examining the overall regional changes, it is important to keep in mind the levels of these indicators and how they vary across countries.

14 of 16
countries
saw declines
in economic
pessimism
between
2023 and
2026.

A Cautious Economic Recovery

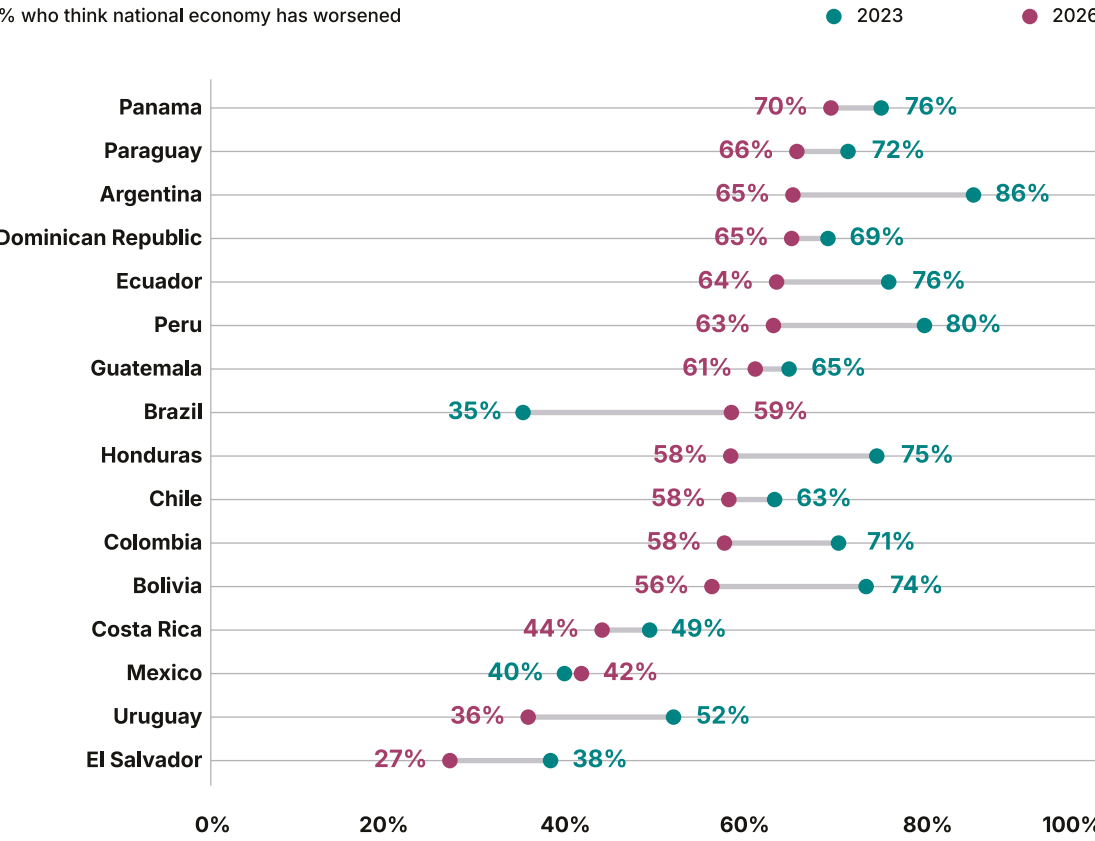
The most pronounced improvement across the region is economic. Between the 2023 and 2026 rounds, the share of citizens who say their national economy is worse than it was 12 months earlier fell in 14 of the 16 countries where the question was asked in both rounds (see **Figure 1.2**).

Some of these shifts are substantial. The share of citizens who evaluate the economy negatively declined by 16–21 percentage points in Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, Honduras,

and Uruguay. Argentina, which ranked among the worst economies in the region in 2023, made impressive strides as President Javier Milei’s policies stabilized the country’s rampant inflation.

But the improvement is regional. Inflation across much of the world has cooled from its post-pandemic highs, the acute economic disruptions of the COVID-19 years have receded, and commodity exporters have benefited from more stable global prices. The fact that Bolivia and Uruguay—countries with almost nothing in common politically—

Figure 1.2 Reports of national economic decline fell across most countries between 2023 and 2026



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023–2026.

Cartagena, Colombia –
LAIPC 2015



both recorded double-digit declines in economic pessimism suggests that citizens are responding less to any single government's program than to a broadly shared easing of the inflationary squeeze that defined the early 2020s. As a result, the region's governments can take only partial credit for this rebound, which may be one reason it has not translated into across-the-board rewards for incumbents.

The same figures are also sobering about how far the recovery has progressed. Even after these improvements, economic pessimism remains the prevailing view

across much of the region. About two in three citizens in Panama, Paraguay, Argentina, and the Dominican Republic still say the economy is worse than in the previous year. There is a widespread sense that things have stopped getting worse—but not yet a sense that they are good.

Brazil is the conspicuous outlier. There, the trend ran the other way: the share of Brazilians who say the economy worsened jumped from 35% in 2023 to 59% in 2026, the only country in the sample to register a large deterioration. The proximate culprit is likely the cost of living. Food prices climbed

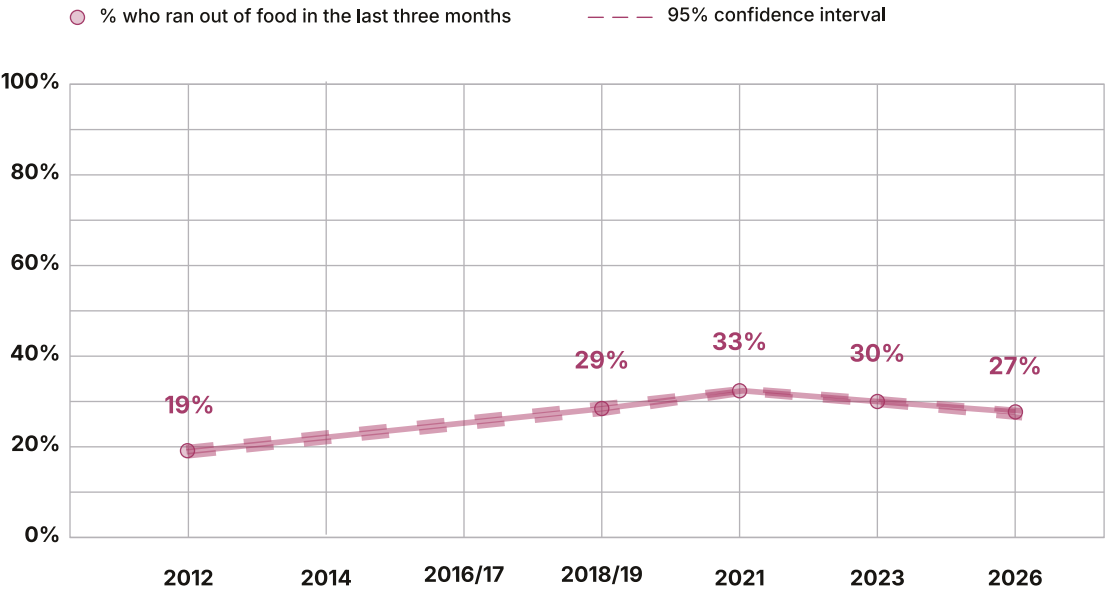
27%
report
running out
of food in
the previous
three
months.

sharply through 2024 and into 2025, eroding household budgets and driving a slump in President Lula da Silva's approval.⁴ For Brazilians, in other words, the economic story of this period was one of rising prices at the checkout counter.

The data on food security corroborate this broader trend (see **Figure 1.3**). Regionally, the share of citizens who report running out of food in the previous three months rose steadily through the 2010s, peaking at around one-third in 2021, before easing to about 27% in 2026—the lowest level since before the pandemic.

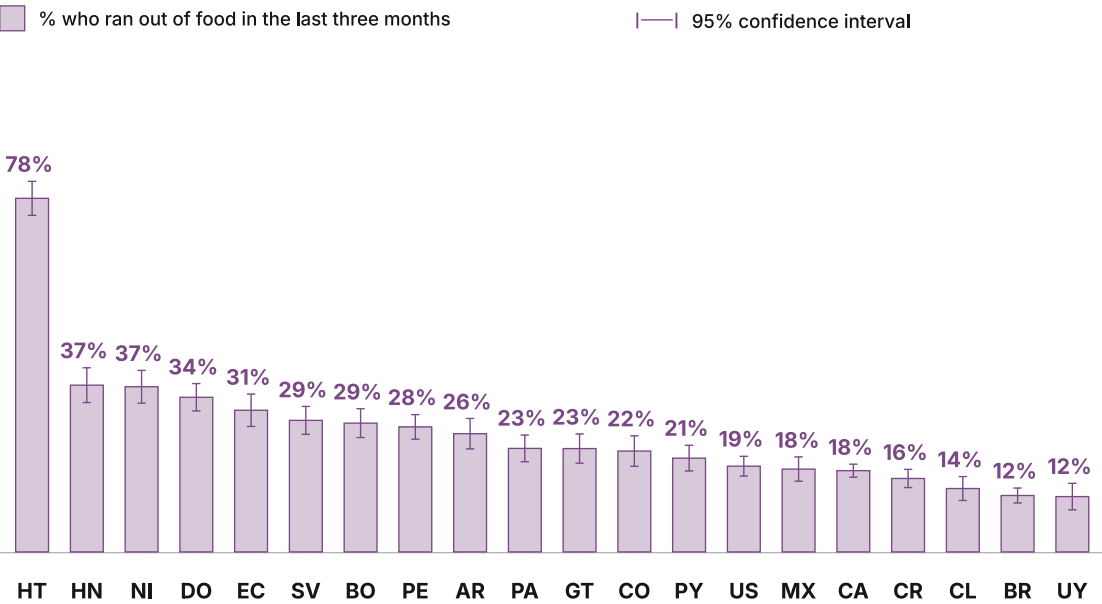
But the regional average again masks heterogeneity within the region (see **Figure 1.4**). Haiti stands apart: a shocking 78% of Haitians report having run out of food, roughly double the next-highest rates in Honduras and Nicaragua, both at 37%. This finding underscores the acute humanitarian crisis in the country. As armed gangs displace families, disrupt agricultural production, and block humanitarian access, millions of Haitians face acute food insecurity.⁵ At the other end of the distribution, Uruguay and Brazil report the lowest rates of food insecurity in the region, at 12% each. The regional mood is improving, but it is improving unevenly.

Figure 1.3 Food insecurity has declined since its pandemic peak



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2012–2026.

Figure 1.4 Food insecurity varies widely across the Americas



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Fear Recedes, but Slowly

On crime and security, the picture is more mixed, though it too tilts in a hopeful direction. Crime victimization has declined only modestly. The share of citizens victimized by crime in the previous year has hovered around 22 to 24% since 2021, down only modestly from a peak of about 25% in 2018/19 (see **Figure 1.5**).

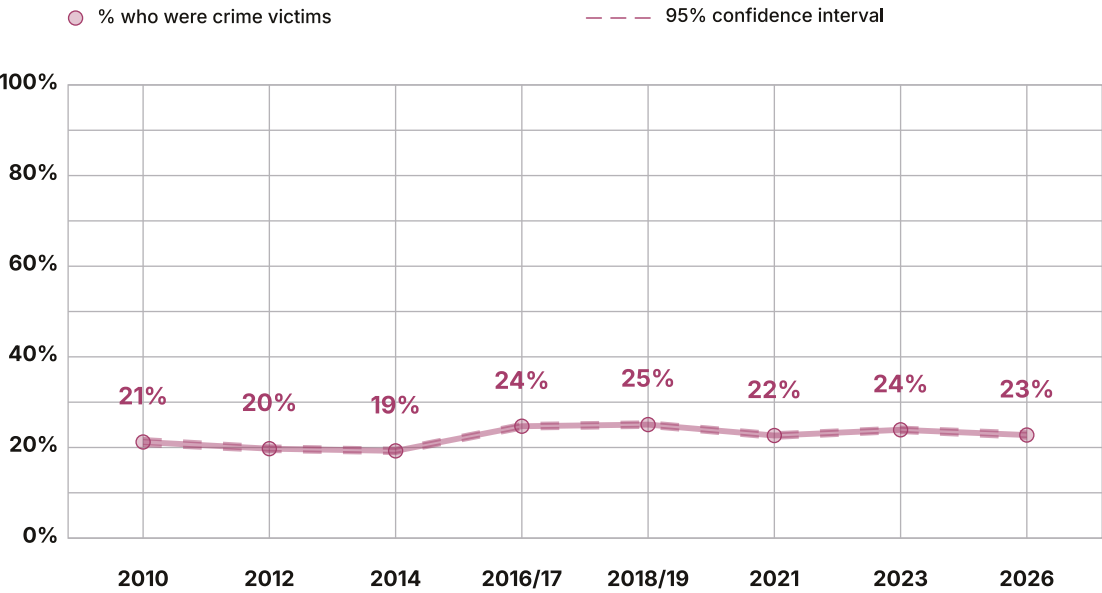
Where a country falls on this measure closely aligns with the region’s geography of organized crime (see **Figure 1.6**). In 2026, crime victimization was highest in Ecuador (35%), Peru (34%), and Mexico (33%)—the front lines of the region’s struggle against drug trafficking and transnational criminal networks. The most striking result, however,

sits at the bottom of the ranking: El Salvador, where just 8% of citizens report having been the victim of a crime, by far the lowest in the hemisphere.

El Salvador’s position is the product of President Nayib Bukele’s sweeping gang crackdown. Under a state of exception in force since 2022, authorities have detained some 90,000 people, and the homicide rate has collapsed from 103 per 100,000 in 2015 to roughly 1.3 per 100,000 in 2025—a figure the government touts as the lowest in the Western Hemisphere. The security gains are real and are reflected across every crime measure in the AmericasBarometer, even as they come at a documented cost to civil liberties, including mass arbitrary detention and deaths in custody.⁶

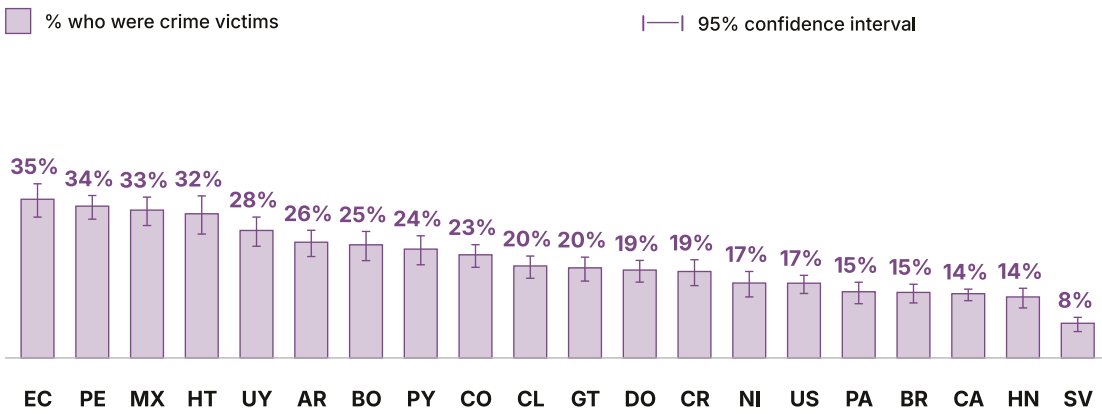
The security gains are real and are reflected across every crime measure in the AmericasBarometer, even as they come at a documented cost to civil liberties, including mass arbitrary detention and deaths in custody.

Figure 1.5 Crime victimization has declined slightly since 2018/19



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2010–2026.

Figure 1.6 Crime victimization differs substantially across countries



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

40%
feel somewhat
or very
unsafe in their
neighborhoods.

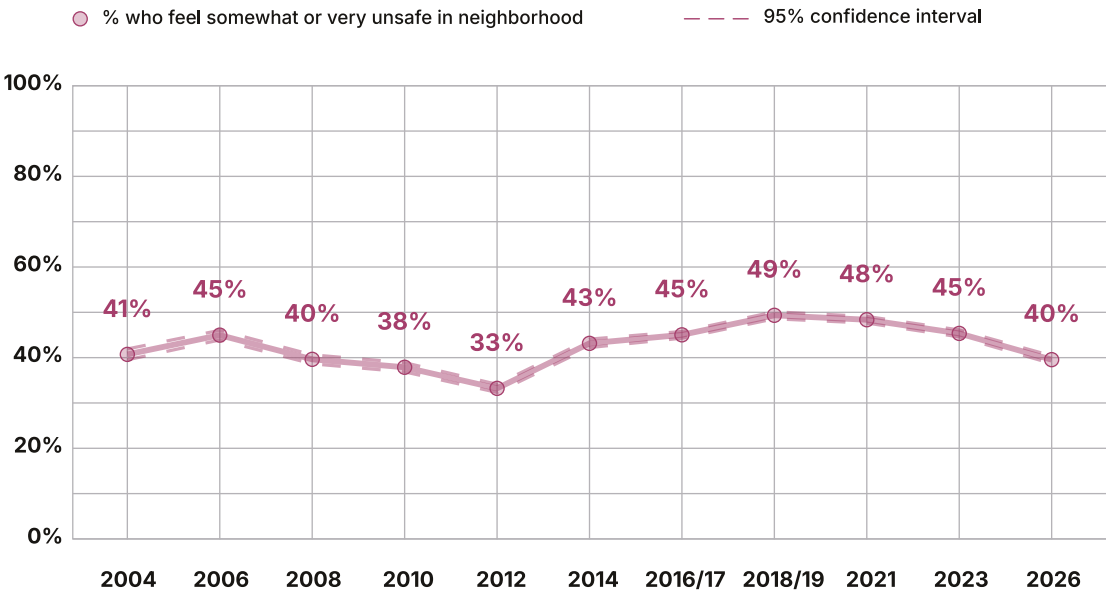
At the other end of the distribution, Ecuador is El Salvador's mirror image. Once among the safest countries in South America, Ecuador has become its deadliest: cocaine-trafficking networks have turned its Pacific ports into a strategic hub for shipments to the U.S. and European markets. By 2025, Ecuador's homicide rate had climbed to roughly 51 per 100,000—the second highest in Latin America for the third consecutive year. In January 2024, President Daniel Noboa declared an “internal armed conflict” against the gangs and has leaned heavily on military deployments and states of exception—some of the same tactics employed by Bukele. Yet the violence in Ecuador has proved difficult to contain.⁷

While crime victimization declined only modestly, perceptions of insecurity have improved more substantially. The share of citizens who feel somewhat or very unsafe in their neighborhoods peaked at about 49% in 2018/19 and has fallen in every survey round since, reaching 40% in 2026 (see **Figure 1.7**).

Again, the distribution of countries is instructive (see **Figure 1.8**). Perceived insecurity is highest in Ecuador (63%) and Peru (60%), the two countries whose recent descent into cartel and gang violence has dominated regional headlines, and lowest in El Salvador (9%).

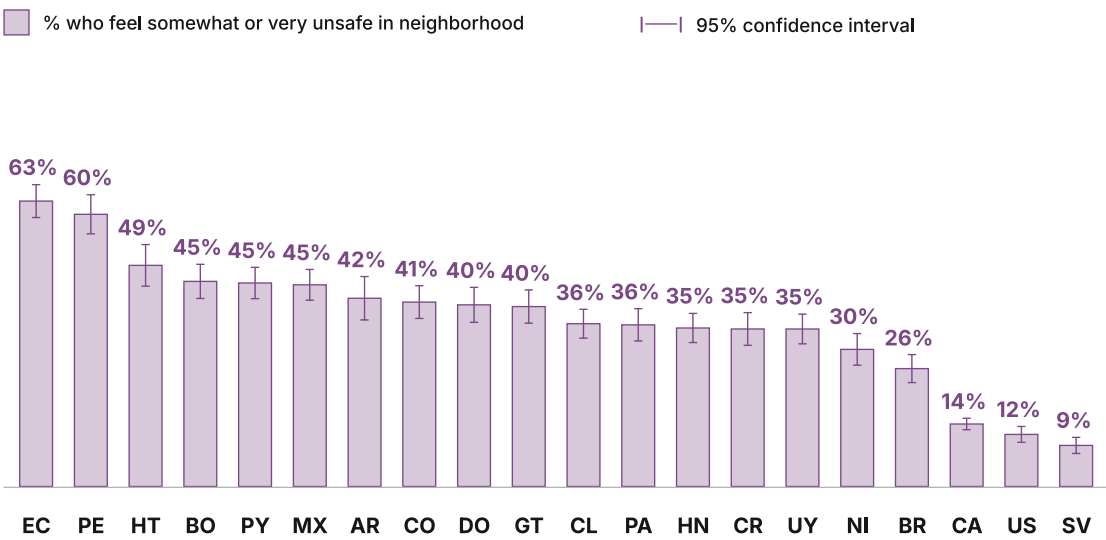
The security data show a region where fear is slowly receding from its late-2010s peak, while crime victimization has declined more modestly. Insecurity has nevertheless become one of the most potent forces in the region's politics—powering Bukele's dominance in El Salvador and driving the punitive turn in Ecuador.

Figure 1.7 Perceptions of neighborhood insecurity have declined steadily since 2018/19



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2004–2026.

Figure 1.8 Perceptions of neighborhood insecurity differ sharply across countries



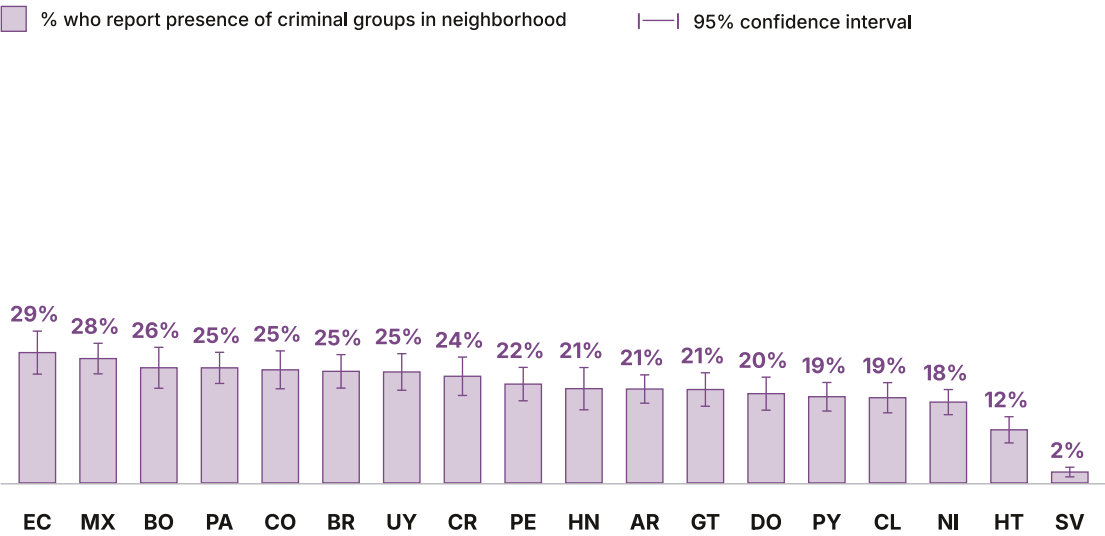
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

A new item in the 2026 AmericasBarometer asked whether criminal groups are present in the respondent's neighborhood, telling the same story from a different angle (see **Figure 1.9**). The perceived presence of criminal groups is highest in Ecuador (29%) and Mexico (28%) and, again, lowest in El Salvador, where only 2% of citizens report that criminal groups operate in their neighborhoods.

The security data show a region where fear is slowly receding from its late-2010s peak, while crime victimization has declined more

modestly. Insecurity has nevertheless become one of the most potent forces in the region's politics—powering Bukele's dominance in El Salvador and driving the punitive turn in Ecuador. On this score, Bukele's El Salvador remains a defining experiment—a state that traded liberties for safety and, by these measures, delivered greater safety. Whether that bargain proves durable, and whether it travels to countries like Ecuador and Peru that are now tempted to emulate it, will be among the central questions of the region over the next decade.

Figure 1.9 Perceived criminal group presence is widespread across the region, except in El Salvador



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

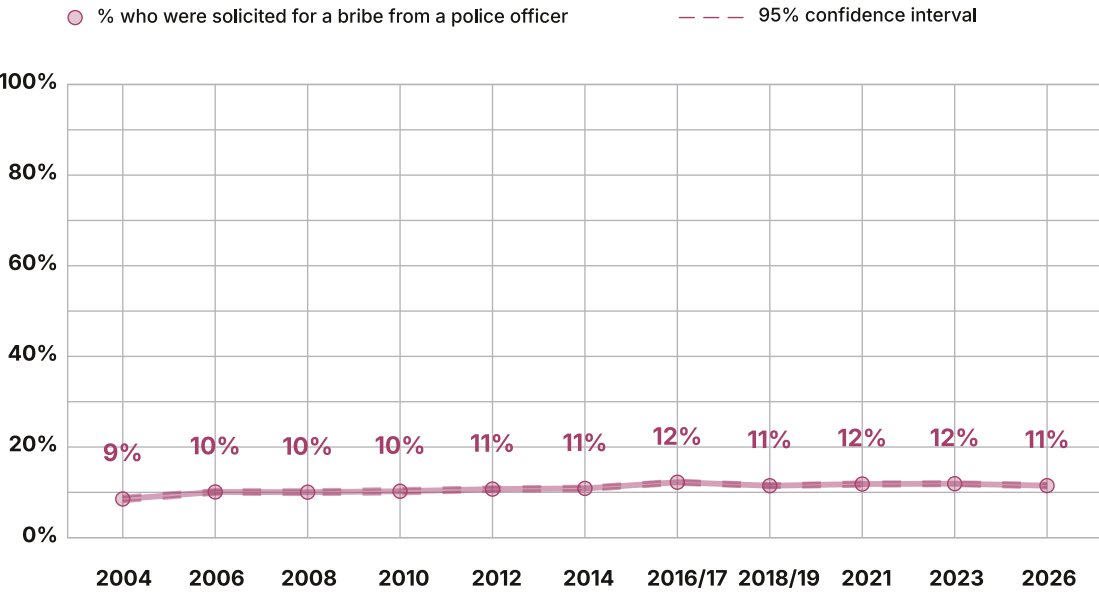
11%
were asked
to pay a
bribe by
a police
officer.

The Weak Link of Governance

Governance is where evidence of improvement is thinnest and where the roots of the region's long anti-incumbent mood are most visible. Everyday corruption, in particular, has scarcely budged. The share of citizens asked to pay a bribe by a police officer in the previous year has remained stubbornly around 11 to 12% for a decade, with no discernible improvement in the most recent round (see **Figure 1.10**).

That everyday corruption should prove so resistant to change is not entirely surprising. Petty bribery is embedded in the daily routines of underpaid police forces and under-resourced bureaucracies, and it responds little to swings in the national mood or the business cycle. This structural feature of how ordinary citizens encounter the state helps explain why brighter evaluations of the economy and public safety have not carried over into a broader restoration of confidence in government. Improving how

Figure 1.10 Police bribe solicitation has remained stable for more than a decade



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2004–2026.

4 of 20 presidents have majority approval.

citizens feel about the country turns out to be considerably easier than improving how the state actually treats them.

Satisfaction with the services governments actually deliver offers a somewhat brighter note (see **Figure 1.11**). Approval of local public services, after sagging to about 30% in 2018/19, has recovered to 36% by 2026.

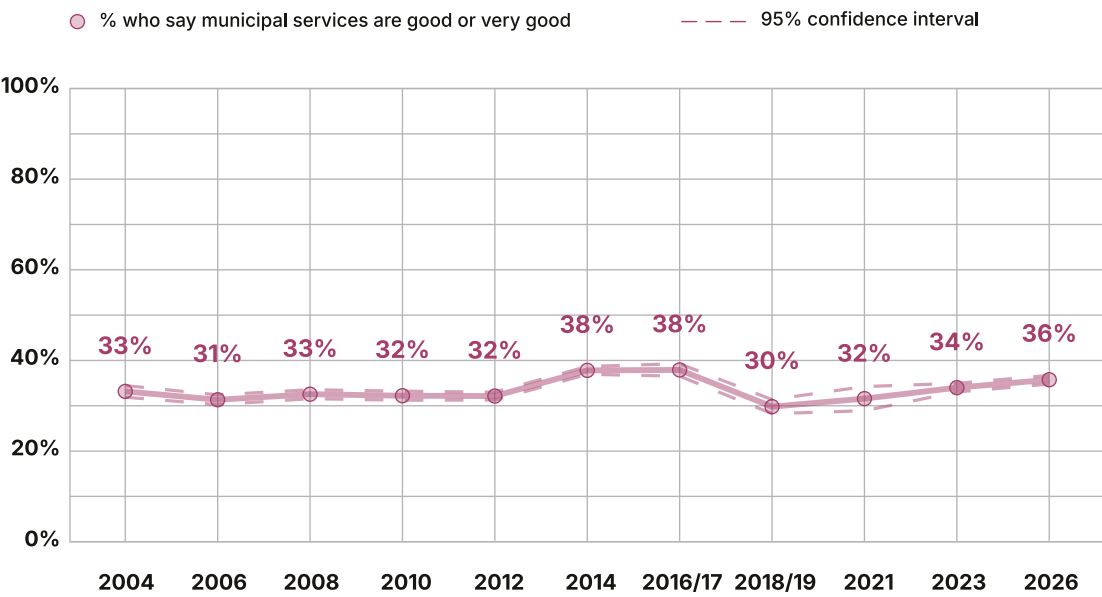
But that regional figure again masks heterogeneity across the regions (see **Figure 1.12**). Satisfaction with municipal services is highest in Nicaragua (52%) and Honduras (50%) and lowest in Bolivia

(16%) and Peru (18%)—a reminder that the quality of government institutions, as citizens experience it, varies widely across the region.

Nowhere is that variation starker than in how citizens rate their presidents (see **Figure 1.13**). Executive approval in 2026 ranges from 83% in El Salvador, where Bukele’s security record has made him the region’s most popular leader, to just 11% in Haiti.

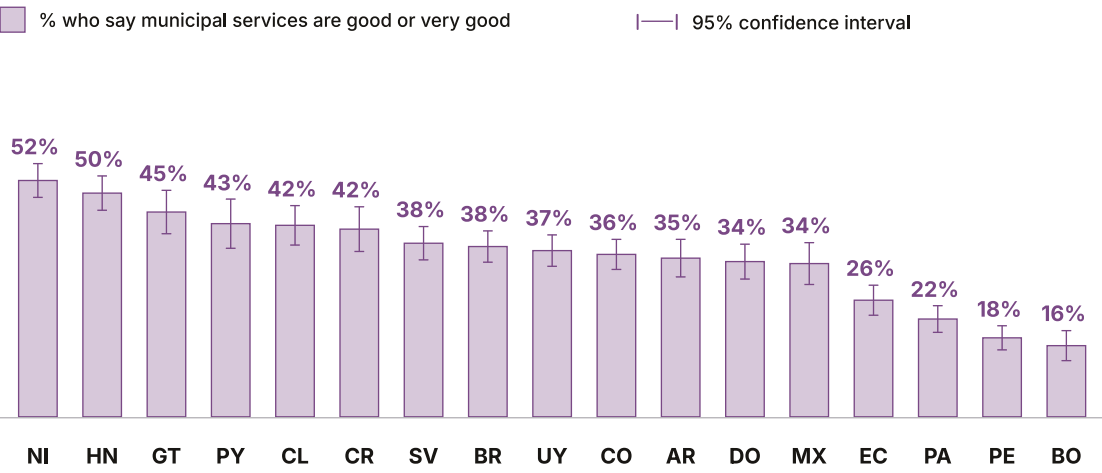
Most of the region’s presidents are unpopular. Peru’s low presidential approval in these data seems less a verdict on then-President José Jeri than a symptom of a

Figure 1.11 Satisfaction with municipal services has rebounded since 2018/19



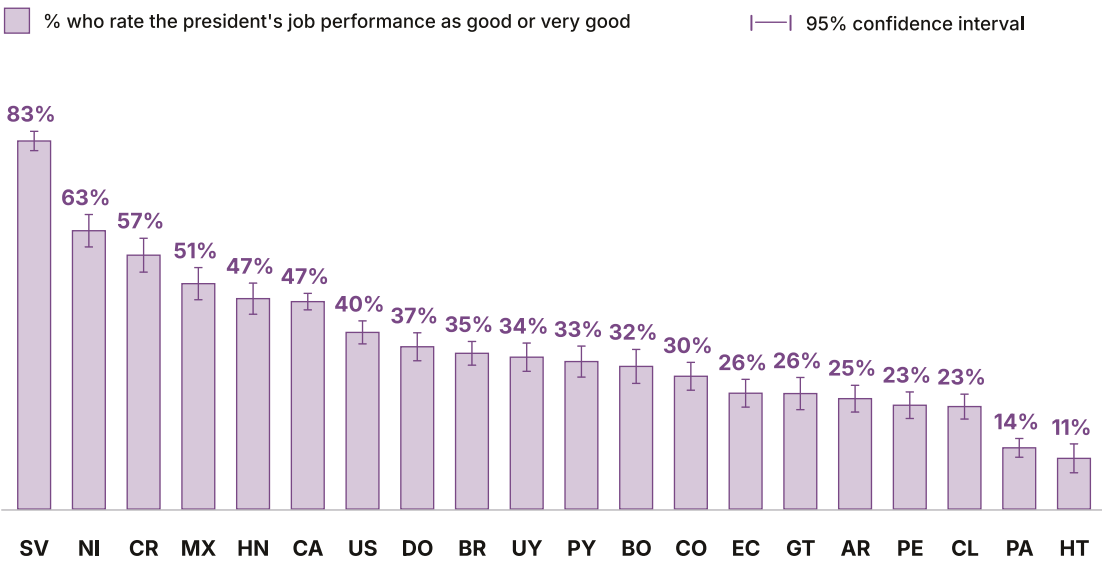
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2004–2026.

Figure 1.12 Satisfaction with municipal services ranges widely across countries



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Figure 1.13 Most presidents remain unpopular across the Americas



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Força nas
Mãos,
Tradição
nos Laços –
LAIPC 2024
Brazil, Ilha
da Maré by
Rosseirys
De La Rosa



governing system that has cycled through president after president—nine in the last ten years—without resolving the underlying crisis of representation. Yet the broader regional pattern is unmistakable: majorities approve of their president in only four of the twenty countries where the question was asked. Even as evaluations of the status quo brighten, they do not translate into government support.

Cautiously Encouraging Trends

The findings of the 2026 AmericasBarometer are cautiously encouraging. Across economic evaluations, food security, perceptions of insecurity, and satisfaction with public services, among other indicators, citizens

of the Americas are more positive than in 2023. On several measures, the improvement extends a trend that has been building since the regional nadir in 2018/19. With sustained effort and continued investment, this improvement will hopefully prove enduring.

And yet it bears repeating that this is an improvement from a very low base; hundreds of millions of people across the Americas remain profoundly dissatisfied with the status quo. Majorities in many countries still judge the economy to be deteriorating; two in five still feel unsafe; one in four still cannot reliably put food on the table; and everyday corruption has hardly improved. The facts on the ground in the region are certainly less bad, but they are still a long way from good.

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Notes

- 1
- Noam Lupu is Director of the Center for Global Democracy and Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University.
- 2
- Author’s calculations from first-round vote shares of incumbent-party presidential candidates across the Americas, 1990–2025, excluding Nicaragua and Venezuela, whose recent elections were not competitive.
- 3
- Carlin, Singer, and Zechmeister (eds.) 2015.
- 4
- Pooler 2025.
- 5
- Ali 2025.
- 6
- Alemán 2026.
- 7
- International Crisis Group 2025.

HOW BELIEFS ABOUT REGIME PERFORMANCE SHAPE DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES

Luis Schiumerini¹ and Scott Mainwaring²

What explains why citizens in some countries develop long-standing commitments to democracy in high numbers while they fail to in other countries? To help us address this question, the 2026 AmericasBarometer fielded an original battery asking respondents to rate how well a democratic and a non-democratic regime in their country’s history protected civil liberties and delivered economic growth. For each respondent, we compute a belief differential—the democratic rating minus the non-democratic rating—so that positive values indicate that the citizen credits democracy with stronger performance.

This report summarizes those beliefs across fourteen countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay), compares them with objective regime differences in protecting civil liberties and delivering economic growth, and shows that they predict a broad range of democratic attitudes.

The results show that where citizens believe that their democracy has greatly outperformed the antecedent authoritarian regime in protecting civil liberties, they are more likely to be committed democrats. Conversely, where citizens believe that their democracy has outperformed the previous authoritarian regime in generating economic growth, they are not consistently more likely to express democratic commitments.

How the Beliefs Were Measured

Each respondent evaluated a democratic and a non-democratic regime from their own country’s history. The civil-liberties items (generic wording) read:

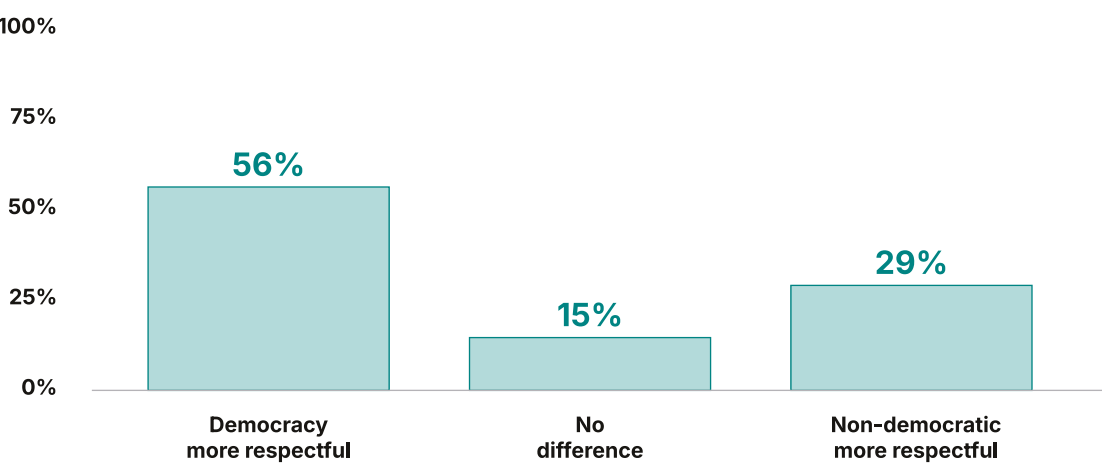
“[Country] had a [non-democratic/ democratic regime] between [year] and [year]. How would you score the [regime] for its respect for civil liberties? Use a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 means civil liberties were not at all respected and 100 means they were fully respected.”

The economic-growth items (generic wording) read:

“[Country] had a [non-democratic/ democratic regime] between [year] and [year]. How much do you think the economy grew on average under the [non-democratic / democratic regime]? Use a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means the economy shrank a lot and 5 means it grew a lot.”

The regime and period were tailored to each country’s history rather than being asked in general terms. For example, the non-democratic anchor refers to the pre-2000 PRI era in Mexico, the 1973–1985 civil-military regime in Uruguay, and the 1964–1985 military regime in Brazil; in the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Honduras, the item used a generic “non-democratic regime” with no date. Because the anchors differ, cross-country comparisons should be read as

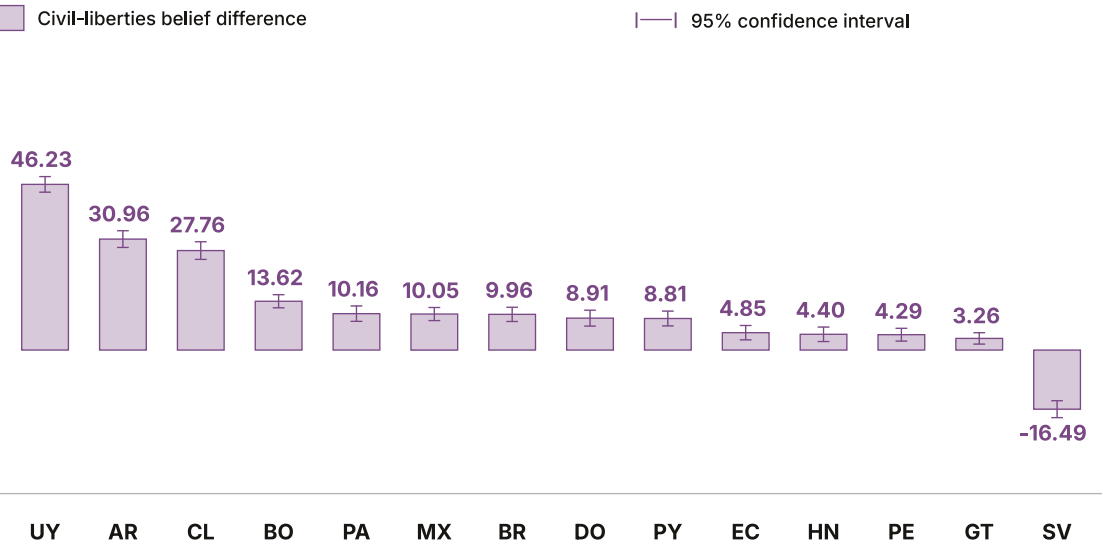
Most associate democracy with greater respect for civil liberties



Note: Share of respondents rating the democratic regime as more respectful of civil liberties, the non-democratic regime as more respectful, or seeing no difference. Pooled mean differential = +11.7 on a –100 to +100 scale (N = 14,190).

Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Perceptions of democracy's protection of civil liberties vary across countries



Note: Mean civil-liberties belief differential by country (bars), ordered high to low, with 95% confidence-interval whiskers; zero line marks no perceived difference. Country means range from about +46 (Uruguay) to –16 (El Salvador).

Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

differences in how citizens evaluate their own country's regimes, not as responses to an identical stimulus.

Citizens Believe Democracy Protects Civil Liberties More Than Non-Democratic Rule—but the Perceived Advantage Varies Across Countries

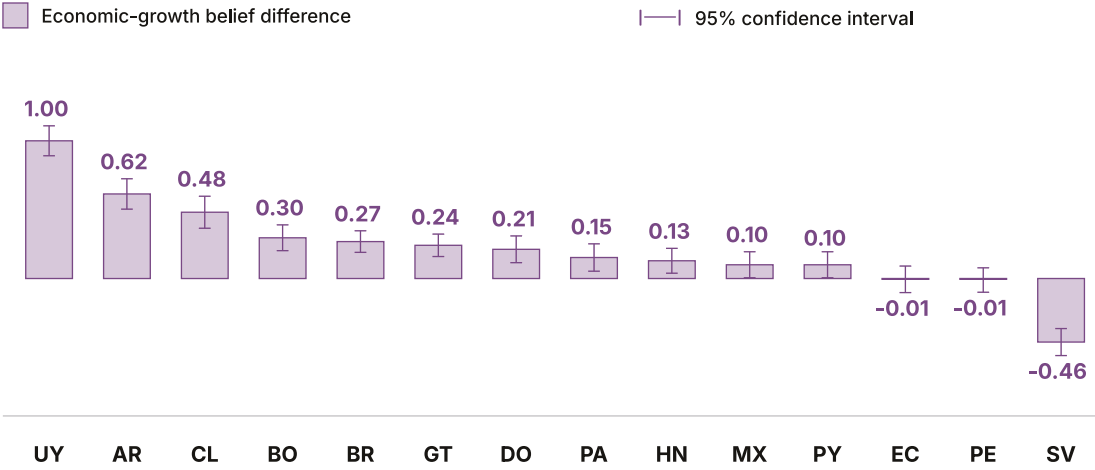
A majority of citizens rate the democratic regime as more respectful of civil liberties than the non-democratic one (56%), but this is far from universal: about three in ten (29%) rate the non-democratic regime as more respectful, and 15% see no difference. On the 0–100 scale, the average differential is only about +12 points. Democracy's perceived civil-liberties edge is real but modest.³

The perceived advantage varies sharply across countries: it is largest in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile, small (roughly 3–14 points) in most others, and negative in El Salvador, where the average citizen rates the authoritarian regime higher on civil liberties.

Citizens Give Democracy Only a Slight Edge on Economic Growth, and in Several Countries, No Edge at All

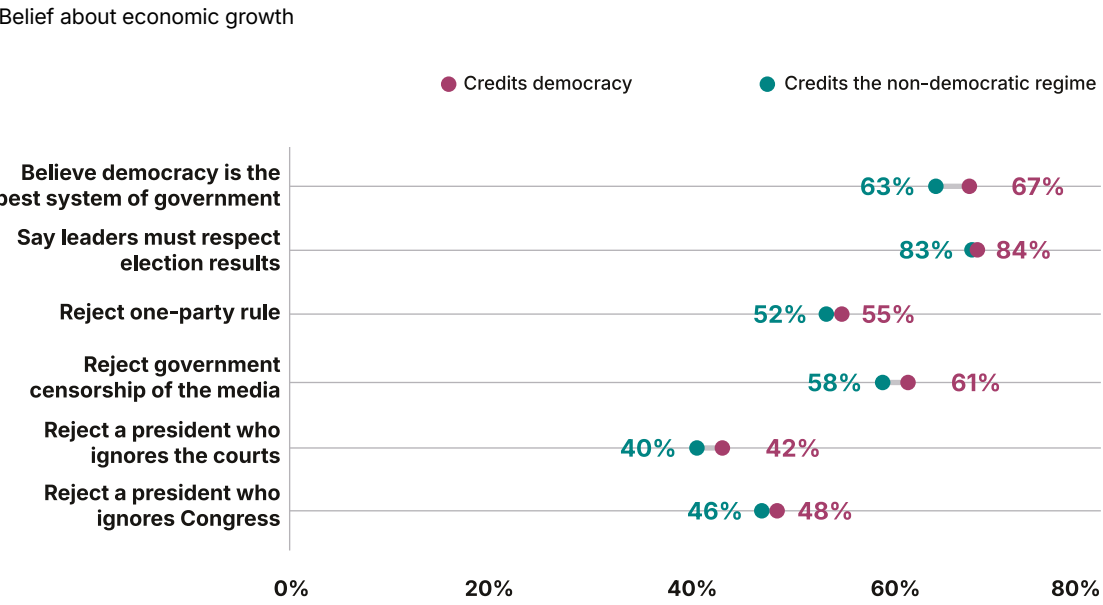
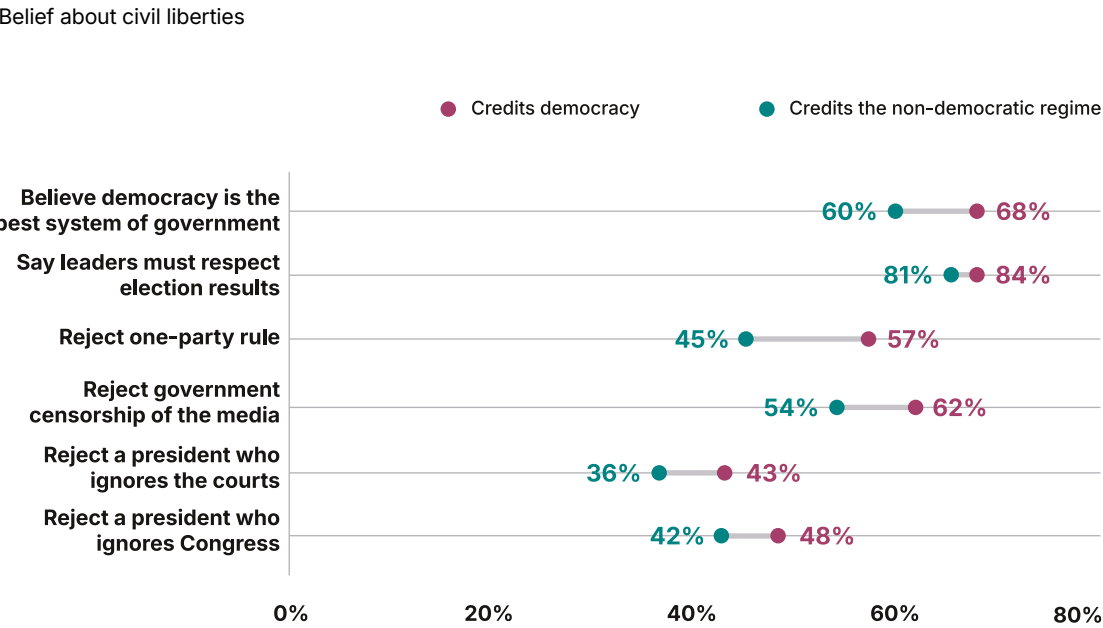
Citizens are far more divided on how average economic growth has compared under democracy and the authoritarian regime. The most common response is that the two regimes delivered similar growth (40% see no difference); 35% credit democracy with stronger growth, and 25% the non-

The perceived economic growth advantage of democracy varies across countries



Note: Mean economic-growth belief differential by country (bars), ordered high to low, with 95% confidence-interval whiskers; zero line marks no perceived difference. Country means range from about +1.0 (Uruguay) to -0.46 (El Salvador).
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Committed democrats perceive a large civil liberties advantage under democracy



Note: Share of citizens holding each pro-democratic view, comparing those who credit the democratic regime (dark) with those who credit the non-democratic regime (light) – on civil liberties (top) and on economic growth (bottom). Each percentage is estimated from a linear probability model that regresses the 0/1 attitude on indicators for the citizen's belief group, the competing-belief differential, and country indicators.
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

democratic regime. On the 1–5-based differential, the average is just +0.2—a weak pro-democratic tilt, much fainter than for civil liberties.

Country differences mirror the civil-liberties pattern: Uruguay again stands out positively; a few countries show a modest positive tilt; several are essentially at zero; and El Salvador is again the negative outlier.

Citizens who Credit Democracy with Better Performance on Civil Liberties Are Committed Democrats

We predict a broad set of democratic-attitude outcomes—abstract support for democracy, respect for election results, and the rejection of specific backsliding moves (media censorship, one-party rule, and a president who overrides Congress or the courts)—using both belief differentials together, holding constant respondents’ characteristics and country. Because citizens’ beliefs about how civil liberties and growth compared under the two regimes are correlated, we report each net of the other. The civil-liberties belief is a consistent, strong predictor: citizens who see a larger democratic civil-liberties advantage are more supportive of democracy. Conversely, citizens who believe that economic growth has been better under democracy than under authoritarian rule are only marginally more likely to express democratic attitudes.

This finding holds across the full range of democratic attitudes—from abstract support for democracy to the rejection of specific backsliding moves. On every measure, citizens who see a larger democratic civil-liberties advantage (top panel) are the more committed democrats: more likely to call democracy the best system and to insist that leaders respect election results, and more likely to reject one-party rule, media censorship, and a president who ignores Congress or the courts. The same comparison for beliefs about economic growth (bottom panel) is consistently flatter.

On attitude after attitude, what citizens believe democracy does for their freedoms—not for their wallets—is what drives their commitment to it. These findings suggest that strengthening public support for democracy depends not only on economic performance, but also on citizens’ belief that democratic institutions protect fundamental rights and freedoms.

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Notes

- 1 Luis Schiumerini is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame and Faculty Fellow of the Kellogg Institute for International Studies.
- 2 Scott Mainwaring is Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame and Faculty Fellow of the Kellogg Institute for International Studies.
- 3 Each belief differential is a respondent’s rating of the democratic regime minus their rating of the non-democratic regime, so positive values mean the citizen credits democracy with the stronger record. Net of country differences, more educated and wealthier citizens perceive a larger democratic advantage.

Latin America is in the midst of a profound demographic transformation. As a recent *Americas Quarterly* analysis shows,² the region is aging faster than anywhere else in the world: its median age, just 18 in 1950, now stands at roughly 31 and is projected to reach 40 by 2050. But age is only one dimension of a broader remaking of the region’s social fabric. AmericasBarometer data point to two further shifts with potentially far-reaching political consequences: rising levels of education and a reconfiguration of religious life. Together, these trends are reshaping not only who Latin Americans are, but also what they believe—and increasingly how divided they are on the moral questions that define contemporary politics.

The region’s educational profile has transformed within living memory. Among Latin Americans aged 66 and older, only about 16% have a university education; among those aged 26 to 35, the share roughly doubles, to 31%. Each generation has entered adulthood better educated than the last—a cumulative expansion that steadily raises the share of the electorate with a university education as older, less-educated cohorts give way to younger ones. Because the more educated tend to participate more actively in politics,

hold more secular values, and take more liberal positions on social issues, this quiet expansion is likely to have important political consequences.

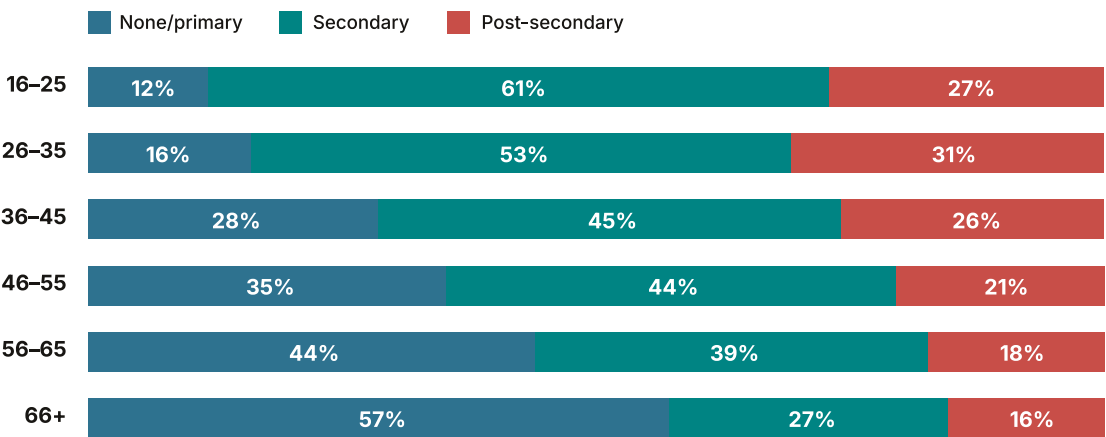
Religious life is changing at least as fast. For most of the twentieth century, Latin America was overwhelmingly Catholic, but that near-monopoly has eroded. Across AmericasBarometer cohorts, the Catholic share falls from 67% among those aged 66 and older to 45% among adults under 26, while the Evangelical share rises from 17% to 25% and the share of the religiously unaffiliated doubles, from 12% to 24%. Even as denominational affiliations shift, religiosity itself shows no such decline: the share of Latin Americans who say religion is “very important” in their lives has held steady—at around two-thirds—since 2010. Religious affiliation is changing more rapidly than religiosity itself. A growing share of Latin Americans—especially the young—identify with no religion, even as the intensity of belief among those who remain religious has remained remarkably stable.

How do these shifts matter politically? Education and religion are among the sharpest sources of division over social issues that have moved toward the center of Latin American politics in recent decades—

Each generation has entered adulthood better educated than the last—a cumulative expansion that steadily raises the share of the electorate with a university education as older, less-educated cohorts give way to younger ones.

Younger generations are much more educated than older generations

Highest level of education reached, by age group



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023.

same-sex marriage, abortion, and the rights of sexual minorities. And the region's changing demographics pull in opposite directions.

Consider attitudes toward same-sex marriage in 2023. Support rises sharply with education: just 23% of Latin Americans with no formal education approve, compared with 43% of those with a university education. It increases even more steeply as religiosity declines: only 26% of those who call religion “very important” approve, versus 64% of those for whom it is “not at all important.” Support also differs substantially by religious affiliation: 55% of the religiously unaffiliated endorse same-sex marriage, compared with 37% of Catholics and just 18% of Evangelicals. Attitudes toward abortion follow the same fault lines—77% of the

university-educated consider it justifiable, versus 52% of those with no schooling. Evangelicals (61%) trail both Catholics (68%) and the unaffiliated (75%).

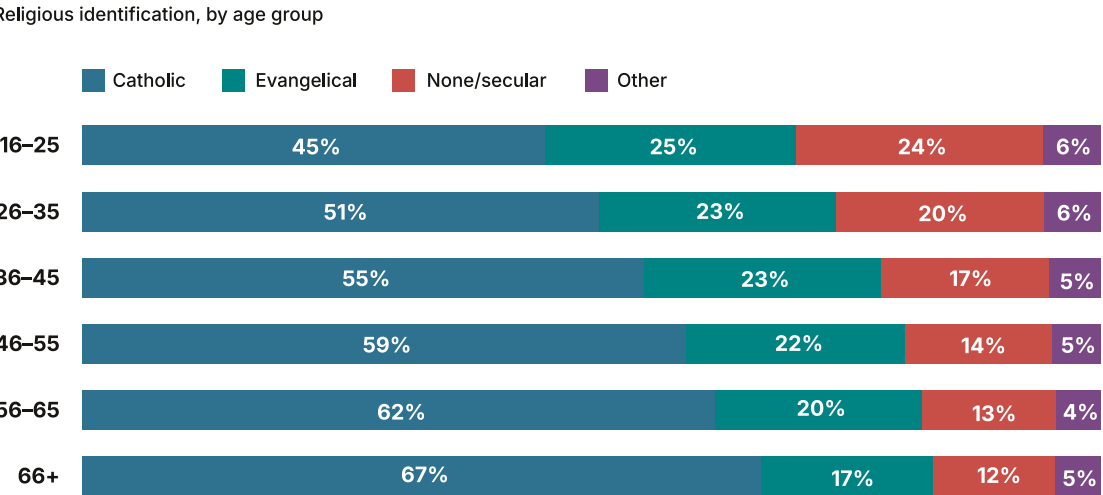
On average, the region has grown markedly more progressive on these questions. Support for same-sex marriage nearly doubled between 2010 and 2023, from 19% to 35%, and approval of the right of gay and lesbian citizens to run for office rose from 23% in 2004 to 41%. But this liberalizing tide is not changing attitudes uniformly. It is concentrated among the segments of society that are expanding—the more educated and the less religious—while Evangelicals, a large and growing bloc, remain anchored on the conservative side of nearly every one of these issues. The net effect is less a uniform shift than a widening divide.

These demographic changes may be contributing to growing cultural divisions across Latin America. As educational expansion and secularization expand the segments of society holding more progressive views, and as Evangelical communities consolidate into a cohesive conservative counterweight, moral and social questions are likely to become an ever more salient axis of political competition—one that increasingly cuts across the traditional left-right divide over economic issues. Parties and candidates that once treated abortion or LGBT rights as peripheral concerns will find them moving to the core of how Latin Americans sort themselves politically.

Demographic change, in short, is not politically neutral. It is redrawing the region's political map along lines of schooling and faith—and setting the stage for the social-issue conflicts that will increasingly define the region's politics.

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Catholic Identification has declined across successive generations



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023.

Notes

- 1
- Noam Lupu is Director of the Center for Global Democracy and Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University.
- 2
- Blair 2026.

Over the past two decades, Latin American democracies have grown markedly more inclusive. Gender quotas and, more recently, parity laws have brought record numbers of women into legislatures; Indigenous and Afro-descendant movements have won new political voice; and the formal barriers that once limited who could vote and run for office have largely fallen. Yet elected officials still look strikingly unlike the citizens they represent.

As in democracies around the world, the political class in the Americas remains narrow: legislators are disproportionately older, wealthier, better educated, and overwhelmingly male.² In Latin America, they are disproportionately white relative to the region's large Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations. Working-class citizens are almost entirely absent. That skew is consequential: a substantial body of research links who governs to what governments do, shaping which problems reach the political agenda and whose interests governments ultimately serve. The numerical gap between representatives and the represented has proven stubborn even as democracies formally open their doors.

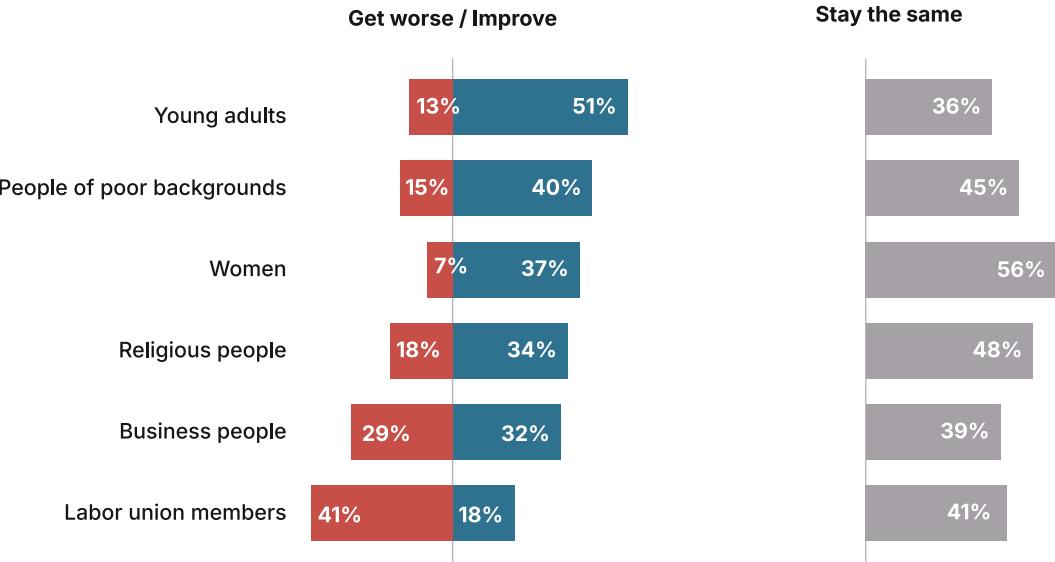
Do citizens see this gap as a problem worth closing? The 2026 AmericasBarometer asked respondents in Argentina, Bolivia, and Honduras whether public policy would

improve, worsen, or remain the same if more elected officials came from each of six social groups. The responses offer a window into how citizens across three very different countries in the region evaluate who holds political office. The pattern reveals a public broadly favoring more inclusive representation, particularly for groups long shut out of power.

The appetite for change is strongest among young adults: half of respondents (51%) said policy would improve if more officials were young, compared with 13% who expected it to get worse—nearly four times as many. Candidates from poor backgrounds inspire similar optimism, with 40% expecting improvement and only 15% anticipating worse outcomes. Support for greater representation of women follows closely: 37% expect improvement and only 7% predict deterioration—the lowest opposition recorded for any group. In each case, citizens associate a more representative political class with better, not worse, governance. These are precisely the groups whose representation in elected office has historically lagged furthest behind their share of the population.

The picture differs sharply for groups already tied to political and economic power. Respondents split almost evenly on businesspeople, with 32% expecting improvement and 29% expecting decline.

Citizens believe more inclusive representation would improve public policy



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026. Argentina, Bolivia, and Honduras. Mean unweighted aggregate country percentages.

Labor union members are the only group for which pessimism prevails: just 18% believe policy would improve if more union members held office, while 41%—more than twice as many—expect it to worsen, reflecting citizens' low opinion of labor unions. Citizens appear to welcome the inclusion of historically marginalized social groups but are far more wary of empowering channels associated with concentrated power.

Two further patterns merit emphasis. First, across every group, a large share of respondents—between 36% and 56%—expect policy to remain the same regardless

of who governs. This response is most common among women (56%) and religious people (48%), hinting at public skepticism about whether numerical representation translates into substantive change: many citizens may favor more inclusive leadership as a matter of fairness or legitimacy, even while doubting it will alter concrete outcomes. Second, the comparatively muted enthusiasm for religious people in office (34% improve, 18% worse) suggests that citizens distinguish between making political leadership more representative and empowering particular ideological or institutional blocs.

These findings resonate with a broader global mood. Studies by the Pew Research Center document rising dissatisfaction with how representative democracies function—a pervasive sense that parties and leaders are unresponsive and indifferent to ordinary people’s concerns.³ Publics around the world are demanding a better version of democracy, one featuring new political elites and more empowered citizens—including decision-making bodies that more closely reflect the people they serve.

The implication for the region’s democracies is cautiously hopeful. The overrepresentation

of older, affluent white men is not, at least in these three countries, a settled public preference. Pluralities or majorities believe that opening office to young people, the less-affluent, and women would make government work better. Narrowing the descriptive gap may therefore depend less on overcoming public resistance than on strengthening the institutional pathways—candidate recruitment, party gatekeeping, and political opportunities—that enable a broader range of citizens to seek and reach office. Where citizens hesitate is not inclusion itself, but the prospect of handing still more power to entrenched interests.

Notes

- 1
- Noam Lupu is Director of the Center for Global Democracy and Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University.
- 2
- Carnes et al. 2025.
- 3
- Wike 2025.

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Women's participation in positions of political power has long been a central demand of feminist movements worldwide. At the same time, recent debates over gender have become increasingly central to political conflict across Latin America. Recent research shows that contemporary anti-gender movements extend beyond debates over reproductive rights to promote more traditional understandings of family, authority, and the roles of men and women in society.²

In this context, public attitudes toward gender and political leadership deserve close attention. The 2026 AmericasBarometer shows that agreement with the belief that men make better political leaders than women has increased across much of the region since 2018.

Since 2008, the AmericasBarometer has measured agreement with the statement that men make better political leaders than women. Because this question was not included in every survey round, the regional trend includes only those rounds in which it was fielded in a majority of countries. The survey question is as follows:

*Some say that in general, men are better political leaders than women. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree?*³

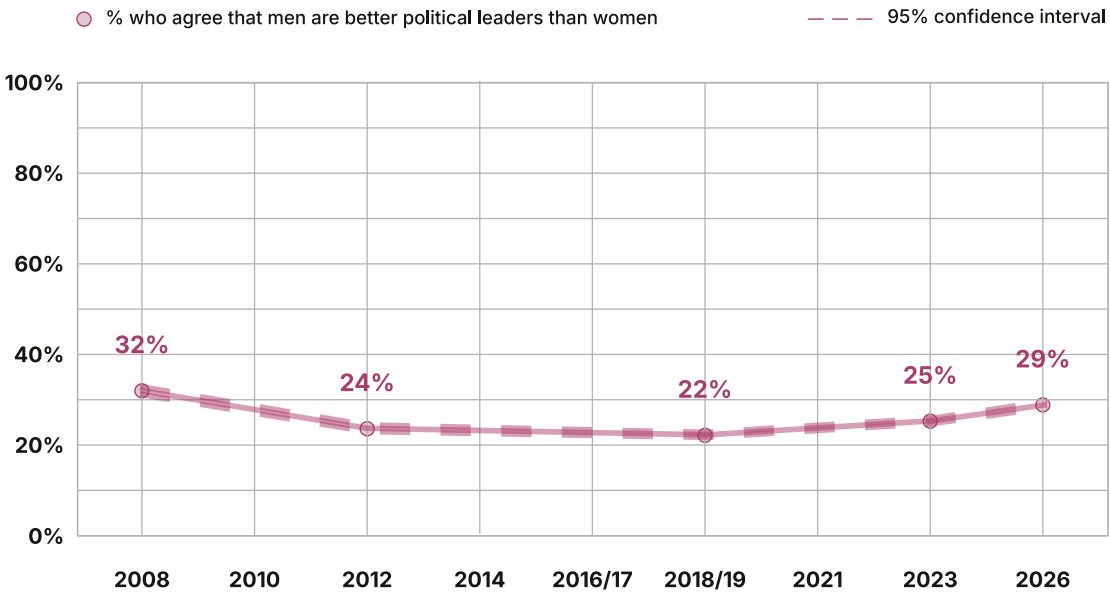
Agreement with the idea that men are better political leaders than women is higher today than it was a decade ago. The first figure shows the regional-average share of individuals in Latin America who agree with this statement. Between 2008 and 2018, agreement declined significantly from 32% to 22%.

In recent years, however, this downward trend has stalled and begun to reverse. From 2018 to 2026, agreement rebounded from 22% to 29%. Nearly three in ten adults now agree that men make better political leaders than women, reversing part of the progress observed between 2008 and 2018/19.

Views favoring men as political leaders increased in most countries between 2023 and 2026, though the magnitude of change varied widely. El Salvador experienced the largest increase (13 percentage points), followed by Nicaragua (8 percentage points), Brazil, Guatemala, and Ecuador (6 percentage points each). Only Uruguay and Panama recorded declines.

When considering who is more likely to support the belief that men make better political leaders than women in the Americas in 2026, differences emerge by gender, education, wealth, religiosity, and political ideology.⁴

Agreement that men make better political leaders has increased since 2018



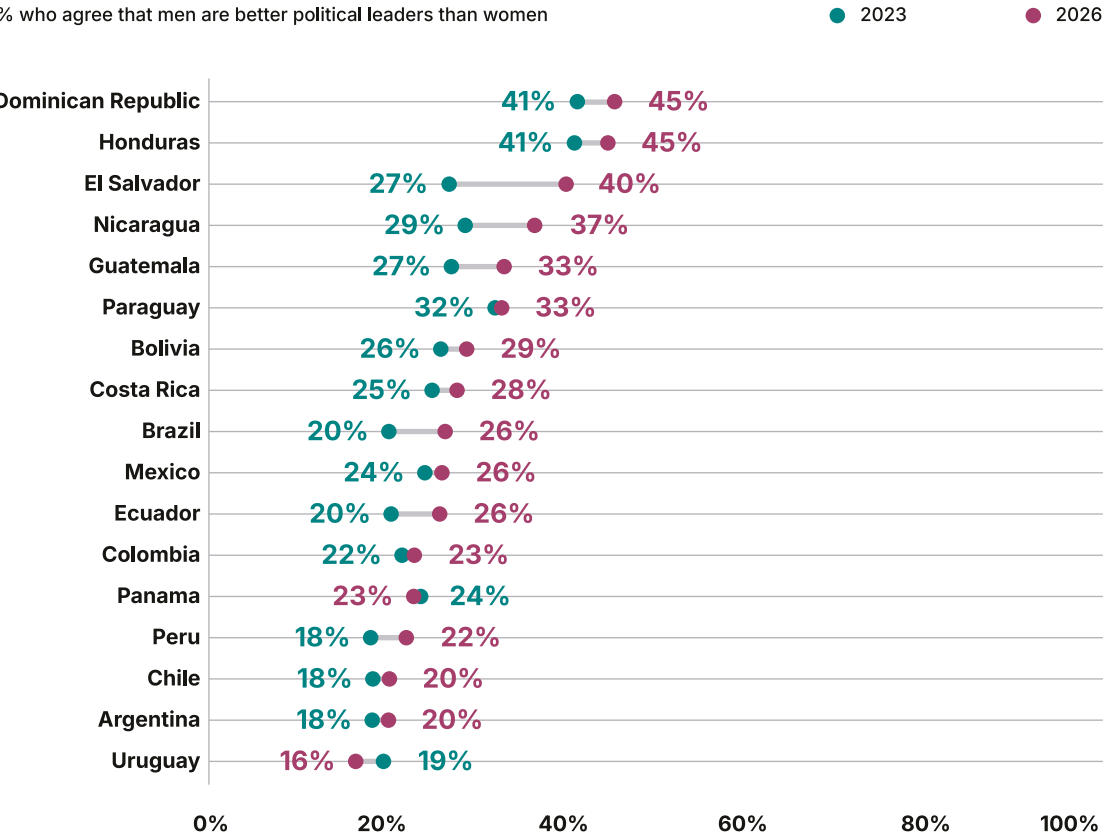
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2008–2026.

Men, those with lower levels of education, and less wealthy individuals are more likely to believe that men make better political leaders than women. Those who report that religion is very important in their lives are also more likely to endorse this view than those who place less importance on it. Similarly, respondents on the political right express higher levels of support than those on the political center or left.

The relative ordering of these groups changed little between 2023 and 2026. Rather, the share favoring men as political leaders increased across nearly all demographic and ideological groups. For example, agreement increased among both men (32% to 35%) and women (18% to 22%), suggesting that the recent increase reflects a broad regional shift rather than changes within a single segment of the population.

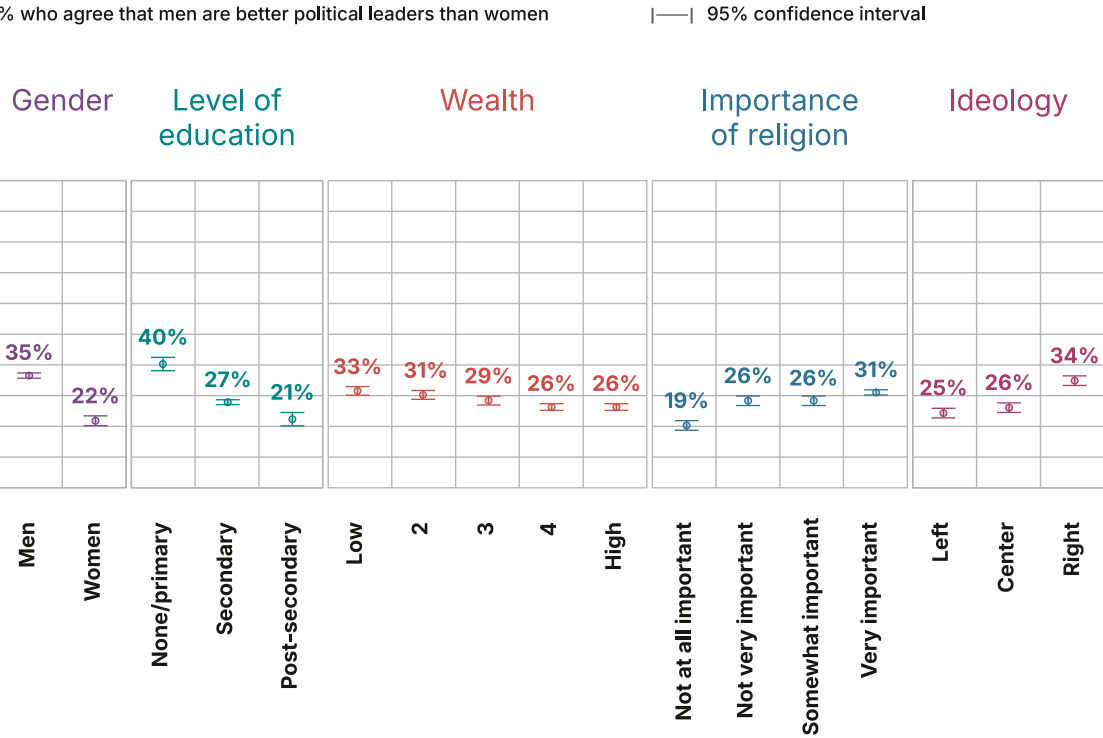
The broad-based nature of this shift raises important questions about evolving attitudes toward gender and political leadership in the region. Because agreement increased across nearly every demographic and ideological group, the trend appears to reflect a broader regional shift in public opinion rather than changes within any single segment of society. Future rounds of the AmericasBarometer will help determine whether this represents a temporary shift or the beginning of a longer-term trend. Because attitudes toward women’s political leadership are closely tied to broader questions of democratic representation and political inclusion, tracking these views over time provides an important indicator of how public attitudes toward gender equality continue to evolve across the region.

Views favoring men as political leaders increased in most countries between 2023 and 2026



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023–2026.

Support for male political leadership is highest among men, the less educated, the more religious, and those on the political right



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Notes

- 1. Abril Todorov is Research Program Coordinator at Vanderbilt University’s Center for Global Democracy and LAPOP Lab.
- 2. Brechenmacher 2025.
- 3. Responses were recoded into a binary measure. Respondents who answered “strongly agree” or “agree” were coded as agreeing that men are better political leaders than women.
- 4. Age and place of residence are omitted because their effects were not statistically significant in a multivariate analysis. Nicaragua and Haiti are excluded from the pooled analysis because the ideology question was not included in the 2026 AmericasBarometer questionnaire in those countries.

What Buys Goodwill Toward Democracy?

Alexander Dean,¹ Mariana Rodríguez,² Robert Vidigal,³
and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister⁴

The Red Valley & Rainbow
Mountain – LAIPC 2021
Cusco, Peru by Kai Gardner

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MAIN FINDINGS

- **The 2026 AmericasBarometer documents a modest yet widespread increase in support for democracy.** About two-thirds of the Latin American public expresses support for democracy in 2026, nearly on par with levels documented in the first six rounds of the AmericasBarometer and 6 percentage points higher than in 2023.
- **The increase in democratic support is broadly shared.** Support for democracy increases in nearly every country and across age groups and educational levels, rather than being driven by any single demographic subgroup. At the same time, substantial differences in levels of democratic support remain across countries.
- **Positive shifts in lived experiences are associated with comparatively higher support for democracy.** Citizens who experience greater economic security, lower food insecurity, less exposure to crime, and fewer experiences with corruption express higher support for democracy. On average, each of these conditions improves across the region between 2023 and 2026.

Support for democracy is neither automatic nor fixed: it can strengthen or weaken as citizens' experiences with the political system change. Citizens' experiences with crime, corruption, and economic scarcity shape how they evaluate the political system. The 2026 AmericasBarometer documents a positive uptick in support for democracy across Latin America after nearly a decade of comparatively lower levels. This chapter examines the breadth of that increase and the connection between citizens' quality of life and their support for democracy.

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Public commitment to democracy helps to bolster political systems against overt turns to authoritarianism. High public support for “democracy” signals the equity that democracy as a political brand has gained, typically over years. That brand value shapes citizens’ expectations and, in turn, constrains the space in which anti-democratic actors can maneuver. In fact, countries whose institutions and processes are more democratic have publics that are more supportive of democracy.⁵ It matters, then, what value citizens assign to the abstract notion of “democracy”.

The 2026 AmericasBarometer documents a positive uptick in support for democracy—as a political system—across the Americas. Across the region and across subgroups within countries, support for democracy has risen. What explains this widespread increase in support for democracy?

To answer this question, we demonstrate a connection between support for democracy and individuals’ quality of life. Specifically, we show that quotidian experiences—the extent to which people are protected against crime, corruption, and economic scarcity—predict support for democracy. We also show that the Latin American public reports, on average, positive changes in security and material well-being since the last round of the AmericasBarometer in 2023. Taken together, these findings are consistent with a broader pattern observed in research on public opinion and democracy: public commitment to democracy tends to be stronger when governments deliver greater security and material well-being.⁶

Support for Democracy Has Increased

Since its inception in 2004, the AmericasBarometer has asked individuals to what extent they favor democracy over other forms of government. We code those who agree with the statement “Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government” as showing support for democracy.⁷ By focusing on this question, we explicitly and intentionally assess the brand value of “democracy”; elsewhere in this report, we assess individuals’ commitment to the principles and practices associated with democratic political systems.⁸

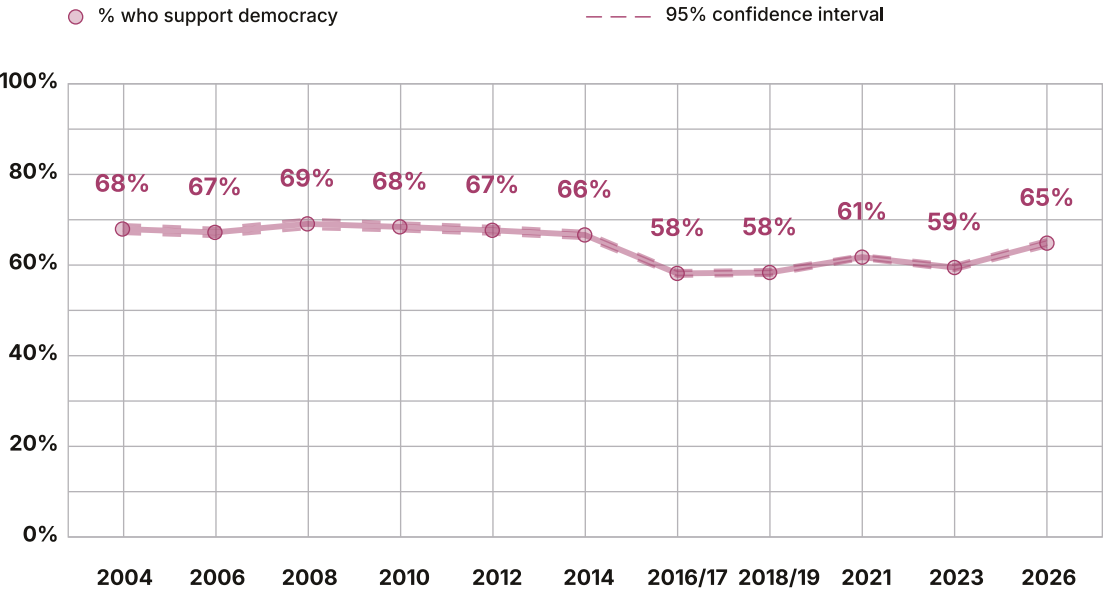
Figure 2.1 shows that about two-thirds of the Latin American public expresses support for democracy in 2026. This current level of support for democracy (65%) is nearly on par with levels documented in the first six rounds of the AmericasBarometer (2004–2014). This outcome represents a rebound from a decline in 2016/17 to a lower level of support that persisted for nearly a decade. In brief, after ten years of comparatively lower levels, support for democracy—one measure of the brand value of democracy—has increased by 6 percentage points.

After ten years of comparatively lower levels, support for democracy—one measure of the brand value of democracy—has increased by 6 percentage points.

Encanto de mi tierra – LAIPC
2021 by Andy Rolong in Colombia



Figure 2.1 Support for democracy has increased in the Latin American region



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

86% support democracy in Uruguay, compared with 50% in Peru.

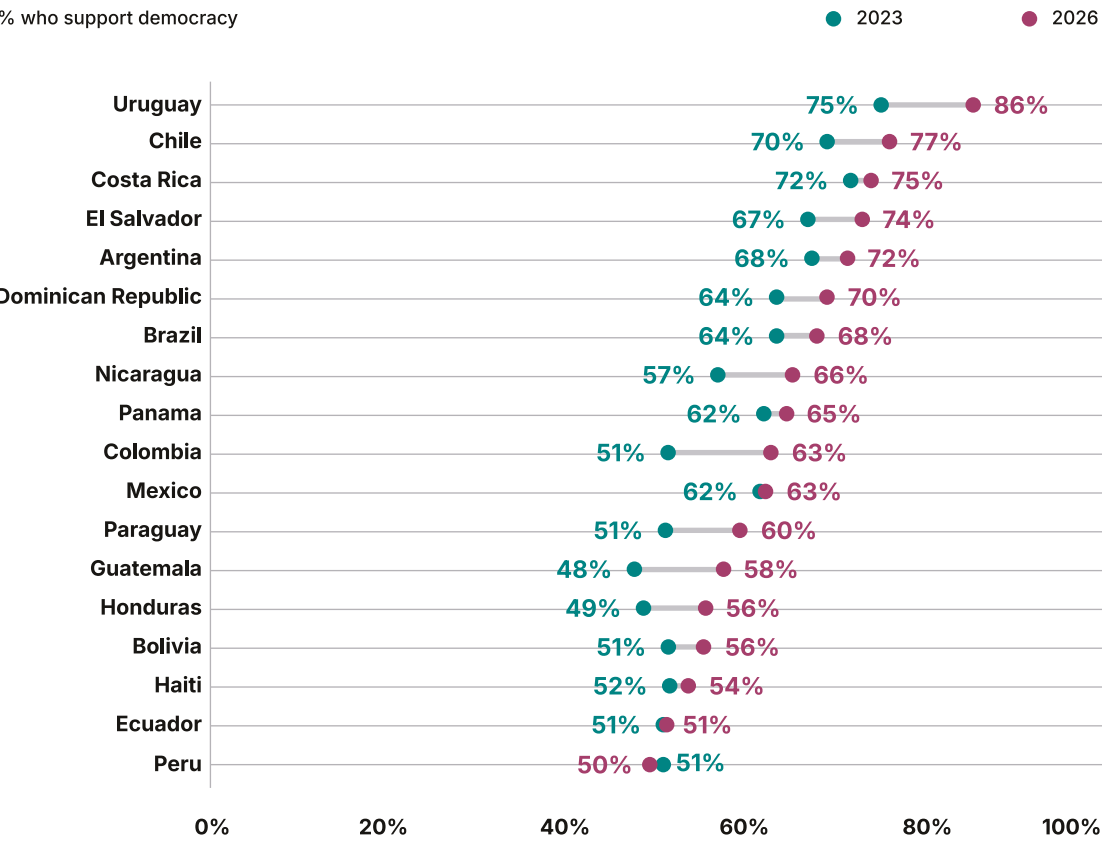
Support for democracy has increased in nearly every country across the region. As **Figure 2.2** shows, nine countries recorded particularly large increases in support for democracy: Colombia (12 percentage points), Uruguay (11), Guatemala (10), Nicaragua (9), Paraguay (9), Chile (7), El Salvador (7), Honduras (7), and the Dominican Republic (6).⁹

In some countries—Costa Rica, Argentina, Brazil, Panama, Haiti, and Bolivia—support for democracy increased only marginally. Finally, in only three countries did support

for democracy remain essentially unchanged between the two most recent rounds of the AmericasBarometer (fluctuating by no more than one percentage point in either direction): Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador.

Of course, average levels of support for democracy vary across countries. In 2026, the proportion of the public that expresses support for democracy ranges from a low of 50% in Peru to a high of 86% in Uruguay. While the regional trend is broadly positive, substantial differences in democratic support remain across countries.

Figure 2.2 Support for democracy increased in nearly every country in Latin America



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

On Point in a Cuban Bar – LAIPC 2024 Havana, Cuba by Lesley Gill



Increased Support for Democracy Is Broad-based

Explanations of abstract support for democracy are often grounded in the notion that socialization experiences vary across age cohorts and that education levels matter.¹⁰ The regional increase observed in 2026, however, is not driven by changes within any single age or education subgroup.

The dots to the right in **Figures 2.3** and **2.4** show that older and more educated individuals express higher levels of support

for democracy than the youngest age cohort, mirroring the patterns we observed in the 2023 AmericasBarometer. Importantly, each age cohort experienced an uptick in support for democracy between 2023 and 2026.

Figure 2.4 similarly supports a broad-based conclusion: while support for democracy varies across education subgroups—with support significantly higher among those with post-secondary education than among those with secondary or less—support for democracy increased within each subgroup. The region-wide uptick in support for

democracy is not driven by generational replacement or by changes within any single education subgroup.¹¹

Improved Living Conditions Predict Greater Democratic Support

What explains the general uptick in support for democracy in the Latin America region? Support for democracy responds to positive changes in individuals’ lived experiences with crime, corruption, and economic well-being. These factors have improved on average across Latin America in recent years.

Together, these dynamics—a positive link between quality-of-life metrics and support for democracy, and an upward trend in quality-of-life outcomes—show that public support for democracy rises in tandem with improved living conditions.

Scholars have theorized that weakly institutionalized political systems have comparatively low levels of what David Easton called “reservoirs of democratic goodwill” toward the political system.¹² While support for democracy has increased in the Latin America region, average levels remain

Figure 2.3 Support for democracy increased across all age cohorts

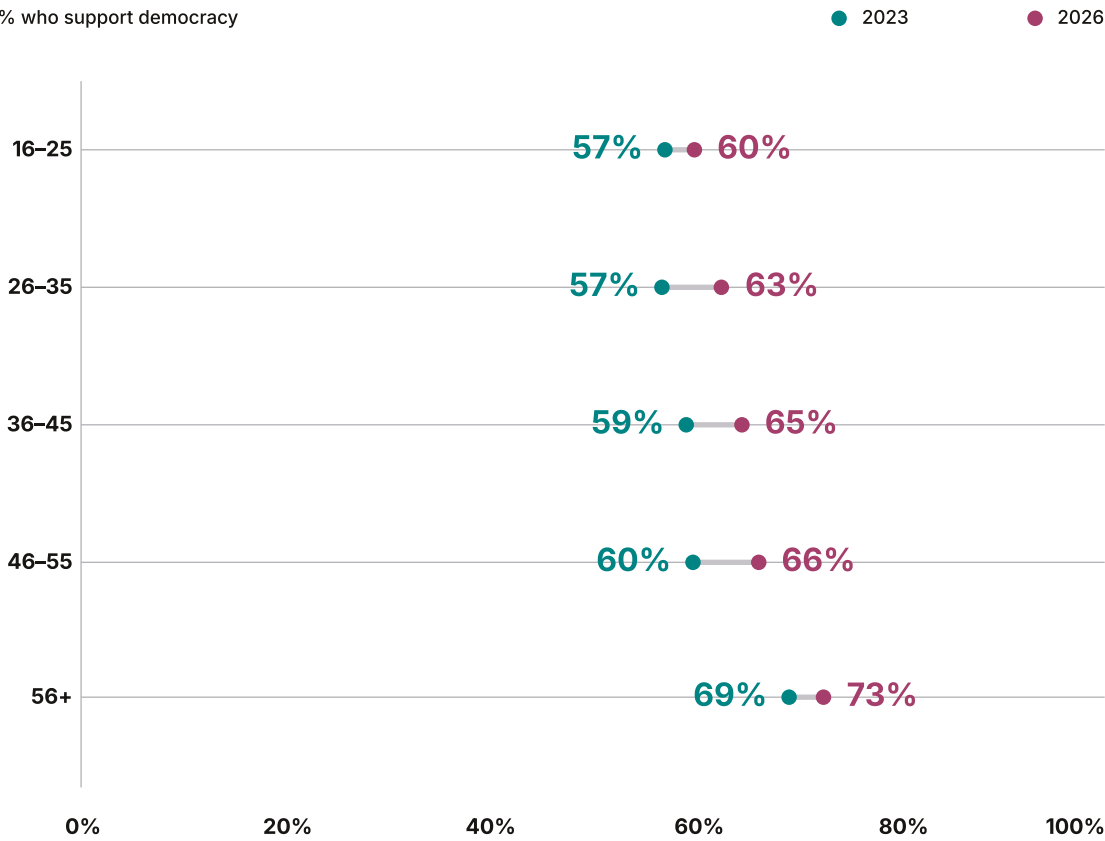
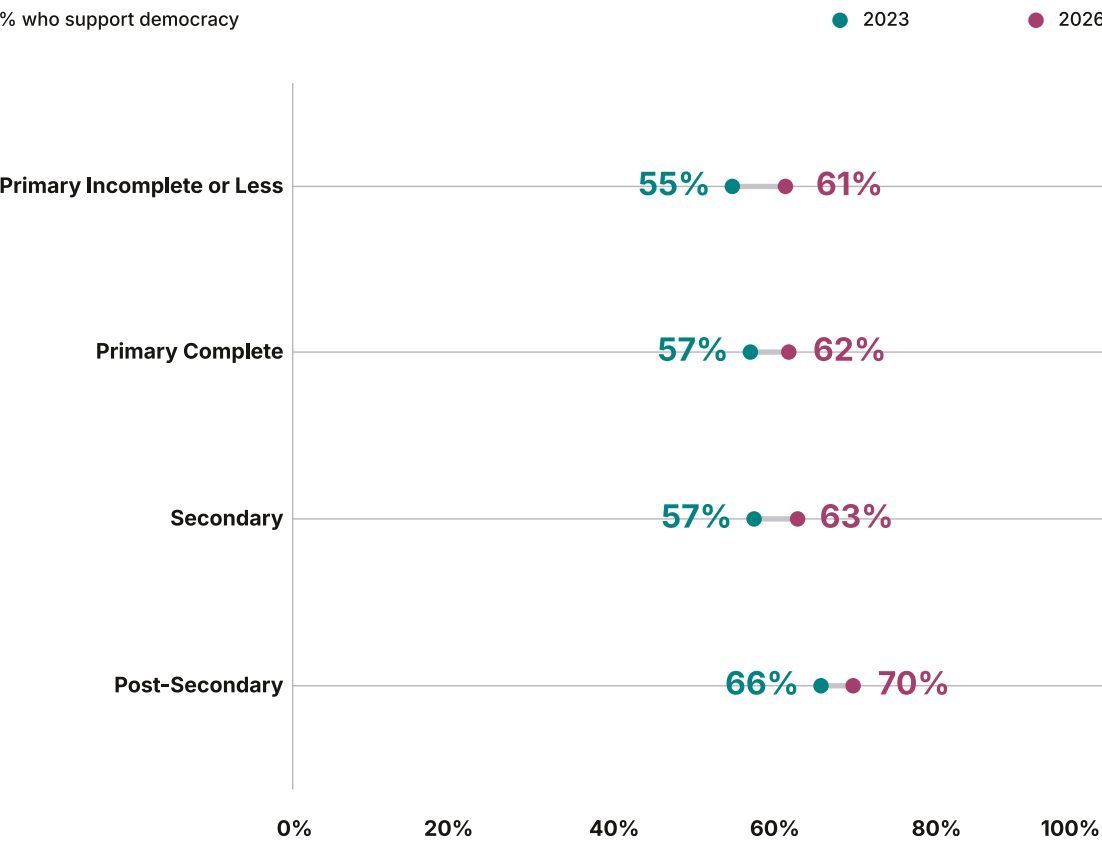


Figure 2.4 Support for democracy increased across all education levels





Those who have not experienced food insecurity in the last three months are 9 percentage points more supportive of democracy than those who have recently run out of food. Simply put, citizens who experience a higher quality of life are more likely to support democracy.

10
percentage
points more
support for
democracy
among those
who have
not been
asked for a
bribe.

lower than in more institutionalized countries. For example, the 2026 AmericasBarometer data show that 73% of US citizens and 74% of Canadian citizens express support for democracy—nearly three-quarters of these publics, compared with nearly two-thirds in the average country within the Latin America region.

When reservoirs of goodwill are relatively low, changes in performance outcomes have a greater impact on public favorability toward the system’s political brand, in this case “democracy”.¹³ In theory, these connections between performance outcomes and attitudes toward democracy are even tighter when the public’s understanding of the concept of democracy is grounded in the expectation that democracy’s purpose is to deliver good outcomes.¹⁴ In the Latin America region, the majority of citizens cite performance-related factors—law enforcement, equality, and freedom—when prompted to describe what democracy

means to them (see *Spotlight on Order, Rights, and Fairness Shape Views on Democracy* in this report).

To assess the connection between material outcomes and support for democracy in the Latin America region, we examine four variables that capture individuals’ lived experiences. Specifically, we consider whether they have recently been a victim of a crime, been asked for a bribe by a police officer, seen their household income decline, or experienced food insecurity.¹⁵

Figure 2.5 shows that those reporting better quality-of-life outcomes are more supportive of democracy. Those who have not experienced crime in the last twelve months are 4 percentage points more supportive of democracy, and those who have not been asked for a bribe by a police officer are 10 percentage points more supportive of democracy. Those who have experienced an increase in their household income over the

9 percentage points more support for democracy among those who have not experienced food insecurity.

last two years are 7 percentage points more supportive of democracy than those whose household income declined. Similarly, those who have not experienced food insecurity in the last three months are 9 percentage points more supportive of democracy than those who have recently run out of food. Simply put, citizens who experience a higher quality of life are more likely to support democracy.

If these living conditions are associated with democratic support, an important question is whether they changed between 2023 and 2026. The data show that they did. Consistent with our discussion in Chapter 1, **Figure 2.6** shows gains across all four indicators in the Latin America region on

average, though gains in victimization and corruption were more modest than those in economic security.

Moreover, conditions remain challenging across much of the region: more than one in five adults experienced crime victimization in the past year; about one in ten has been asked for a bribe by a police officer; just under one-third experienced a decline in household finances in the previous two years; and just over one-quarter have recently experienced food insecurity. Yet between 2023 and 2026, these indicators moved—to some degree—in positive directions for the region as a whole.¹⁶ These improvements coincided with a regional

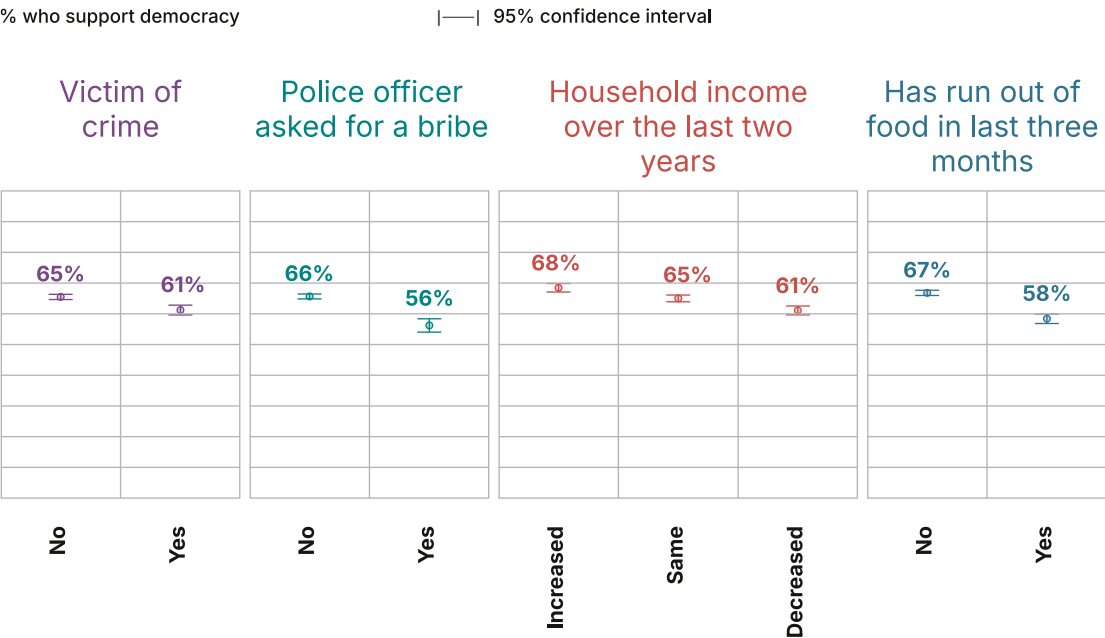
increase in democratic support, providing important context for interpreting that rebound.

The Future of Democracy Depends on Continued Progress

The 2026 AmericasBarometer documents a modest yet widespread increase in support for democracy across Latin America. This increase marks the highest regional level of democratic support in more than a decade and is broad-based across countries and demographic groups. These findings suggest that the decline in democratic support documented in recent years may have begun to reverse.

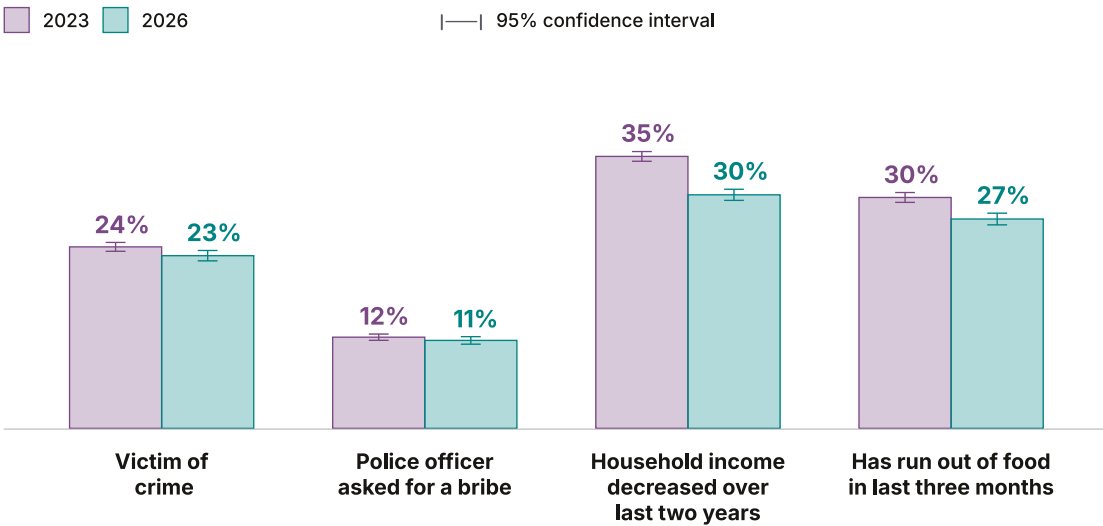
This increase in democratic support coincided with improvements in several of the lived conditions most closely associated with expressions of goodwill toward democracy. Citizens who report greater economic security, lower food insecurity, less exposure to crime, and fewer experiences with corruption express higher support for democracy. On average, each of these conditions improved across the region between 2023 and 2026. These findings suggest that citizens’ support for democracy increases as their everyday living conditions improve.

Figure 2.5 Better living conditions are associated with greater support for democracy



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Figure 2.6 Living conditions associated with democratic support improved between 2023 and 2026



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023–2026.

Governments need not solve every challenge overnight to strengthen democratic legitimacy. Demonstrating sustained progress may itself help build public confidence in democracy.

These findings also reinforce a central message reported in the 2023 *Pulse of Democracy*. That report warned of a slow-burning crisis of democratic support and argued that rebuilding public confidence would depend on governments demonstrating meaningful improvements in the conditions that shape citizens' daily lives. Although many challenges remain across the region, the improvements documented in this report coincide with a measurable rebound in democratic support, consistent with that broader expectation.

Whether the recent increase represents the beginning of a sustained recovery in democratic support or a temporary departure from more than a decade of comparatively lower levels remains an open question. Democratic support is not fixed. It often takes years to build but can erode much more quickly. Continued progress in security, economic opportunity, and household well-being may strengthen democratic legitimacy over time, while setbacks could reverse recent gains.

The AmericasBarometer's long-standing measure of democratic support remains an important tool for monitoring these changes. The measure is responsive to shifting political and social conditions and continues to provide a reliable framework for monitoring democratic resilience over time.

Across much of the Americas, conditions remain challenging but have improved in many countries. Citizens appear to respond to these improvements in multiple ways: by expressing more support for democracy and, as shown in the next chapter, by becoming less likely to consider emigrating. Together, these findings suggest that governments need not solve every challenge overnight to strengthen democratic legitimacy. Demonstrating sustained progress may itself help build public confidence in democracy.

Notes

- 1Alexander Dean is a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University.
- 2Mariana Rodríguez is Director of Research and Engagement at Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy and LAPOP Lab.
- 3Robert Vidigal is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Brasília and former Senior Statistician at Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy and LAPOP Lab.
- 4Elizabeth J. Zechmeister is the Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Growth Initiatives, Dean of the Graduate School, and Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University.
- 5Castorena and Zechmeister 2023; Claassen 2020; Easton 1975; Keller 1993.
- 6Lupu et al. 2023. This argument is consistent with Easton's (1975) reconceptualization of diffuse democracy as subject to performance-driven fluctuations; see also Magalhães (2014), who documents variation in these connections by survey item. For evidence that many citizens in Latin America associate democracy with performance, see the *Spotlight on Order, Rights, and Fairness Shape Views on Democracy* in this report.
- 7The survey item is asked on a 1-7 disagree-agree scale. Respondents selecting 5, 6, or 7 are coded as supporting democracy.
- 8See Spotlights on the *Order, Rights, and Fairness Shape Views on Democracy, Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism: A New Index of Democratic Commitment*, and *Support for Democracy Does Not Always Extend to Liberal-Democratic Norms* in this report.
- 9In these countries, the increase in support for democracy is equal to or greater than the region-average of 6 percentage points.
- 10Jennings and Niemi 1981; see also Noam Lupu, "Spotlight on Political Generations and Democratic Attitudes," in 2023 *Pulse of Democracy* (LAPOP Lab 2023).
- 11Regional averages mask important cross-national variation. For example, younger cohorts experienced declines in support for democracy in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Haiti, while support increased among younger respondents in Mexico. Additional country-specific analyses are available using the AmericasBarometer data.
- 12Easton 1975; Lupu et al. 2023.
- 13Easton 1975.
- 14A related argument is made by Singer (2010), who argues that the public's tendency to punish or reward an incumbent for poor economic performance is conditioned by the importance they attach to the economy relative to other issues; that is, attitudes that occupy the foreground of citizens' minds condition the extent to which they link material outcomes to political evaluations.
- 15Crime victimization measures whether respondents were victims of crime during the previous 12 months; corruption captures whether a police officer requested a bribe during the previous 12 months; household income records changes over the previous two years; food insecurity measures whether respondents ran out of food during the previous three months.
- 16The analysis focuses on regional averages for 2023 and 2026. Chapter 1 examines longer-term regional trends, while Chapter 3 presents country-level changes over time.

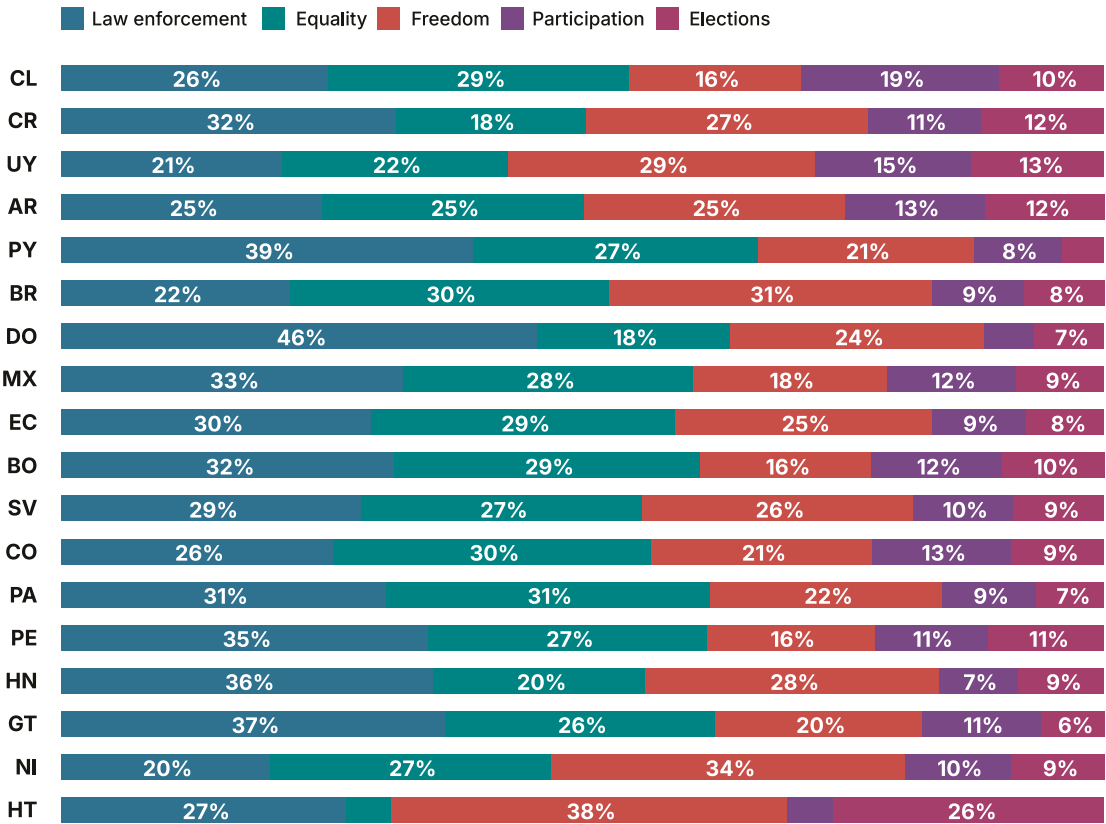
Across Latin America, citizens tend to associate democracy more with what democratic institutions are expected to deliver than with the procedures that formally define democratic rule. Law enforcement, freedom, and equality are more frequently cited than elections or participation as the values most closely associated with democracy. Regionally, law enforcement is the most commonly cited association with democracy, selected by 30.3% of respondents, followed by equality at 25% and freedom at 24.4%. By comparison, participation (10.5%) and elections (9.7%) receive much lower levels of support.

The preference for law enforcement is especially pronounced in the Dominican Republic (46%), Paraguay (39%), Honduras (36%), Peru (35%), Mexico (33%), and Costa Rica (32%), whereas freedom is most important in Haiti (38%), Brazil (31%), and Uruguay (29%). Equality is prominent in Panama (31%), Brazil and Colombia (30% each), Ecuador (29%), Mexico (28%), and Paraguay, Peru, and El Salvador (27% each).

These findings suggest that citizens evaluate democracy not only by whether elections are competitive, but also by whether democratic institutions provide security, protect rights, and ensure fair treatment.

If citizens primarily associate democracy with order, equality, and security, democratic legitimacy may weaken when governments fail to control violence, curb corruption, or address unequal treatment. These findings suggest that efforts to strengthen democratic legitimacy may require attention not only to electoral institutions but also to citizens' expectations for security, rights, and equal treatment. They also require institutions capable of responding credibly to public concerns about security and equality. In contexts like Latin America, marked by insecurity and social inequality, many citizens may judge democracy primarily by its capacity to provide order, protect rights, and promote equality rather than by electoral competition or opportunities for civic participation alone.

Citizens Prioritize Law Enforcement, Equality, and Freedom Over Elections and Participation



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Notes

1

Robert Vidigal is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Brasilia and former Senior Statistician at Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy and LAPOP Lab.

SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY DOES NOT ALWAYS EXTEND TO LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC NORMS

Alexander Dean¹

Researchers and policymakers often describe two widely held public attitudes as contradictory: individuals say that democracy is preferable to other forms of government while also accepting actions that weaken institutions meant to keep elected leaders accountable. Previous AmericasBarometer reports and other research have documented these beliefs across Latin America.² Yet citizens may not see these beliefs as contradictory. Instead, this apparent tension may indicate that citizens, researchers, and policymakers understand democracy and the norms necessary for democratic resilience differently.

New data from the 2026 AmericasBarometer suggest that support for liberal-democratic norms is only weakly associated with support for democracy, challenging the common assumption that the two move together. The main exception is elections: support for norms related to electoral competition is associated with stronger support for democracy, suggesting that many citizens understand democracy primarily in electoral terms.³

The 2026 AmericasBarometer included seven questions measuring support for core democratic principles, including respect for election results, rejection of one-party rule, media freedom, judicial independence, and legislative oversight. We combine these responses into an index that measures support for liberal-democratic norms.⁴

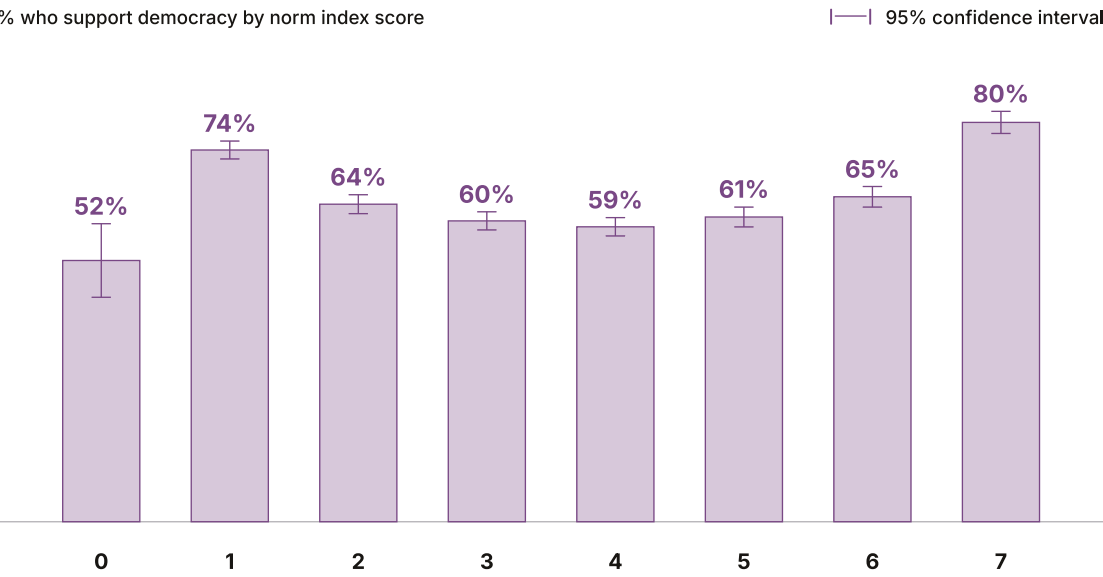
If support for democracy and support for liberal-democratic norms moved together, individuals with higher scores on the seven-

item index would also express stronger support for democracy. The data show that this is generally not the case. Support for democracy changes little across most values of the index and increases substantially only among individuals who support all seven norms. The one notable exception is individuals who support only a single liberal-democratic norm. Most members of this group endorse only one principle, respect for election results, suggesting that elections occupy a uniquely important place in how many citizens understand democracy. This pattern suggests that support for liberal-democratic norms is only weakly associated with support for democracy.

Looking at each norm separately helps explain this pattern. Individuals may view only some liberal-democratic norms as essential to democracy. Among those who affirm a specific norm, support for democracy varies narrowly (61% to 69%), with the regional average at 65%. The two norms related to electoral competition—respect for election results and rejection of one-party rule (69% and 67%, respectively)—are associated with higher-than-average support for democracy. The other five norms fall below the regional average. Although the two highest-ranked items concern electoral competition, norms related to judicial and legislative constraints on executive power are among the weakest correlates of support for democracy.

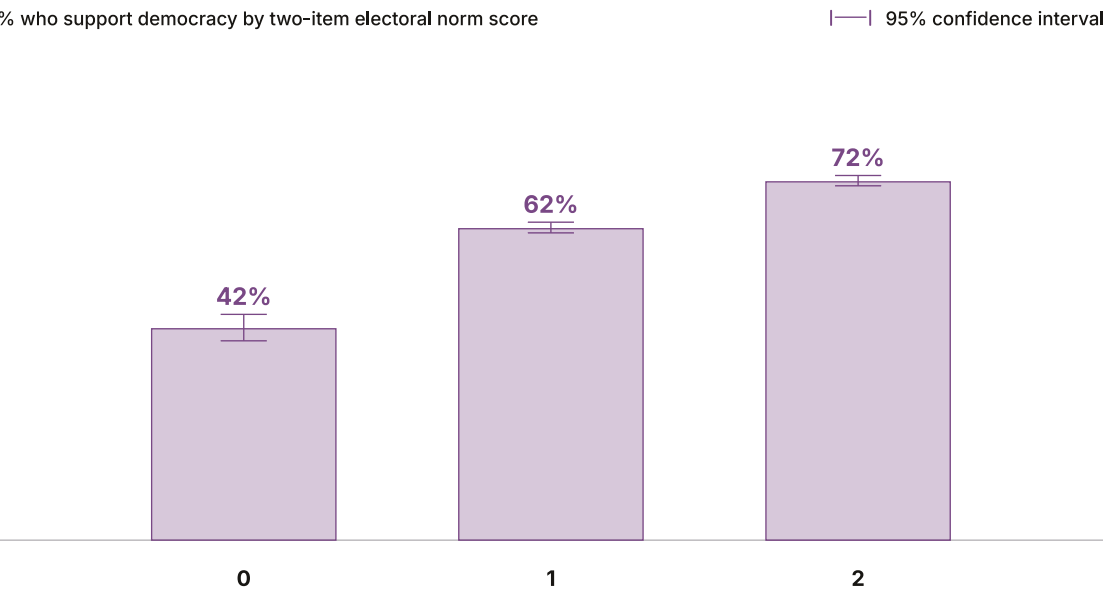
Examining the two electoral questions as an index reinforces this interpretation. When these norms are combined into an additive index, the relationship is clearly ordered:

Support for democracy is only weakly associated with broader liberal-democratic norms



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Support for democracy is most closely associated with electoral norms



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

individuals who reject both norms report extremely low support for democracy (42%), those who support only one report average support (62%), and those who support both report the highest support (72%). These results suggest that citizens view elections as the defining elements of democracy. Conversely, they suggest that many citizens may not view judicial independence or legislative constraints on executive power as essential components of democracy, which helps explain why the broader seven-item index is only weakly associated with democratic support.

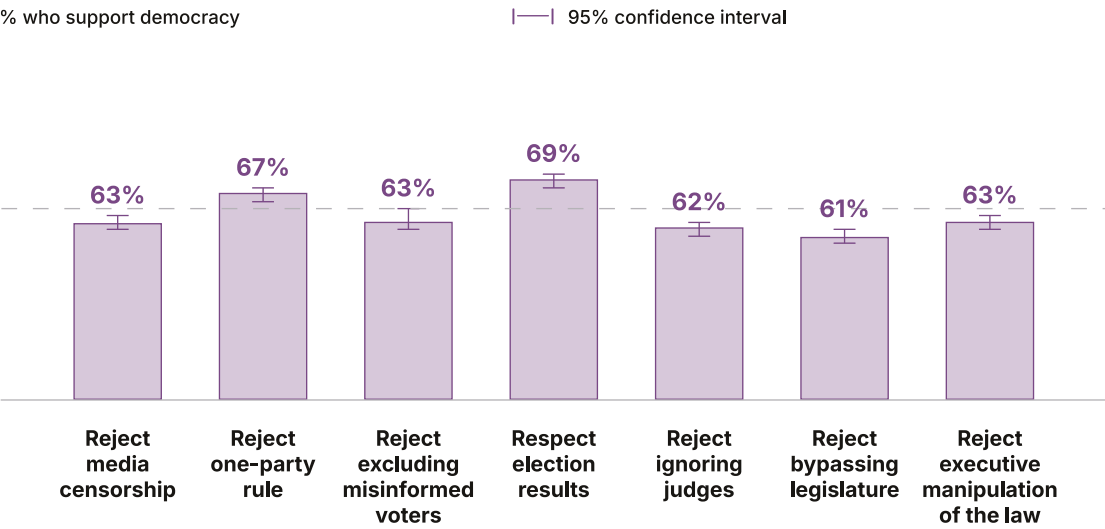
These findings do not suggest that individuals who endorse democracy are insincere. Rather, they show that the conventional question of whether democracy is preferable to other forms

of government should not be interpreted as a proxy for a fully liberal-democratic worldview, nor vice versa. If citizens view judicial independence and legislative oversight as ordinary questions of governance rather than as matters of democratic legitimacy, they can sincerely affirm democracy while remaining indifferent to the erosion of these institutions.

For researchers, policymakers, and democracy practitioners, these findings suggest that strengthening democratic resilience may require more than promoting democracy in the abstract. They also underscore the importance of helping citizens understand why institutions such as independent courts, legislatures, and other checks on executive power are essential to democratic governance.

The conventional question of whether democracy is preferable to other forms of government should not be interpreted as a proxy for a fully liberal-democratic worldview, nor vice versa.

Support for democracy increases with support for core electoral norms



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026. The dashed line indicates the regional average.

Notes

- 1 Alexander Dean is a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University.
- 2 Lupu et al. 2023; Carlin and Singer 2011.
- 3 These findings complement those presented in the Spotlight “Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism: A New Index of Democratic Commitment”.
- 4 The seven-item index is adapted from Claassen et al. (2024). Respondents rated each statement on a seven-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). For the six items in which agreement reflects rejection of a liberal-democratic norm (media censorship, one-party rule, restricting voting rights, ignoring judges, bypassing the legislature, and manipulating the law), responses of 1–3 were coded as affirming the liberal-democratic norm. For the item on respecting election results, responses of 5–7 were coded as affirming the norm. These seven binary indicators were summed to produce an index ranging from 0 (supports none of the norms) to 7 (supports all seven norms).

SUPPORT FOR ILLIBERAL MAJORITARIANISM: A NEW INDEX OF DEMOCRATIC COMMITMENT

Abby Córdoba¹ and Gessica de Freitas²

Across the Americas, many citizens express strong support for democracy while also backing leaders who weaken checks and balances, sideline opposition parties, and challenge the rule of law. Why does this apparent contradiction exist? That is, *why do citizens who express strong support for democracy often endorse leaders and practices that undermine democratic institutions?* Many citizens understand democracy in “illiberal majoritarian terms”: a system in which elected leaders are viewed as legitimate representatives of the people’s will and therefore entitled to govern with few constraints, even at the expense of minority rights and institutional checks and balances. This conception helps explain why support for democracy, as typically measured by the so-called Churchill question (“Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government”) often coexists with support for democratic erosion. Citizens who hold illiberal majoritarian views tend to regard elected leaders as democratic simply because they were chosen by the people, regardless of whether those leaders undermine liberal democratic institutions.

Using data from the 2026 AmericasBarometer, this Spotlight shows that support for illiberal majoritarianism is widespread across Latin America. More importantly, in several countries, citizens who score high on illiberal majoritarianism also express strong support for democracy, as measured by the Churchill question. These findings suggest that many citizens view democracy primarily as a system in which leaders are elected by the people, rather than as one that also requires institutional checks

and balances, minority rights, and the rule of law. To better understand these attitudes, this Spotlight introduces a new index of Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism (SIM) included in the 2026 AmericasBarometer surveys.

Measuring Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism

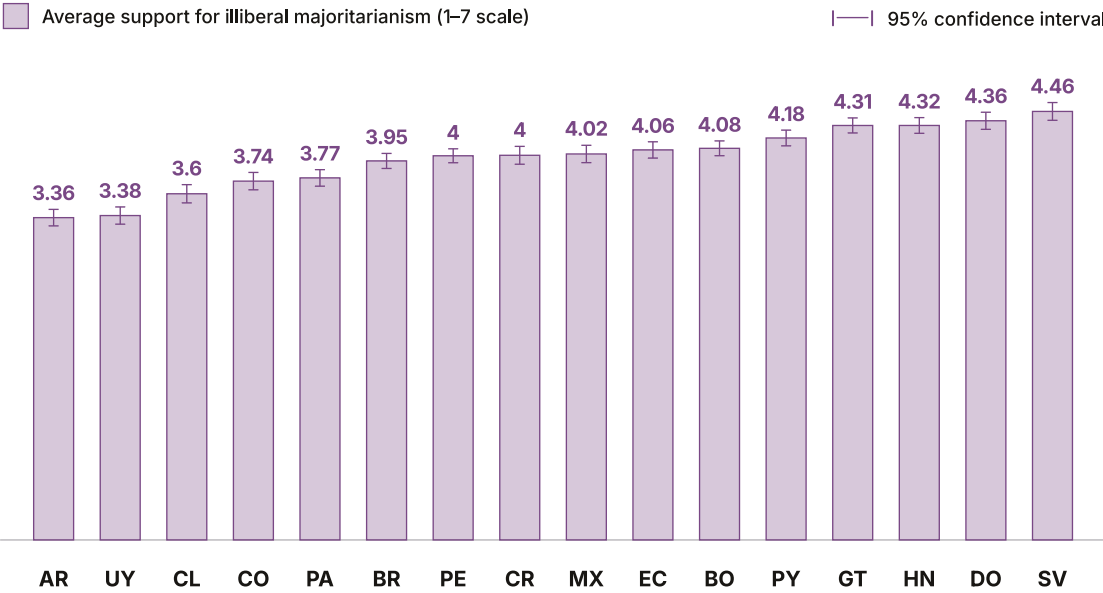
The 2026 AmericasBarometer included five survey items designed to measure support for SIM. These questions capture the extent to which citizens believe that elected leaders should be able to govern with few constraints, including limiting opposition voices, disregarding judicial and legal obstacles, overriding minority rights, and exercising broad authority based on their electoral mandate. We combine the following items into a single index of support for illiberal majoritarianism:³

For the country’s progress, it is necessary for our presidents to limit the voice and voting power of opposition parties. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? (1–7 scale)

For the country’s progress, it is necessary for our presidents to limit the voice of judges who obstruct their work. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? (1–7 scale)

For the country’s progress, it is sometimes justified for our presidents to ignore laws that obstruct their work. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? (1–7 scale)

Support for illiberal majoritarianism varies widely



Note: Average support for illiberal majoritarianism measured based on a simple average of items POP101, IM1, IM2, IM3, and IM5 across respondents.

Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Elected presidents should do what the people want, even when this violates the rights of a minority. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? (1–7 scale)

Presidents elected by the people should have the authority to govern without obstacles. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? (1–7 scale)

Support for Illiberal Majoritarianism Is Widespread Across the Region

SIM varies substantially across countries, ranging from an average of 4.46 in El Salvador to 3.36 in Argentina on a 1–7 scale—two countries in the sample with contrasting trajectories of liberal democracy,

as measured by V-Dem. Countries such as the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Guatemala also exhibit high levels of SIM, whereas Chile, Uruguay, and Colombia show comparatively lower levels of support. We also observe that Costa Rica, long recognized for its democratic stability but that has experienced modest erosion in recent years, displays SIM levels similar to those in countries with more substantial democratic backsliding, such as Mexico and Peru.⁴

Support for illiberal majoritarianism is widespread across the region rather than confined to a small segment of the public. A second figure shows the cumulative percentage of respondents across SIM index values, from high to low, in each country. The sum of the blue, teal, and red bars indicates the percentage of citizens who score on the

upper end of the index—between 4 and 7 points on the 1–7 scale.

In most countries, the majority of respondents fall within this upper range. In El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Guatemala, over 60% of respondents score at least 4 points on the SIM scale. In most other countries, this number is at least 50%, though it falls somewhat lower in Panama, Colombia, and Chile (45–47%). Even in Argentina and Uruguay, which have comparatively lower average SIM levels, over 35% of the public scores in the 4–7 range. Overall, SIM is not a marginal belief limited to countries in the region experiencing deep democratic backsliding; support for illiberal majoritarianism is broadly present across countries with very different democratic trajectories.

Many Citizens Who Support Democracy Also Support Illiberal Majoritarianism

Multivariate analyses indicate that the SIM index is not merely capturing presidential approval but rather reflects a distinct understanding of democracy. More specifically, in several countries, citizens who score high on support for illiberal majoritarianism also express high levels of support for democracy, as measured by the Churchill question in the survey. This positive relationship is statistically significant in most countries in the analysis, including El Salvador, Mexico, Honduras, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, and Panama.

Rather than rejecting democracy, many citizens who support illiberal majoritarianism seem to hold a different conception of it. For these citizens, democratic legitimacy derives primarily from elections and majority rule, rather than from checks and balances, judicial independence, minority rights, and other liberal-democratic institutions. This helps explain why support for democracy can

coexist with support for leaders who weaken democratic constraints and underscores the limitations of relying solely on conventional survey measures of democratic support.

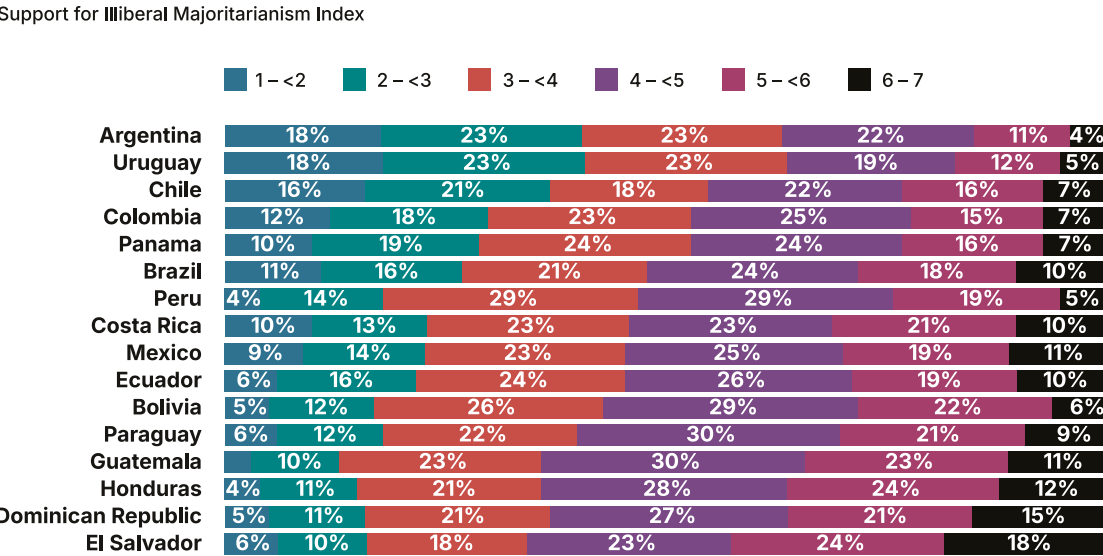
In several other countries, the relationship is not statistically significant, suggesting that citizens hold more heterogeneous understandings of democracy. Only in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay do we observe the expected negative relationship: citizens who support illiberal majoritarianism are, on average, less likely to support democracy.

The concept of illiberal majoritarianism holds that democratic legitimacy derives primarily from elections. Under this view, leaders who win elections are entitled to govern with few constraints, even when their actions undermine checks and balances, minority rights, or other liberal democratic institutions. If this interpretation is correct, citizens who score high on support for illiberal majoritarianism should also be more likely to believe that elections alone are sufficient for democracy. To test this expectation, the 2026 AmericasBarometer included an additional survey question not part of the SIM index:

For there to be full democracy, the only thing that matters is that our presidents/ prime ministers are elected by the people. How much do you agree or disagree with that view? (1–7 scale)

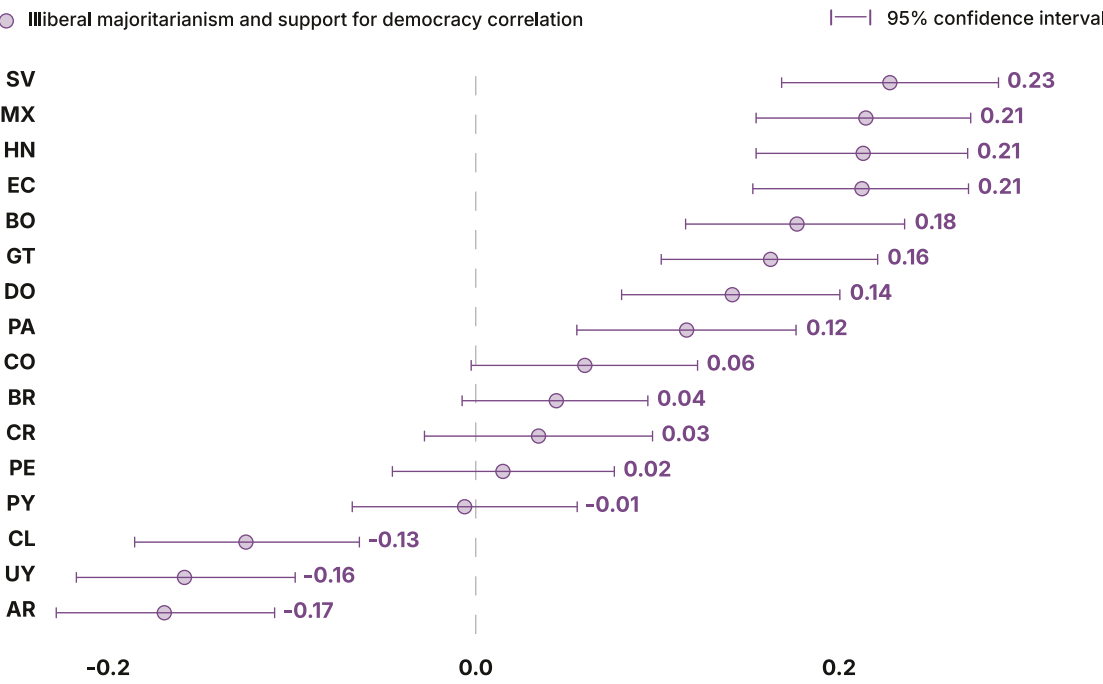
The final figure shows that, in every country in the sample, support for illiberal majoritarianism is positively associated with the belief that elections alone are sufficient for democracy. This pattern strongly suggests that SIM captures a conception of democracy centered on elections and majority rule rather than on the broader set of institutions and protections associated with liberal democracy. It also helps explain why citizens who support illiberal majoritarianism may view elected leaders—and even governments that weaken democratic constraints—as fully democratic.

Support for illiberal majoritarianism is widespread across the region



Note: Frequency distribution of respondents across the values of the support for illiberal majoritarianism index.
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Support for democracy often coexists with support for illiberal majoritarianism



Note: Democratic support is measured by the support for democracy item in the AmericasBarometer surveys.
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Implications for Democratic Resilience

The results presented above have important implications for how we conceptualize and measure citizens’ commitment to democracy. Existing measures often assume that citizen support for liberal democracy reflects a commitment to both its electoral and liberal components. However, the findings here show that individuals conceive of democracy in illiberal, majoritarian terms, reducing it to elections alone—an understanding that can legitimize elected leaders’ efforts to weaken accountability institutions or minority rights, even when those efforts are still viewed as democratic.

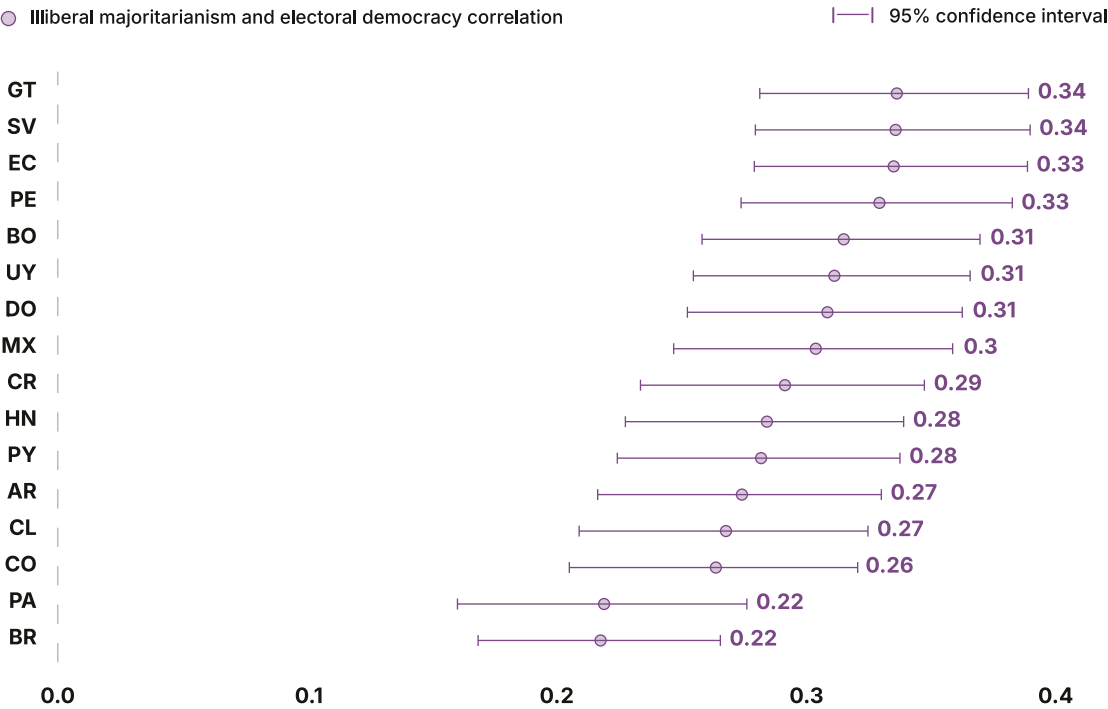
Because support for illiberal majoritarianism is widespread across the region, the index introduced here offers a valuable tool for distinguishing citizens genuinely committed

to liberal democracy from those who equate democracy primarily with electoral legitimacy. In doing so, it provides a clearer lens for understanding the attitudinal foundations of democratic resilience and erosion, as authoritarian leaders increasingly come to power through elections.

These findings also have important implications for efforts to strengthen democracy. Promoting citizen commitment to liberal democracy requires more than encouraging participation in elections; it also requires strengthening public understanding of the institutions and protections that sustain democratic governance. As long as support for illiberal majoritarianism remains widespread, citizens may continue to view leaders’ undemocratic actions as compatible with democracy, thereby limiting public resistance to democratic backsliding.

As long as support for illiberal majoritarianism remains widespread, citizens may continue to view leaders’ undemocratic actions as compatible with democracy, thereby limiting public resistance to democratic backsliding.

Illiberal majoritarianism is linked to viewing elections as sufficient for democracy



Note: Electoral democracy is measured using respondents’ perceptions of democracy as being defined solely by elections.

Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Notes

- 1
- Abby Córdova is an Associate Professor of Global Affairs in the Keough School of Global Affairs at the University of Notre Dame. She is also a Faculty Fellow of the Keough School’s Kellogg Institute for International Studies and Director of the Notre Dame Eliminating Violence against Women Lab.
- 2
- Gessica de Freitas is a Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science at the University of Notre Dame. She is affiliated with the Representation and Politics in Legislatures Lab and the Evidence Against Violence Lab.
- 3
- Except for the first survey item, which was included in past AmericasBarometer surveys, all other items were designed by the authors to reflect the elements of the proposed definition of support for illiberal majoritarianism. Before inclusion in the 2026 AmericasBarometer, this battery of questions was piloted through online surveys in Brazil and Mexico. The five items form a reliable and comparable index of SIM across the countries included in the 2026 AmericasBarometer survey. The index is calculated as a simple average of the five items and is used in the analyses that follow. The index serves as the basis for a more extensive academic paper by the authors, available upon request.
- 4
- Coppedge et al. 2026.

Latin America appears to be experiencing an unprecedented rightward electoral shift, marked by conservative and far-right candidates winning recent presidential elections in countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Costa Rica, and El Salvador. Recent analyses have documented this electoral record in detail, noting that the right won all 4 presidential elections held in the region in 2025 and that 9 of 15 democracies examined have shifted from left to right since 2022.³ To many political observers, these developments seem like evidence of a growing public embrace of right-wing politics across the region. Yet electoral outcomes do not necessarily imply corresponding changes in citizens' ideological orientations. Whether the apparent rightward shift in governments has been accompanied by a comparable shift in mass ideology remains an open empirical question—one that survey data are uniquely positioned to answer.

Interpreting the electoral record is further complicated by what the 2026 AmericasBarometer documents about living conditions across the region. Between 2023 and 2026, economic pessimism declined in 14 of 16 countries surveyed, household food insecurity retreated from its pandemic-era peak, and perceptions of neighborhood insecurity continued a steady decline that began in 2018/19. If conservative electoral gains were primarily a response to deteriorating economic and security conditions, we might expect ideological self-placement to have shifted more dramatically as well. The fact that conditions were broadly improving during the period in which conservative candidates were winning elections suggests that short-term economic

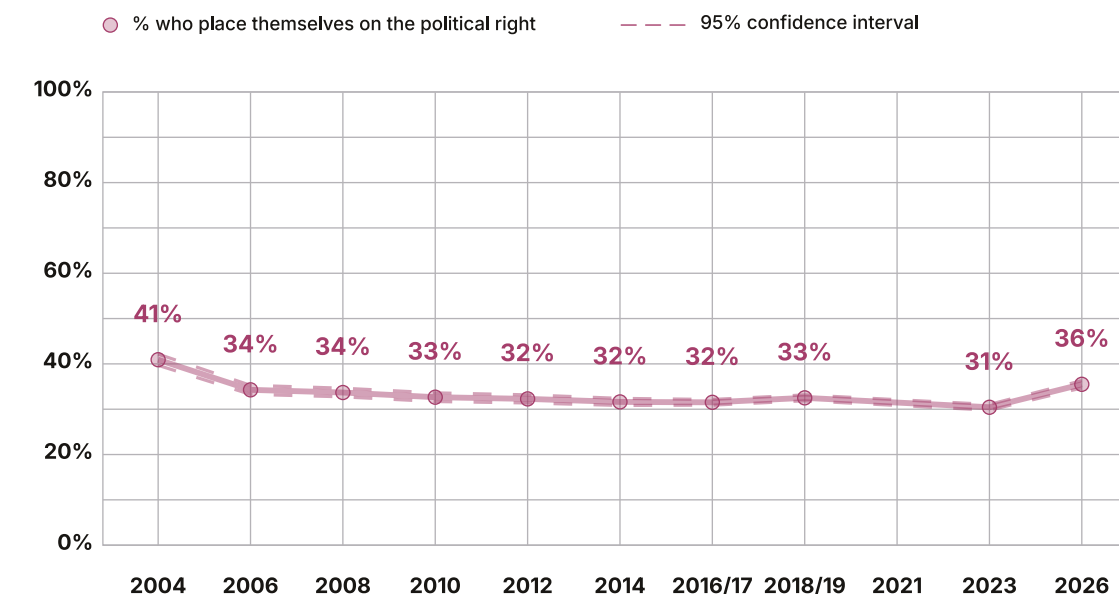
and security conditions alone cannot explain the electoral right's success.

Colombia illustrates the point. Poverty fell to its lowest recorded level in 2025 according to official statistics, yet far-right candidate Abelardo de la Espriella won the June 2026 presidential runoff. Scholars have pointed to the discrediting of Venezuela and Cuba as viable left models, the spread of evangelical Christianity, migration-driven backlash in receiving countries, and the personalist appeal of figures like Nayib Bukele and Javier Milei as forces reshaping electoral competition independently of short-term economic grievances.⁴ Using over two decades of AmericasBarometer data, we examine trends in ideological self-placement both over time and across countries to assess whether Latin Americans have, in fact, become more likely to place themselves on the political right.⁵

The time series shows that the proportion of individuals placing themselves on the right of the ideological spectrum has remained stable across two decades of AmericasBarometer surveys, with no sustained long-term shift in either direction. After reaching 41% in 2004, the share of individuals placing themselves on the right declined to about one-third of the population in Latin America, ranging between 31% and 34% from 2006 through 2023. The 2026 AmericasBarometer records a modest increase to 36%, suggesting that this change should be interpreted cautiously rather than as evidence of a meaningful shift in ideological self-placement.

This pattern is consistent with analyses indicating that much of the right's electoral strength reflects dissatisfaction with left-wing incumbents and a demand for better

Political right self-placement in Latin America has changed little over time



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2004–2026.

performance on security and economic reform rather than a durable shift in ideological self-placement.⁶ Notably, the 2026 AmericasBarometer also documents a broad but moderate increase in support for democracy across the region—including in countries that elected right-wing governments—suggesting that conservative electoral choices do not necessarily reflect a broader rejection of democracy, but may instead reflect performance-based demands within a broadly democratic framework.

Most countries experience modest increases in the share placing themselves on the political right between 2023 and 2026, although substantial cross-national variation persists. The results show a broad but generally modest rightward shift in ideological self-placement rather than a dramatic regional realignment. At the regional level, the increase in self-placement on the political

right coincides with declines in both left self-placement and ideological nonresponse, while the political center remains essentially stable. Country-level patterns vary, however, demonstrating that there is no single pattern behind the region's modest rightward shift.

Brazil (46% to 50%), Colombia (29% to 40%), Honduras (36% to 42%), Panama (23% to 33%), Bolivia (25% to 34%), and Mexico (29% to 35%) register some of the largest increases. Many of these are cases where left or center-left governments face widespread criticism over crime, corruption, or economic management. Colombia is particularly instructive: self-placement on the political right increases by 11 points in the 2026 AmericasBarometer, fielded before the June runoff, anticipating the electoral outcome that follows even as living conditions improve under the outgoing government. This pattern is consistent with the argument that voters

are responding less to material conditions per se than to perceptions of incumbent performance, governance quality, and the credibility of competing political projects.⁷

By contrast, changes were minimal in countries that already have right-wing governments, such as the Dominican Republic (39% to 38%), Paraguay (32% to 31%), and Argentina (27% to 26%). This pattern is telling: where conservative leaders are now the incumbents, self-placement on the political right is not increasing further—evidencing that the electoral success of right-wing parties has not generated a self-reinforcing ideological realignment among citizens. Chile offers a related illustration: José Antonio Kast won the December 2025 presidential runoff with 58% of the vote—the most significant rightward electoral shift in Chile since the end of the Pinochet era—, yet the country records one of the smallest increases in self-placement on the political right in the region (23% to 28%) and remains among the lowest in absolute terms. The divergence between dramatic electoral outcomes and modest shifts in ideological self-placement is precisely what the survey data allow us to see.

El Salvador recorded the highest share in the 2026 AmericasBarometer (51%), while Argentina and Chile continue to exhibit the lowest levels despite both being governed by right-wing presidents. The case of Argentina is particularly striking: Javier Milei’s libertarian radicalism has made him a reference point for the international right, yet Argentine citizens show almost no change in ideological self-placement (-1 point) and remain among the least likely in the region to place themselves on the right. This illustrates a broader point: governing ideology and citizens’ ideological self-placement are only loosely connected. Electoral outcomes can reflect anti-incumbent sentiment, personalist appeals, and short-term performance demands without

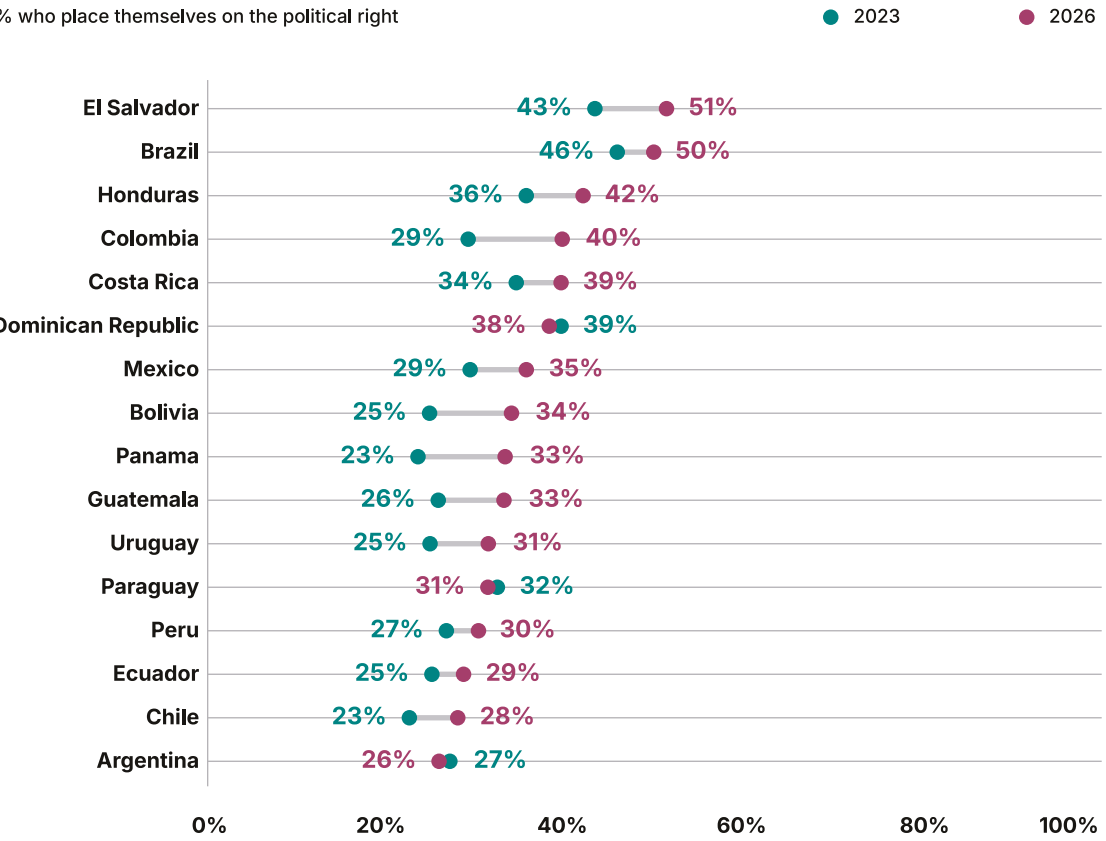
producing lasting shifts in how ordinary citizens locate themselves on the ideological spectrum.⁸ The same anti-incumbent dynamics that helped bring right-wing parties to power could eventually work against them—a possibility Winter (2026) himself acknowledges in cautioning against reading the current moment as a durable once-in-a-generation realignment.

Electoral Change Does Not Necessarily Mean Ideological Change

Understanding how citizens locate themselves ideologically remains central to the study of democratic politics in Latin America. The 2026 AmericasBarometer data allow us to distinguish between two related but distinct phenomena: the electoral volatility that has brought conservative candidates to power across much of the region, and the ideological self-placement of Latin American publics. The former is real and consequential—the right has now won every presidential election held in the region since 2025, including the narrow but significant victory of far-right candidate Abelardo de la Espriella in Colombia in June 2026.

The latter has remained remarkably stable, with self-placement on the political right holding near one-third of the population for two decades before a modest uptick to 36% in 2026. Taken together, these findings suggest that the region’s conservative electoral wave has not been accompanied by a comparable transformation in citizens’ ideological self-placement, and may instead reflect, at least in part, performance-based judgments of incumbent governments. As new leaders emerge and as political debate continues to revolve around security, inequality and democratic performance, monitoring ideological self-placement will remain essential for distinguishing short-term electoral shifts from longer-term changes in mass political orientations.

Self-placement on the political right increases in most countries



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023–2026.

Notes

- 1 Mariana Rodríguez is Director of Research and Engagement at Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy and LAPOP Lab.
- 2 Robert Vidigal is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Brasilia and former Senior Statistician at Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy and LAPOP Lab.
- 3 Suhr 2026; Winter 2026.
- 4 Winter 2026.
- 5 Left-right self-placement captures how citizens locate themselves on the ideological spectrum and should not be interpreted as a direct measure of positions on specific policy issues. The substantive meaning of left and right varies across individuals and political contexts in Latin America, as does the relationship between ideological self-placement and issue positions. See Zechmeister and Corral (2013).
- 6 Suhr 2026.
- 7 Winter 2026.
- 8 Suhr 2026.

HOW MANY AMERICANS WILL
TRADE AWAY DEMOCRACY?

John Sides¹

Many Americans say they would prioritize economic security or public safety over core democratic guarantees. New AmericasBarometer data suggest that large shares of both Democrats and Republicans would choose a political system that guarantees income, basic services, or low crime over one that guarantees fair elections or freedom of expression. These findings raise broader questions about the conditions under which citizens may become willing to sacrifice democratic institutions for desired policy outcomes.

Scholars have long noted that public support for democracy can be tenuous. Samuel Huntington argued that citizens might turn away from democracy if they perceived it as producing disorder, preferring the order a less democratic regime could provide even at the expense of political freedoms.

More recent research reaches a similar conclusion. A cross-national study by Jonathan Chu, Scott Williamson, and Eddy Yeung found that many respondents were willing to trade democratic procedures for greater public safety. For example, respondents often preferred a country without free and fair elections that was “very safe” over one with free and fair elections that was only “somewhat safe.” They made similar tradeoffs regarding civil liberties.²

New AmericasBarometer data suggest these tradeoffs may be even more pronounced. In a 2025 U.S. survey conducted by the AmericasBarometer, respondents were

asked to choose between a political system that guarantees democratic outcomes (fair elections or freedom of expression) and one that guarantees either economic security (“income and basic services”) or public safety (“a low level of crime”).

The results are stark: large numbers of both Democrats and Republicans would rather have security, however defined, than democracy.

In particular, majorities of both Republicans and Democrats would prefer a system that guarantees income and basic services to one that guarantees either fair elections or freedom of expression. There was little partisan divide on this issue.

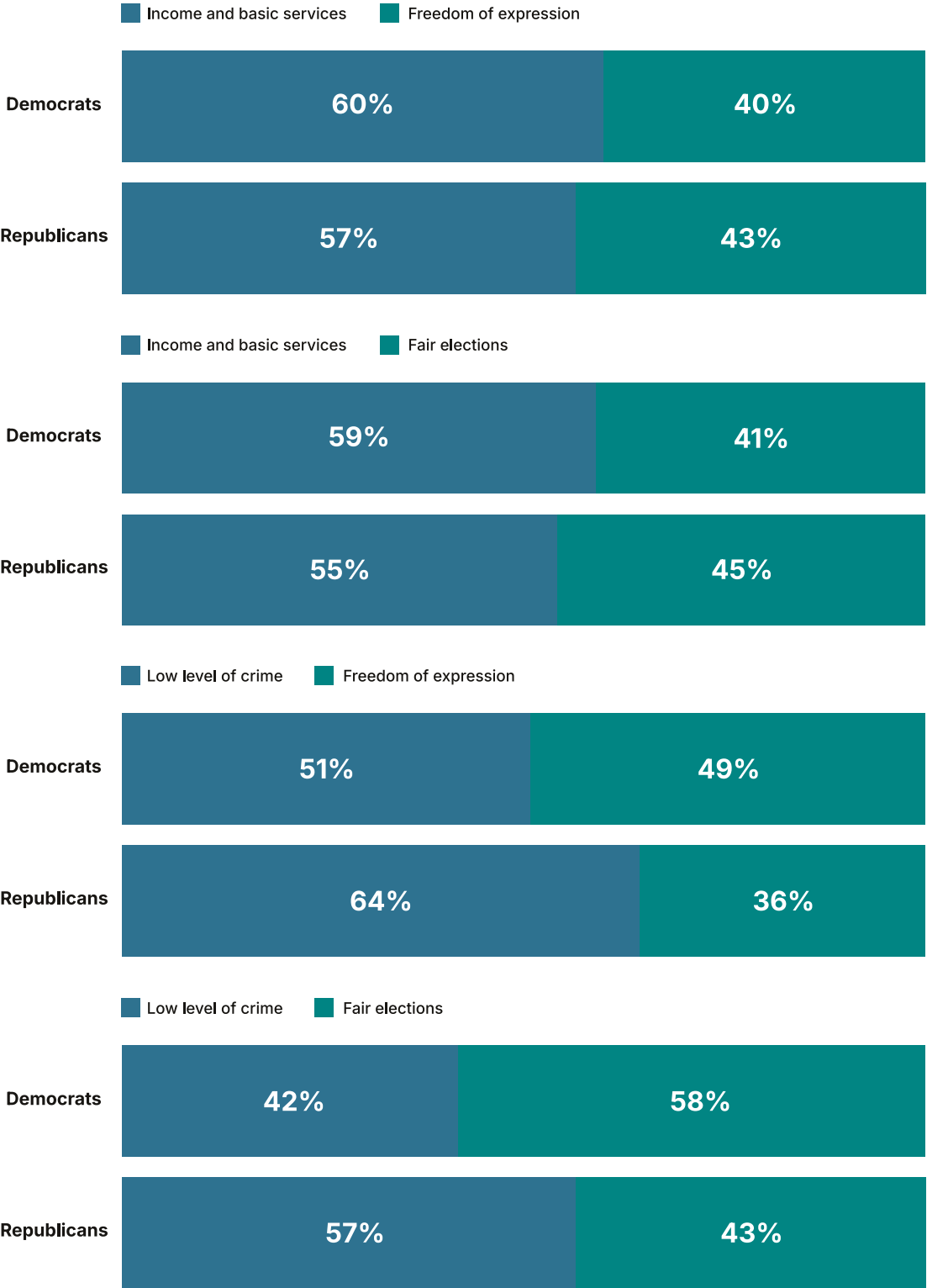
Republicans are more likely than Democrats to prioritize public safety over democracy. For example, 64% of Republicans prefer a political system that guaranteed low crime to one that guaranteed free expression. Even among Democrats, a substantial number prefer lower crime.

Americans’ modest preference for fair elections distinguishes them from citizens of other countries in the Americas. In the AmericasBarometer surveys, the United States ranks near the bottom for prioritizing free elections over guaranteed income.

Indeed, the United States is joined at the bottom by Canadians. Meanwhile, in countries with a difficult democratic history—notably Haiti and Peru—large majorities

Many Americans prioritize economic security over democratic guarantees

Prefer a political system that guarantees...



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer United States 2026.

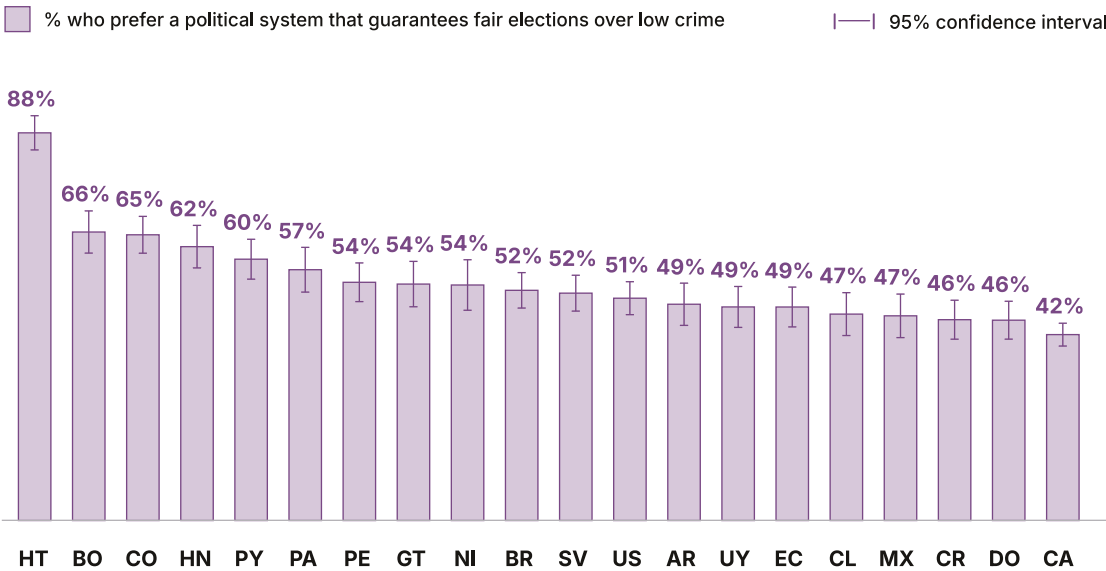
prioritize free elections. This is all the more remarkable given that both countries are considerably poorer than the U.S. and Canada. One might therefore expect Haitians or Peruvians to prioritize a guaranteed income or basic government services instead.

The question of whether citizens prefer fair elections or lower crime yields a somewhat different ranking of countries, but Haitians still stand out for their support for fair elections. The United States is in the middle of the pack, while Canada remains near the bottom. Again, it does not appear that countries facing acute threats to public order instinctively prioritize low crime over fair elections.

To be clear, these are hypothetical questions posed in a survey. In real life, citizens do not choose between political systems that “guarantee” different outcomes. I do not interpret the findings literally—as if citizens would accept autocracy as long as they were paid or felt safe walking down the street.

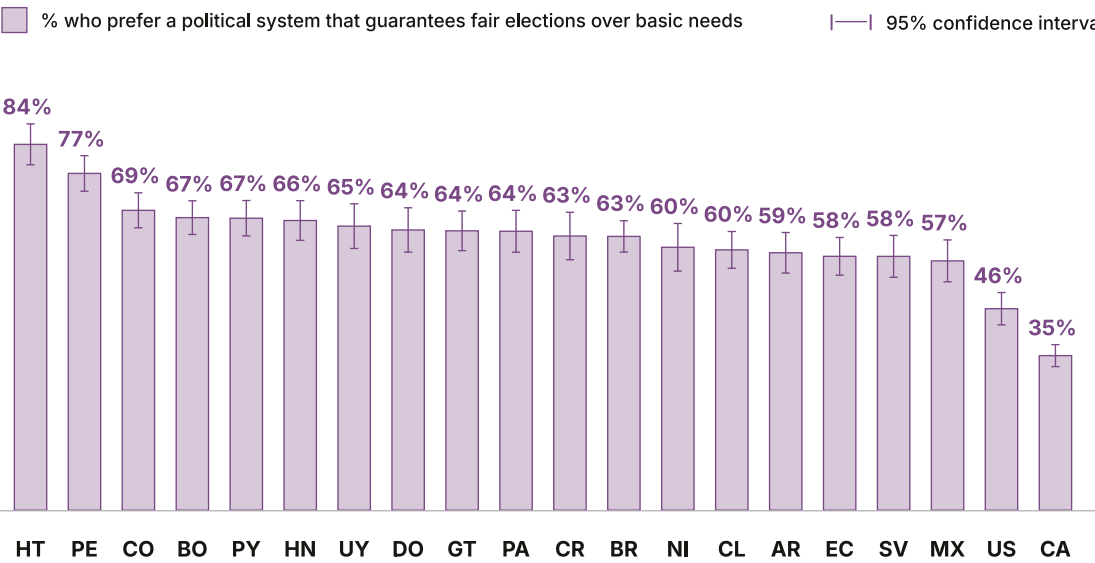
Rather, these results suggest that many people value security and economic well-being and may be receptive to leaders who promise these outcomes, even if doing so requires weakening democratic institutions. However, that susceptibility might vary across countries, and in surprising ways. It is not necessarily the long-established democracies that care most about democratic goals.

Haiti stands out for prioritizing fair elections over low crime



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Countries with more recent democratic crises show stronger support for fair elections



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Notes

- 1 John Sides is Professor and William R. Kenan, Jr. Chair in the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University.
- 2 Chu, Williamson, and Yeung (2025) conducted a conjoint experiment in several countries, including the United States. Respondents evaluated hypothetical countries that varied in democratic institutions (e.g., elections, civil liberties, and institutional checks) and policy outcomes (e.g., public safety, wealth, and health care), allowing the authors to estimate the relative importance citizens place on democratic institutions versus policy outcomes.

Emigration Trends Have Declined Across the Americas

Jonathan Hiskey¹ and Mariana Rodríguez²

MAIN FINDINGS

- **Emigration intentions have declined across the Americas.** After reaching near-historic highs following the COVID-19 pandemic, the share of adults planning to emigrate falls from 31% in 2023 to 25% in 2026, returning to pre-pandemic levels.
- **The decline reflects changes at both ends of the emigration process.** More restrictive immigration policies in destination countries and improving conditions in many countries of origin appear to have reduced emigration pressures. Country-level differences caution against attributing the regional decline to either factor alone.
- **The Emigration Readiness Score reveals important differences across countries.** While overall emigration intentions decline, readiness to emigrate increases in some countries and declines or remains stable in others. Looking beyond intentions provides a more complete picture of where emigration pressures remain most immediate.
- **The same key drivers continue to shape emigration decisions.** Food insecurity, economic hardship, crime, corruption, natural disasters, and remittances remain among the strongest predictors of emigration intentions and readiness. What appears to have changed are the conditions themselves, not the underlying emigration calculus.

Three years after the AmericasBarometer recorded near-historic levels of emigration intentions, the regional picture looks notably different. In 2023, widespread desires to seek a better life elsewhere coincided with high levels of insecurity, crime, corruption, economic hardship, and political instability. The 2026 AmericasBarometer tells a different story: emigration pressures appear to have eased across much of the region, though for different reasons in different countries. This chapter looks beyond the regional trend to examine changing conditions in countries of origin and destination and differences between emigration aspirations and readiness.

The emigration landscape across the Americas has changed dramatically since the publication of the 2023 *Pulse of Democracy*.³

Three years ago, the AmericasBarometer recorded near-historic levels of emigration intentions across much of the region, slightly lower than the post-COVID mark in 2021, when an average of over a third of individuals reported plans to leave their country. As documented in the 2023 report, these widespread desires to seek a better life elsewhere were driven by persistently high levels of insecurity, crime, corruption, economic hardship, and political instability, as well as a relatively more welcoming policy

environment across many of the principal destination countries in the region.

The 2026 AmericasBarometer tells a different story.

Across the region, fewer people now report plans to leave their country than at any point in the past decade. The regional average has fallen 6 percentage points since 2023, from 31% to 25%, returning to the level observed before the sharp rise in emigration intentions following the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 3.1). Although one in four adults still reports plans to live or work abroad within the next three years, the regional emigration

25%
plan to live
or work
abroad
within the
next three
years.

pressures documented in the 2023 *Pulse of Democracy* have clearly eased. We explore the factors behind the decline in emigration intentions, showing how changes in destination-country policies and conditions in countries of origin have shaped them across the region.

The decline is among the most important findings from the 2026 AmericasBarometer. It also raises an equally important question: *Why have emigration intentions fallen so sharply?*

For many observers, the answer may seem straightforward. Since early 2025, the United States has implemented substantially stricter immigration enforcement policies, expanded removals, and dramatically reduced unauthorized crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border. U.S. Customs and Border Protection recorded fewer than 450,000 southwest border encounters in 2025 (October 2024 – September 2025), a fraction of the levels seen just two years earlier (≈2.1M in 2024 and 2.5M in 2023).

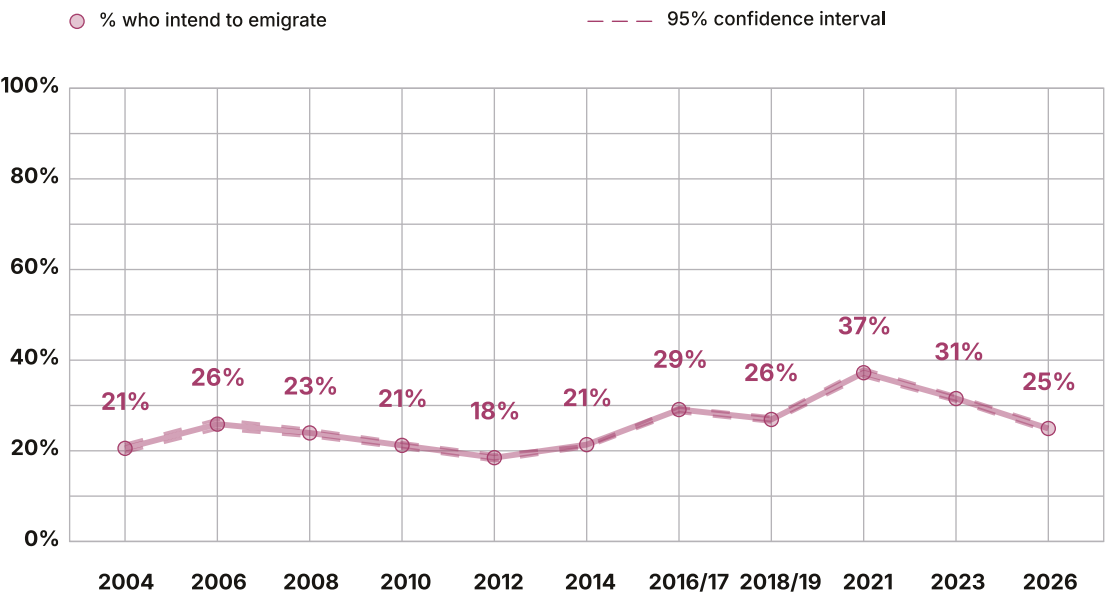
At the same time, spurred in part by the public backlash against the rapid influx of millions of Venezuelan immigrants across the region, several countries have adopted tougher immigration policies and elected governments that campaigned on promises to strengthen border enforcement. Reflecting these changing political dynamics, Chile’s newly elected president, José Antonio Kast, began construction of a “Border Shield” system along the country’s northern border shortly after taking office in 2026, in an effort to “build a sovereign Chile.”⁴

Kast joins many leaders in the region who have recently been elected on anti-immigration and crime-reduction platforms.⁵ The rise of these anti-immigrant leaders is, in part, a reflection of growing public opposition to immigration in many of the region’s primary destination countries, such as Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru.⁶ These developments have undoubtedly altered the perceived costs and risks of emigration for many prospective migrants.

Yet the 2026 AmericasBarometer data suggest that this explanation is only part of the story.

Emigration decisions are shaped not only by conditions in destination countries but also by the circumstances people face at home. Since 2023, important changes have also occurred in many of the region’s principal countries of origin. Many of these countries have seen improvements in conditions long associated with emigration, including food insecurity, household economic conditions, and, in some cases, public safety. As we show later in this chapter, these improvements coincide with declining emigration intentions in many countries, suggesting that the regional decline reflects changes at both ends of the emigration process: increasingly restrictive destination-country environments and improving conditions in many countries of origin.

Figure 3.1 Emigration intentions have declined steadily since 2021



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2004–2026.

These improvements coincide with declining emigration intentions in many countries, suggesting that the regional decline reflects changes at both ends of the emigration process: increasingly restrictive destination-country environments and improving conditions in many countries of origin.

Equally important, the regional average masks substantial differences across countries.

While emigration intentions declined sharply in countries such as Haiti, Nicaragua, Peru, Ecuador, Honduras, and El Salvador, they changed little in Bolivia, Paraguay, Guatemala, and Mexico. In other words, countries facing similar restrictive immigration policies in major destination countries often experienced very different changes in emigration intentions. **Figure 3.2** shows that understanding emigration

dynamics in 2026 requires looking beyond the regional trend and examining how conditions evolved within individual countries.

These country-level differences also caution against interpreting the regional decline as evidence that emigration pressures have disappeared or that restrictive immigration policies alone are sufficient to “solve” the emigration issue.

The standard AmericasBarometer asks respondents the following question:

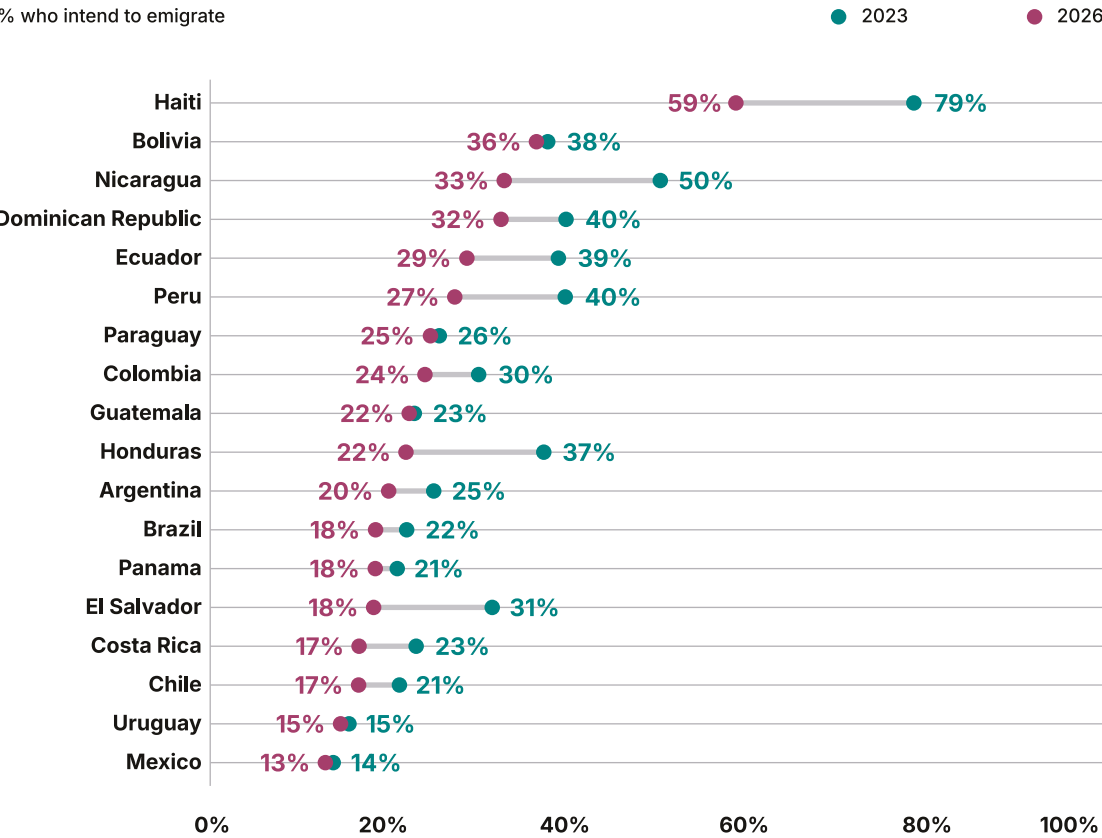
“Do you have any intentions to go live or work in another country in the next three years?”

This survey question serves as an important cross-time barometer of emigration aspirations, but it does not distinguish between those who merely express a desire to emigrate and those who have already begun preparing to do so. As we argued in the 2023 *Pulse of Democracy*, these represent two distinct dimensions of emigration behavior. Aspirations may rise or fall relatively quickly in response to changing political or

economic conditions, whereas the ability to migrate often depends on access to financial resources, migrant networks, documentation, and other practical constraints.

To capture this distinction, we introduced the Emigration Readiness Score (ERS) in the 2023 *Pulse of Democracy* report. The ERS is a more nuanced measure that helps distinguish between individuals who express a desire to emigrate and those who have taken concrete steps toward doing so. As we discuss below, that distinction is especially important for understanding emigration dynamics in 2026.

Figure 3.2 Emigration intentions declined across most countries between 2023 and 2026



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023–2026.

A neighborhood in Havana – LAIPC 2020 by Brannen Dickson



As we noted at the outset, the regional trend highlighted by AmericasBarometer data suggests a significant decline in emigration intentions. Relying solely on regional averages risks overlooking important differences in emigration pressures across countries. For that reason, we go beyond documenting the regional decline in emigration intentions. We also revisit the ERS, which examines how readiness has changed since 2023, and investigates whether the same economic and social factors that shaped emigration intentions in 2023 continue to do so in 2026. Together, these analyses provide a more complete picture of emigration dynamics across the Americas and help distinguish temporary shifts in emigration aspirations from deeper, more persistent emigration pressures.

The evidence we present points to a nuanced yet encouraging conclusion. Emigration pressures appear to have eased across much of the region, though for different reasons in different countries. Improvements in living conditions appear to have reduced emigration incentives in many places, while changes in immigration policies have likely altered the perceived feasibility of emigration elsewhere. At the same time, persistent hardship in countries such as Haiti reminds us that important emigration pressures remain, even when overall emigration intentions have declined.

Regional averages offer an important overview of emigration trends, but effective immigration policy depends on identifying where emigration pressures are easing, where they remain critical, and whether those pressures reflect changing conditions in countries of origin, changing opportunities in destination countries, or both. In the analyses that follow, we use the AmericasBarometer to unpack these distinct patterns and demonstrate why looking beyond headline regional trends is critical to understanding emigration across the Americas today.

LOOKING BEYOND INTENTIONS REVEALS WHICH COUNTRIES FACE THE GREATEST EMIGRATION PRESSURES

A simple measure of emigration intentions cannot distinguish between those who express a general desire to leave and those who are actively preparing to do so. As a result, two countries with similar levels of emigration intentions may face very different emigration pressures.

To better distinguish between emigration aspirations and the likelihood that those aspirations translate into action, we introduced the ERS in the 2023 *Pulse of Democracy*. This measure combines three dimensions: (1) whether respondents intend to live or work in another country within the next three years; (2) how likely they believe it is that they will do so; and (3) whether they have taken concrete preparatory steps in the previous year, such as saving money, making travel arrangements, or deciding on a departure date. Respondents were then classified into four categories, ranging from “Least Ready” (those with no intention to emigrate) to “High Readiness” (those who report emigration intentions and have taken two or more concrete steps toward leaving).⁷

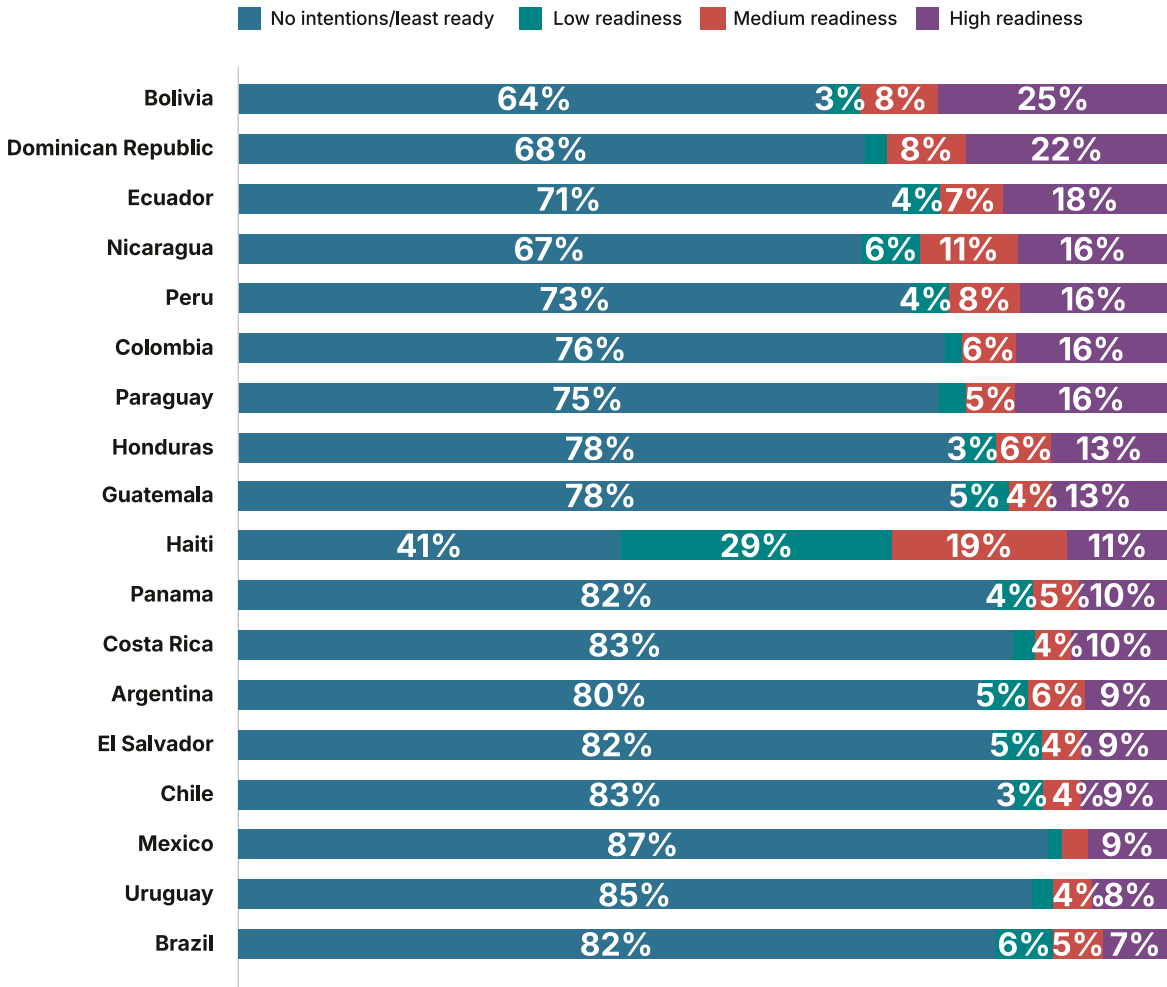
Although no survey measure can determine with certainty who will ultimately emigrate, the ERS provides a more nuanced assessment of emigration pressures by distinguishing between those who aspire to migrate and those who appear most prepared to act on those aspirations. The 2026 AmericasBarometer marks the first time this measure has been implemented across nearly the entire region, enabling the first comprehensive cross-national comparison of emigration readiness.

Figure 3.3 shows the distribution of individuals across the four ERS categories in each country. As expected, given the regional decline in emigration intentions

documented in the previous section, most adults across the Americas (64% to 87%, excluding Haiti) remain in the “Least Ready” category, reporting no plans to emigrate over the next three years. Beyond this common pattern, however, substantial differences emerge in the share of individuals classified as “High Readiness,” suggesting that emigration pressures vary considerably across countries even when overall emigration intentions appear similar.

Figure 3.3 shows that countries with the highest levels of emigration intentions are not necessarily those with the largest shares of individuals who appear most prepared to emigrate. The comparison between Haiti and Bolivia illustrates this distinction particularly well. Haiti continues to report the highest level of emigration intentions in the region, with 59% of adults saying they intend to live or work abroad within the next three years. Yet only 11% of individuals fall into

Figure 3.3 Emigration readiness varies substantially across countries in 2026



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Changes in emigration intentions alone do not fully capture how emigration pressures evolve over time.

adults in these countries fall into the “High Readiness” category, placing them closer to the middle of the regional distribution than to the top. These findings suggest that although emigration intentions remain substantial in these countries, the share of adults actively preparing to emigrate is considerably lower than in countries such as Bolivia or the Dominican Republic.

Declining regional emigration intentions should not be interpreted as evidence that emigration pressures have declined uniformly across the Americas. Instead, the ERS shows that countries occupy different positions along the emigration process. In some, relatively few people express a desire to emigrate. In others, many continue to express aspirations to emigrate, yet comparatively few appear able to act on them. Still others combine moderate levels of emigration intentions with comparatively large shares of individuals actively preparing to emigrate. Looking beyond intentions, therefore, provides a more complete understanding of emigration dynamics across the region.

the “High Readiness” category. By contrast, Bolivia reports considerably lower overall emigration intentions (36%), but one in four adults (25%) is classified as highly prepared to migrate, the highest proportion observed in the region. Similarly, more than one in five adults in the Dominican Republic (22%) falls into the “High Readiness” category, despite substantially lower overall emigration intentions than in Haiti.

The countries of northern Central America also illustrate why distinguishing between aspirations and readiness matters. Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador have historically been viewed as major countries of origin for emigration to the United States. Yet in 2026, between 9% and 13% of

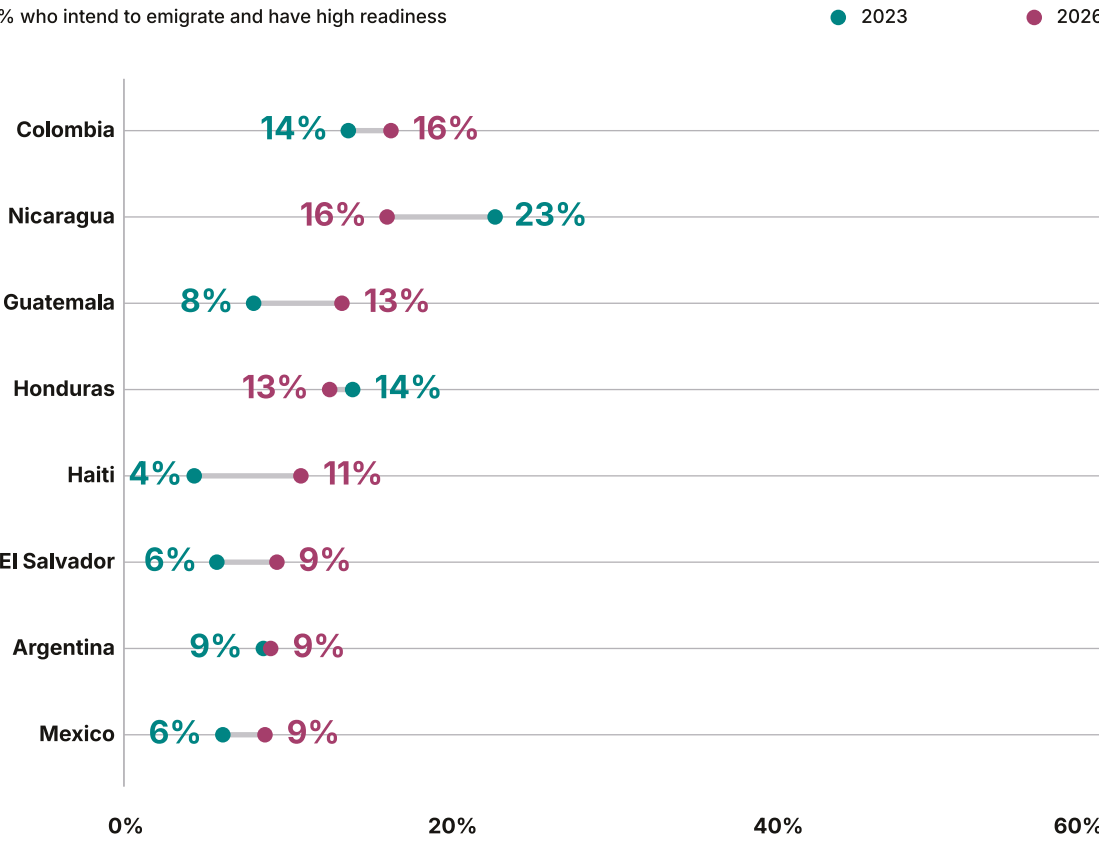
The value of the ERS becomes even clearer when comparing changes since the 2023 AmericasBarometer. While general emigration intentions declined across most countries, the share of individuals classified as highly prepared to migrate changed in a more varied pattern. As shown in **Figure 3.4**, the percentage of adults classified as highly prepared to emigrate increased in Haiti and Guatemala, even as overall emigration intentions declined. By contrast, in Nicaragua, both emigration intentions and the share of individuals in the “High Readiness” category declined substantially. Meanwhile, countries such as Honduras, Colombia, and Mexico experienced little change in emigration readiness despite declines in overall intentions.

These varied trajectories suggest that changes in emigration intentions alone do not fully capture how emigration pressures evolve over time. Notably, all the countries highlighted in **Figure 3.4** maintain strong emigration ties with the United States and have been exposed to the same broad shift toward more restrictive U.S. immigration policies. If those policy changes alone were driving emigration decisions, one would expect emigration readiness to evolve more uniformly across these countries.

Instead, the divergent patterns suggest that country-specific conditions continue to play an important role in shaping individuals’ emigration calculus.

These findings also underscore the value of the AmericasBarometer emigration module. The standard emigration intentions question captures important changes in emigration aspirations across countries, while the ERS provides critical information on how prepared individuals are to act on those aspirations.

Figure 3.4 Emigration readiness has evolved differently across countries since 2023



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023–2026.

Together, the two measures provide a more complete picture of emigration pressures than either measure alone and allow policymakers to distinguish between broad shifts in emigration intentions and the countries where emigration pressures remain most immediate.

Next, we demonstrate how changes in food insecurity, economic conditions, and public safety help explain divergent emigration trajectories.

IMPROVING CONDITIONS HELP EXPLAIN WHY EMIGRATION PRESSURES HAVE EASED

The evidence we have presented so far suggests that changes in U.S. immigration policy alone cannot explain the regional decline in emigration intentions. Countries with similar emigration ties to the United States experienced markedly different shifts in emigration intentions and readiness. To better understand these divergent trajectories, we examine several well-established drivers of emigration, such as food insecurity, economic hardship, and crime.

Across much of the region, these indicators point in the same direction: conditions broadly improved between 2023 and 2026. Although these improvements were not universal, they provide important evidence that declining emigration intentions reflect not only changing opportunities in destination countries but also improving conditions in many countries of origin.

Food Insecurity Has Declined Across Much of the Region

Among the strongest indicators of improving conditions is a decline in food insecurity. The AmericasBarometer measures this by asking respondents whether their household went without food for at least one day in the previous three months. **Figure 3.5** shows a broadly encouraging regional pattern. Compared with 2023, reported food insecurity declined in most countries surveyed.

The largest improvements occurred in the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Ecuador, where the share of households experiencing food insecurity fell substantially. By contrast, food insecurity remained largely unchanged in Haiti, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

These country patterns closely mirror the variation observed earlier in emigration intentions and readiness.

The AmericasBarometer findings are also consistent with external evidence. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), severe food insecurity in Latin America declined from 11.5% in 2021 to 7.8% in 2024, reversing much of the deterioration observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸

These findings suggest that improved food security may have contributed to declining emigration intentions across much of the

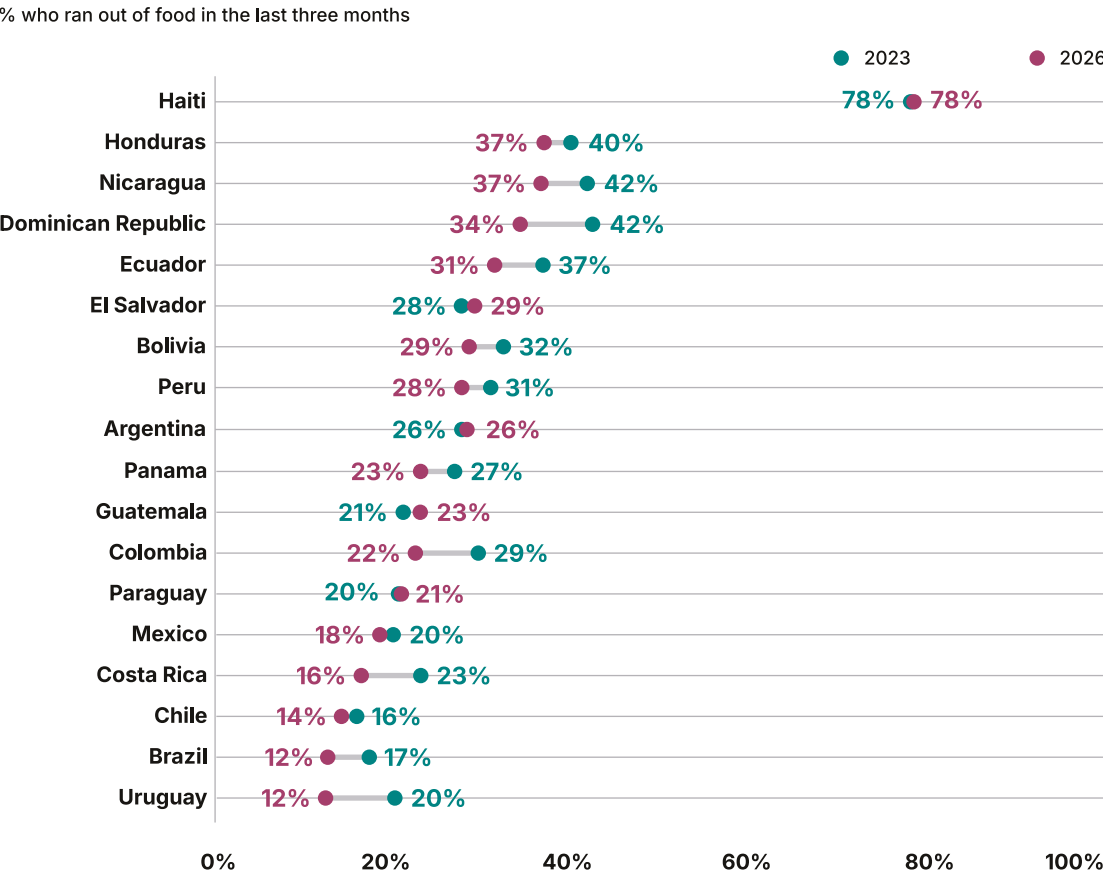
region. As we documented in the 2023 *Pulse of Democracy*, food insecurity remains one of the strongest predictors of both emigration intentions and emigration readiness. As fewer households struggle to meet their basic food needs, fewer individuals may view emigration as a necessary strategy to improve their well-being.

Household Economic Conditions Have Also Improved

A similar pattern emerges when we examined reported household economic conditions. The AmericasBarometer asks respondents whether their household income has

As fewer households struggle to meet their basic food needs, fewer individuals may view emigration as a necessary strategy to improve their well-being.

Figure 3.5 Food insecurity declined across most countries between 2023 and 2026



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023–2026.



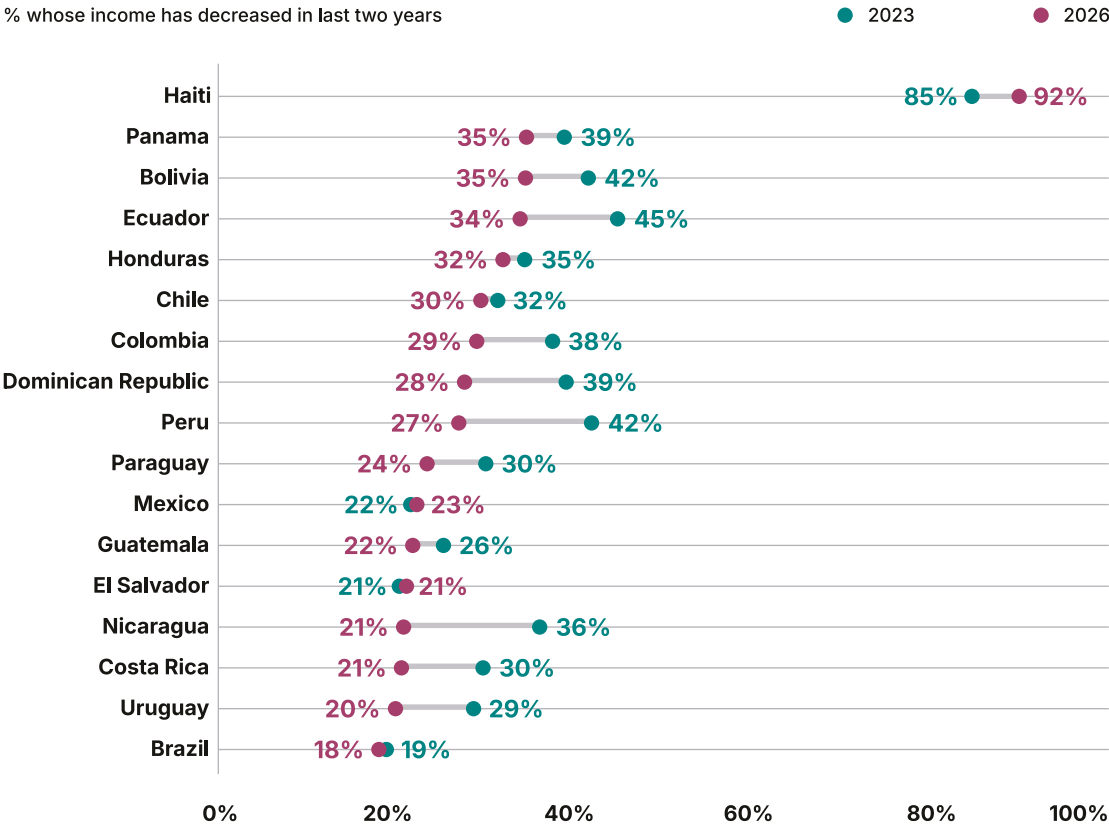
13 of 17
countries
recorded
fewer
reports of
declining
household
income than
in 2023.

improved, stayed the same, or worsened over the previous two years. **Figure 3.6** shows that reports of declining household income became less common across most countries between 2023 and 2026.

Thirteen of the 17 countries with comparable AmericasBarometer data recorded lower declines in reported income than in 2023. Haiti again stands out as the principal exception. Already facing the highest levels of economic hardship in the region, the percentage of Haitians reporting a decline in household income increased further from 85% in 2023 to 92% in 2026.

These improvements provide additional support for a “root causes” explanation of the regional decline in emigration intentions. When household economic conditions remain stable or improve, the incentive to seek opportunities abroad may diminish. At the same time, Haiti’s continued economic deterioration helps explain why exceptionally high numbers of Haitians continue to express a desire to leave their country and why more individuals appear to be putting those plans into action, even as overall emigration intentions across the region have declined.

Figure 3.6 Household economic conditions improved across much of the region



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023–2026.

Crime Trends Are More Uneven

Unlike food insecurity and household economic conditions, crime presents a more mixed picture.

In 2023, we found that crime victimization was one of the strongest predictors of emigration intentions, with crime victims substantially more likely than non-victims to report plans to emigrate. That relationship remains equally strong in the 2026 AmericasBarometer. What has changed is the regional distribution of crime victimization. **Figure 3.7** shows that reported crime victimization declined in some countries, including Argentina, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia; remained relatively stable in others, including Ecuador, Brazil, and Honduras; and increased in others, including Peru, Mexico, and Haiti.

These findings closely parallel external indicators of regional violence. According to InSight Crime, the regional homicide rate declined by 5% between 2024 and 2025,

although trends varied considerably across countries. Countries such as El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and Argentina experienced substantial declines in homicide rates, while Haiti continued to see dramatic increases in violence.⁹

The decline in violent crime observed in countries such as Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador suggests that improving public safety in countries of origin may have contributed as much as, if not more than, changes in U.S. immigration policy to the decline in emigration intentions in these countries.

The Haitian case again illustrates the other side of this story, showing why emigration dynamics cannot be understood through regional averages alone. Although overall emigration intentions declined substantially between 2023 and 2026, Haiti continued to face worsening economic conditions, persistently high food insecurity, rising crime victimization, and increasing homicide rates. At the same time, the share of Haitians highly ready to leave increased. Together, these findings suggest that while changes in U.S. immigration policy may have discouraged some Haitians from expressing general intentions to emigrate, they appear to have had much less influence on those who remain both willing and able to leave the country.

We present a more layered explanation for the regional decline in emigration intentions. Improvements in food security and household economic conditions coincide with declining emigration pressures across many countries, while persistent hardship and insecurity continue to sustain emigration pressures elsewhere. Rather than reflecting a single regional trend, the 2026 AmericasBarometer suggests that emigration decisions continue to be shaped by the interaction of changing opportunities in destination countries and conditions in countries of origin.

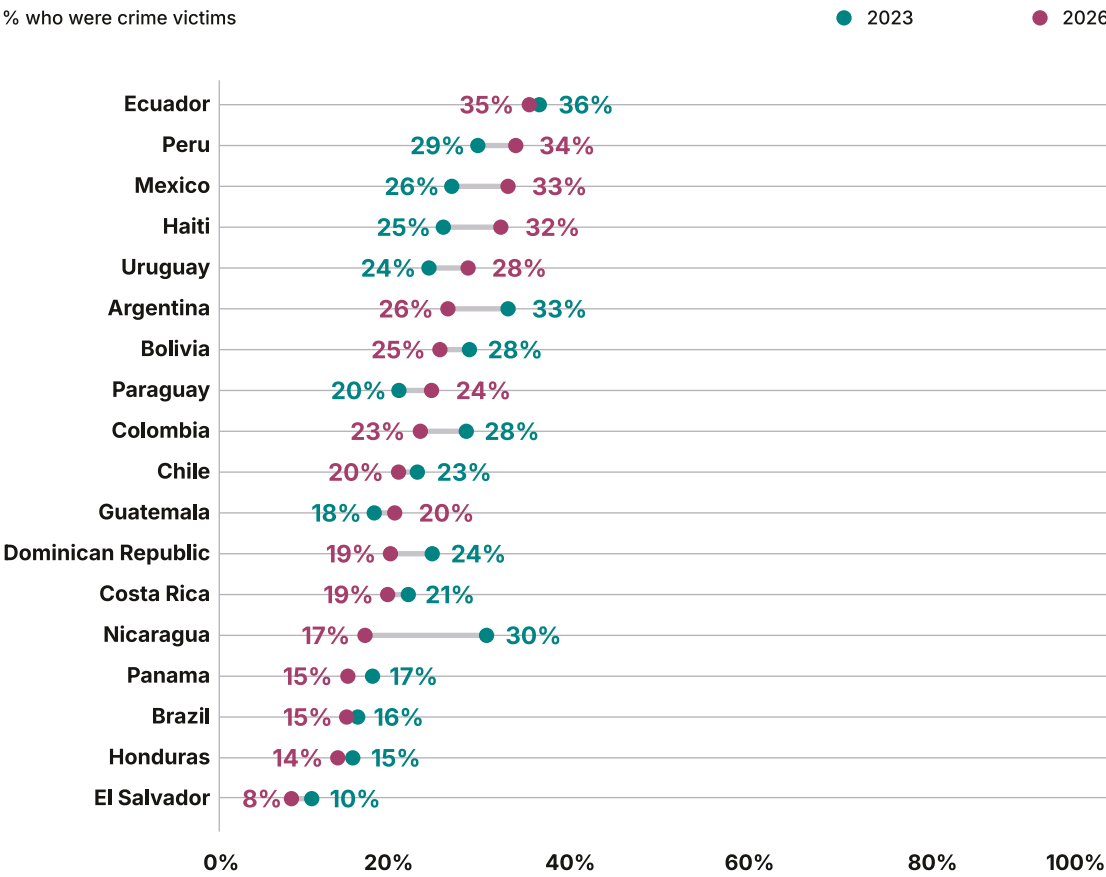
These findings also support the “root causes” framework that has guided emigration research and policy discussions in recent years. Across much of the region, declining emigration intentions coincided with improvements in food security, household economic conditions, and, in several countries, public safety. Although these improvements were not universal, they suggest that conditions in countries of origin remain central to understanding emigration decisions.

THE SAME FORCES CONTINUE TO DRIVE EMIGRATION DECISIONS

Our analyses in the previous sections suggest that the regional decline in emigration intentions reflects changes at both ends of the emigration process. Destination-country policies have become more restrictive, while conditions in many countries of origin have improved. An important remaining question, however, is whether the factors shaping emigration decisions have changed or

Rather than reflecting a single regional trend, the 2026 AmericasBarometer suggests that emigration decisions continue to be shaped by the interaction of changing opportunities in destination countries and conditions in countries of origin.

Figure 3.7 Changes in crime victimization were uneven across countries between 2023 and 2026



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023–2026.

whether the same forces identified in the 2023 *Pulse of Democracy* continue to drive emigration today.

To assess whether these relationships remained stable, we estimated the same multivariate models used in 2023 for both the standard measure of emigration intentions and the ERS. **Figures 3.8** and **3.9** present the bivariate relationships between the principal predictors of emigration intentions in 2026,¹⁰ while **Table 3.1** compares the substantive findings from the multivariate analyses across the 2023 and 2026 survey rounds.

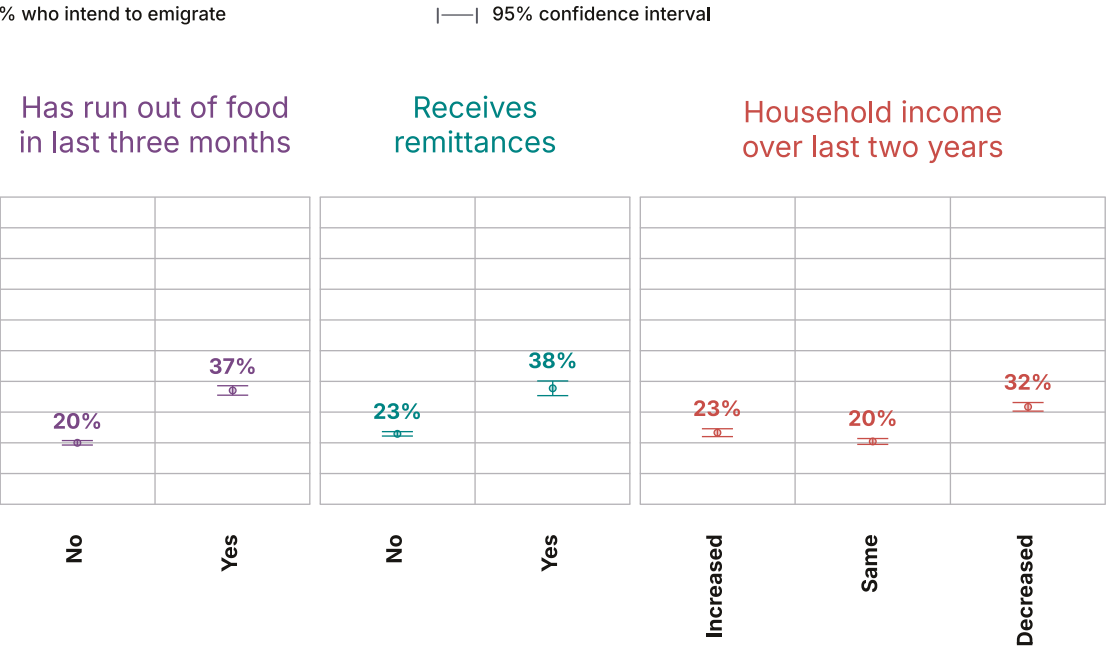
The comparison reveals a striking degree of consistency. The principal drivers of emigration identified in 2023 remain among the strongest predictors of both emigration intentions and emigration readiness in 2026. Across both survey rounds, food insecurity, declining household income, crime victimization, corruption victimization, exposure to natural disasters, and remittances remain strongly associated with a greater likelihood of expressing emigration intentions and taking concrete steps toward emigration.

Figure 3.8 Citizens who experience crime, bribery, or natural disasters are more likely to intend to emigrate



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Figure 3.9 Citizens experiencing economic hardship or receiving remittances are more likely to intend to emigrate



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Table 3.1 The principal drivers of emigration intentions and readiness remained stable between 2023 and 2026

SURVEY ROUND	2023		2026	
	EMIGRATION INTENTIONS	EMIGRATION READINESS	EMIGRATION INTENTIONS	EMIGRATION READINESS
Household income declined	✓	✓	✓	✓
Food insecurity	✓	✓	✓	✓
Crime victimization	✓	✓	✓	✓
Police requested a bribe	✓	✓	✓	✓
Victim of natural disaster	✓	✓	✓	✓
Receives remittances	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: Statistical significance is established in multivariate models controlling for demographic characteristics and country fixed effects.

Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023–2026.

Our findings reinforce a central conclusion in the emigration literature: individuals are most likely to consider leaving their country when persistent insecurity and hardship threaten their ability to build a viable future at home. As Betts (2013) argues, these conditions are characteristic of what he terms “survival emigration,” in which people leave not because of a single crisis but because a combination of economic, social, and governance failures makes staying increasingly untenable.

This consistency suggests that the regional decline in emigration intentions does not reflect a fundamental shift in how people make emigration decisions. Rather, individuals continue to respond to many of the same economic and social conditions that have shaped emigration throughout the AmericasBarometer series. What appears to have changed are the conditions themselves. As we documented in the previous section, food insecurity declined across much of the region, household economic conditions improved in many countries, and several countries saw crime decline. As these conditions improved, emigration intentions declined, while the underlying emigration calculus remained remarkably stable.

EMIGRATION PRESSURES HAVE CHANGED, BUT THE DRIVERS REMAIN THE SAME

One important implication of our findings concerns the AmericasBarometer’s long-standing measure of emigration intentions. Despite its simple yes/no format, the measure appears highly responsive to policy and contextual changes. The widespread

decline in emigration intentions during a period of less favorable emigration opportunities, particularly in countries with strong emigration ties to the United States, is exactly what one would expect if the measure captures meaningful emigration intentions rather than merely abstract aspirations to leave. The same substantive relationships also emerge when emigration readiness is used as the outcome, reinforcing the value of the ERS as a complement to the traditional emigration intentions measure.

For policymakers, this distinction is important. Short-term changes in emigration flows should not be immediately interpreted as evidence that the underlying drivers of emigration have fundamentally changed. Rather, the 2026 AmericasBarometer suggests that emigration pressures continue to be driven by many of the same root causes identified in previous research. The consistency of these findings across two survey rounds conducted under markedly different regional circumstances further supports how the AmericasBarometer emigration measures continue to capture meaningful dimensions of emigration behavior and offer a reliable evidence base for monitoring emigration dynamics across the Americas.

Emigration intentions reflect both changing opportunities and constraints in destination countries and evolving conditions in countries of origin. We not only document a regional decline in emigration intentions but also demonstrate that the AmericasBarometer emigration measures continue to behave in theoretically meaningful ways and provide reliable indicators of emigration pressures across the Americas.

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that the underlying calculus of emigration has remained relatively stable. What appears to have changed are the conditions themselves.

Notes

- 1 Jonathan Hiskey is Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University.
- 2 Mariana Rodríguez is Director of Research and Engagement at Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy and LAPOP Lab.
- 3 Lupu et al. 2023.
- 4 Phillips 2026.
- 5 Garcia Cano and Debre 2026.
- 6 Cerrutti and Parrado 2026.
- 7 The Emigration Readiness Score (ERS) classifies respondents into four categories. Least Ready (0) includes respondents who report no intention to emigrate. *Low Readiness* (1) includes respondents who intend to emigrate but report that emigration is “not likely” or “a little likely” and have not taken any of the three preparatory steps (saving money, making travel arrangements, or deciding on a departure date). *Medium Readiness* (2) includes respondents who either (a) report that emigration is “not likely” or “a little likely” but have taken one or more preparatory steps, or (b) report that emigration is “somewhat likely” or “very likely” but have not taken any preparatory steps. *High Readiness* (3) includes respondents who either (a) report that emigration is “not likely” or “a little likely” but have taken two or more preparatory steps, or (b) report that emigration is “somewhat likely” or “very likely” and have taken one or more preparatory steps.
- 8 FAO, IFAD, PAHO, UNICEF, and WFP. 2026. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) measures severe food insecurity using its Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), which defines it as a condition in which individuals “have likely run out of food, experienced hunger and, at the most extreme, have gone for days without eating, putting their health and well-being at serious risk. Although the FAO and AmericasBarometer use different measures of food insecurity, both point to a broad regional improvement since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 9 Newton et al. 2026.
- 10 The multivariate models control for the same standard sociodemographic characteristics used in the 2023 *Pulse of Democracy*, including gender, age, education, wealth, place of residence (urban/rural), employment status, marital status, parental status, receipt of remittances, and country fixed effects. The bivariate relationships shown in Figures 3.8 and 3.9 remain substantively robust after accounting for these characteristics and are also observed when modeling the ERS.

Driven largely by expanded U.S. removal efforts and programs designed to encourage “self-deportations,” the number of U.S. immigrants returning to their home countries has increased dramatically in the past 18 months. This influx of returnees has been most pronounced in principal countries of origin for U.S. immigrants, including Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

The 2026 AmericasBarometer included new questions in Mexico and the three Northern Central American countries to identify individuals with previous migration experience. Respondents were first asked: “Have you ever tried to migrate to another country?” Those who answered “yes” were then asked whether they reached their destination on their most recent trip and, if they did, whether their return was voluntary or forced.

Combined with other survey questions, the 2026 AmericasBarometer allows us to examine returnees and their prospects for reintegration. The findings show that returnees constitute a substantial share of the population in the four countries. Returnees also express substantially higher intentions to emigrate than non-returnees, and even among those who were deported, intentions to emigrate remain high. As Chapter 3 shows, emigration intentions have declined across the region since 2023. Yet in each of the four countries, the share of returnees planning to emigrate is more than double the national average.

Returnees’ Profile

Among the four countries with information on individuals’ migration history, an average of 14% report previous migration attempts, ranging from 9% in Mexico to 17% in Honduras. Returnees look broadly similar to non-returnees in terms of age and education but are substantially more likely to be men.

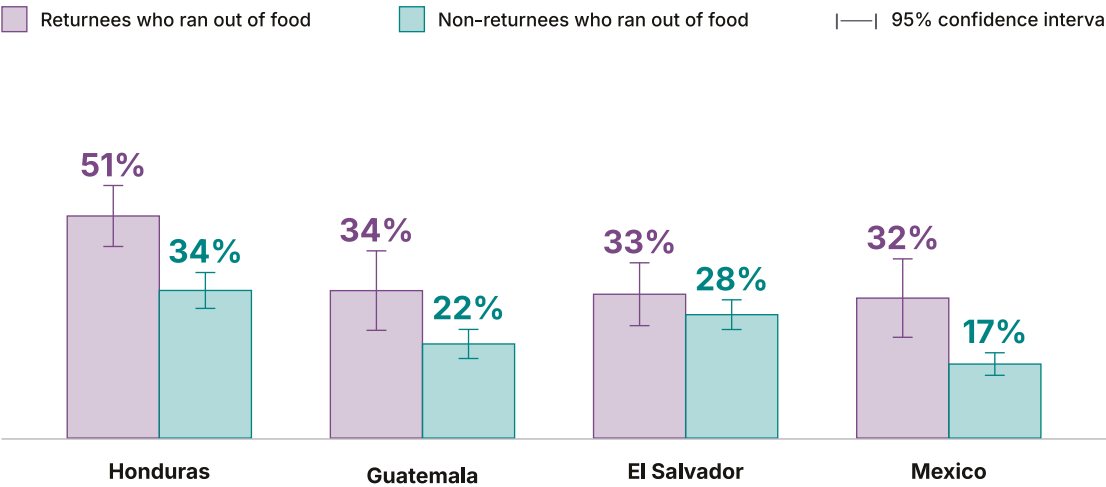
Returnees also arrive home through different pathways. One in five (20%) report that they reached their destination but were deported, while 29% reached their destination and returned voluntarily. The largest share (51%) report that they never reached their intended destination.

Reintegration Challenges:
Human Insecurity

Returnees face substantially greater economic and physical insecurity than non-returnees. The share of returnees who report having gone without food in the past three months is significantly higher than that of non-returnees in three of the four countries. El Salvador is the exception, where returnees and non-returnees report similarly high rates of food insecurity. Across the four countries, Honduras records the highest percentage of returnees experiencing food insecurity (51%).

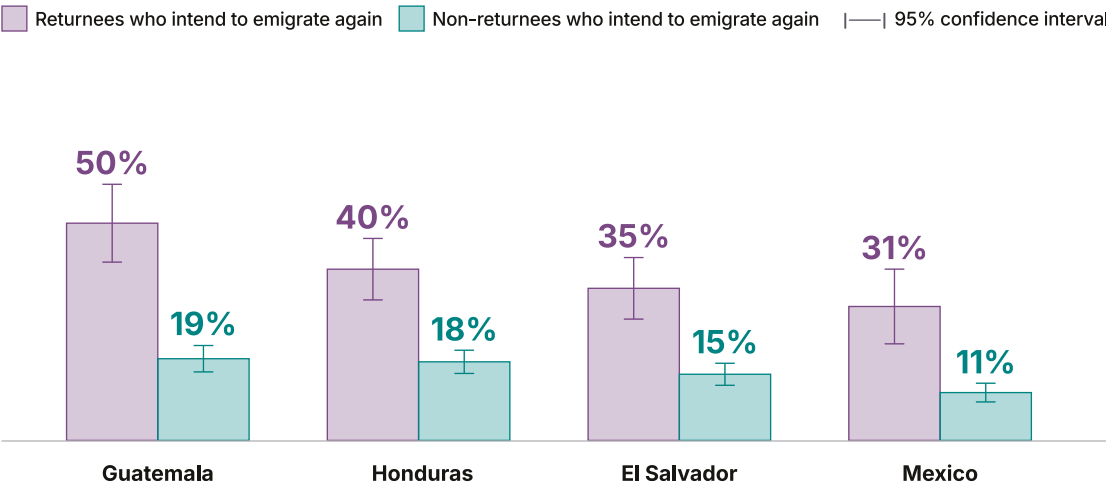
Returnees also report higher rates of crime and corruption victimization than non-returnees. In Mexico, for example, 44% of

Returnees face greater food insecurity than non-returnees



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Returnees are much more likely to plan to emigrate again



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

More than **2x** the share of returnees plan to emigrate compared with non-returnees in all four countries.

returnees report being victims of crime in the previous 12 months, compared to 31% of non-returnees. Similarly, 34% of returnees in Mexico report being asked to pay a bribe by the police, compared with 22% of non-returnees. El Salvador is again the exception: crime and corruption victimization are similarly low among returnees and non-returnees and much lower overall than in the other three countries.

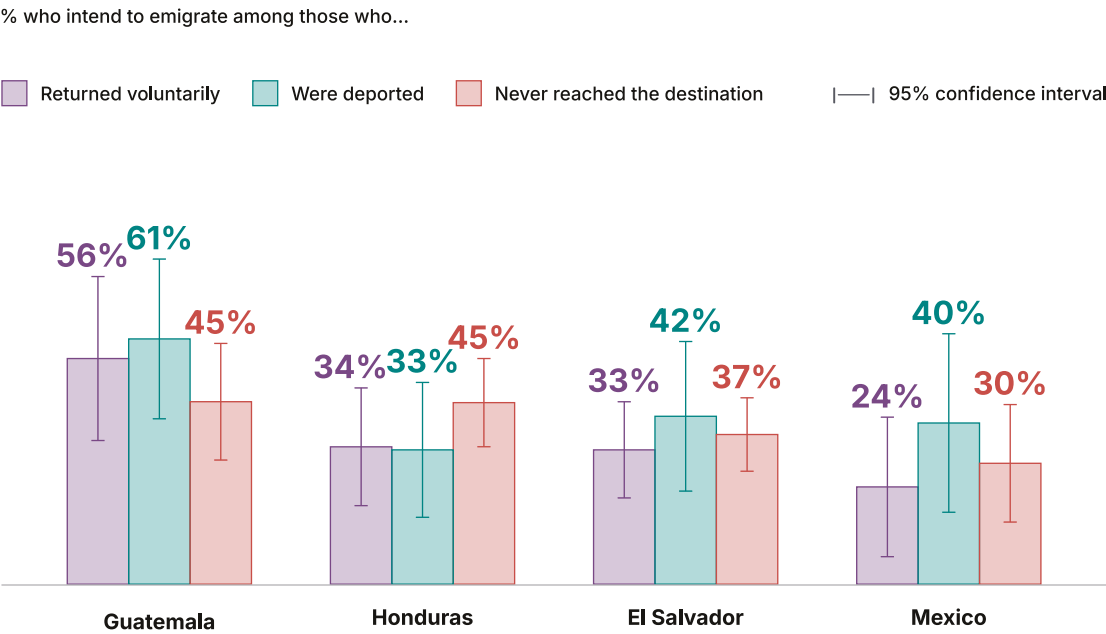
Many Returnees Plan to Emigrate Again

Returnees are much more likely than non-returnees to report plans to emigrate again. As highlighted in Chapter 3, emigration intentions have declined across the region since 2023. However, returnees continue to express much stronger intentions to emigrate than non-returnees. Across all four countries, the share of returnees who plan to re-migrate is more than double that of non-returnees. In Guatemala, for example, 50% of returnees report plans to emigrate in the future, compared to 19% of non-returnees.

The 2026 AmericasBarometer data also suggest that deportation does not appear to discourage future migration intentions. This finding is consistent with research suggesting that enforcement alone is unlikely to reduce migration if the underlying drivers of migration remain unchanged.

The relatively high share of returnees who report plans to emigrate again, even among those who have been deported, suggests that greater attention and resources should be devoted to the security threats returnees face and, more broadly, to the reintegration process of individuals returning after having established lives in the United States or elsewhere. Reintegration is neither automatic nor easy, and failure to address the challenges is likely to contribute to continued emigration.

Deportation does not eliminate intentions to re-migrate



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Reintegration is neither automatic nor easy, and failure to address the challenges is likely to contribute to continued emigration.

Notes

- 1 Abby Córdova is an Associate Professor of Global Affairs in the Keough School of Global Affairs at the University of Notre Dame. She is also a Faculty Fellow of the Keough School's Kellogg Institute for International Studies and Director of the Notre Dame Eliminating Violence against Women Lab.
- 2 Jonathan Hiskey is Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University.

Data from the 2026 AmericasBarometer show that Ecuador has the highest reported rate of gang-related victimization in the Americas. Respondents were asked:

Have you or anyone living in your home been the victim of threats, extortions, or any other crime by a member of a criminal group, such as a gang, among others, in the last 12 months?

Approximately 26% of Ecuadorians report that they or someone in their household was victimized by a criminal group, including gangs, during the previous 12 months. My results underscore the extent to which gang-related criminal victimization has become a defining public security challenge in Ecuador.

These findings challenge the common perception that gang-related crime is concentrated primarily in Central America. According to the U.N. and other studies, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala have some of the world's highest crime rates, driven by organized crime and gang activity.²

The region is often described as among the most violent in the world outside war zones.³ Yet the 2026 AmericasBarometer shows that reported gang-related victimization is highest in Ecuador, Peru, and Haiti, whereas several Central American countries report comparatively lower levels.

Ecuador's recent experience reflects the rapid expansion of transnational organized crime since the mid-2010s and the resulting rise in criminal violence.⁴ According to a 2025 InSight Crime report,⁵ Ecuador's homicide rate reached 50.9 per 100,000 inhabitants, the second highest in the region after Haiti (68.0 per 100,000). While homicide rates often dominate public and media attention because of their severity and visibility, gangs engage in a broader range of criminal activities that affect a much larger share of the population. Measures of gang victimization therefore provide an important complement to homicide statistics by capturing forms of criminal harm that are more widespread yet often less visible in public debate.

These findings challenge the common perception that gang-related crime is concentrated primarily in Central America. According to the U.N. and other studies, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala have some of the world's highest crime rates, driven by organized crime and gang activity. The region is often described as among the most violent in the world outside war zones. Yet the 2026 AmericasBarometer shows that reported gang-related victimization is highest in Ecuador, Peru, and Haiti, whereas several Central American countries report comparatively lower levels.

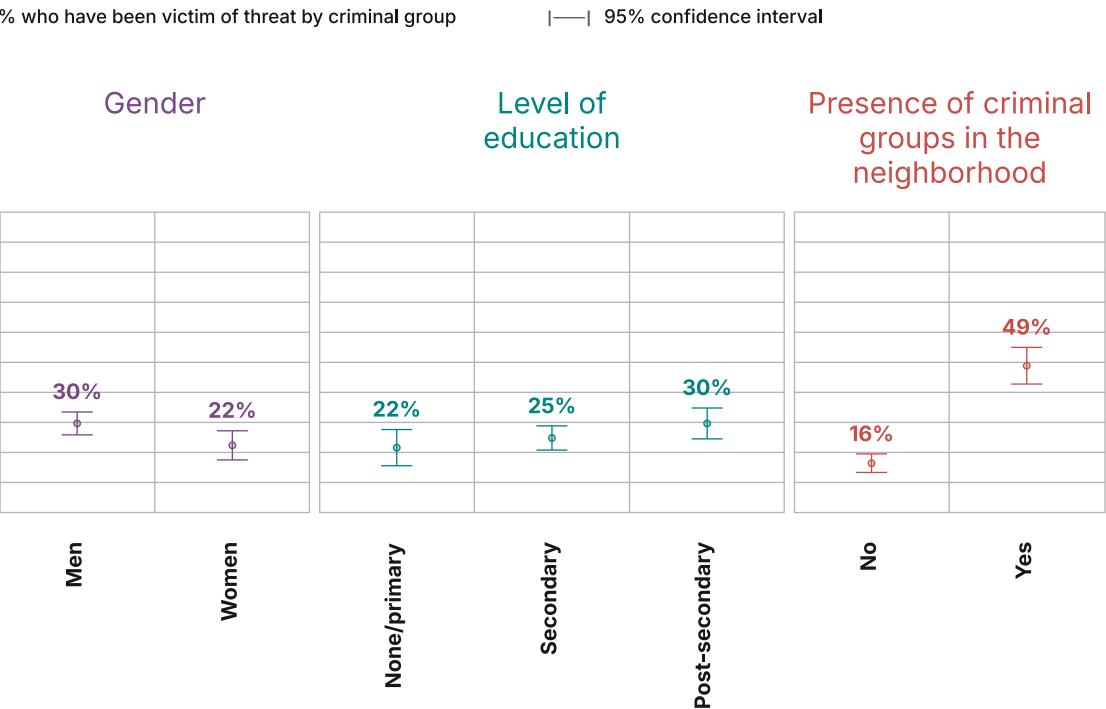
What factors are associated with gang-related victimization in Ecuador? To address this question, I estimate a logistic regression model to examine the factors associated with the likelihood of experiencing gang-related victimization. Ecuadorians who report the presence of criminal gangs in their neighborhood are predicted to have a 33 percentage-point higher probability of experiencing gang victimization than those living in neighborhoods without gang presence, holding other characteristics constant.

By contrast, most socioeconomic and demographic characteristics are either weakly related or not significantly

associated with victimization. Together, these findings suggest that gang-related victimization is driven primarily by exposure to gang activity within local communities rather than by sociodemographic characteristics.

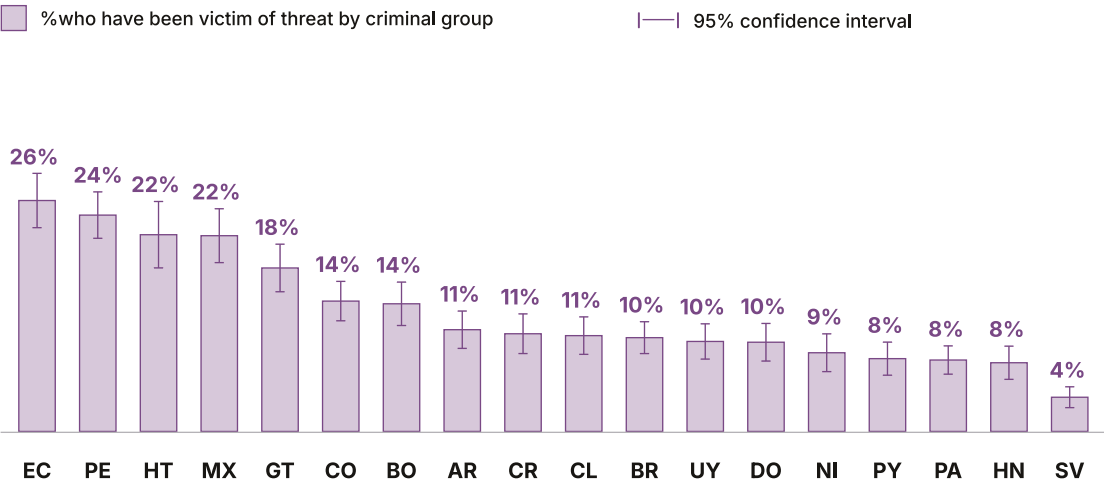
Policies aimed at reducing gang presence and influence within communities may yield broader public safety benefits than interventions targeted primarily at individual demographic groups. The AmericasBarometer thus provides a valuable complement to official crime statistics by documenting how the expansion of organized criminal groups is experienced by ordinary citizens.

Neighborhood gang presence is the strongest predictor of gang victimization



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Ecuador 2026.

Ecuador reports the highest rate of gang-related victimization in the Americas



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Notes

- 1 J. Daniel Montalvo is Director of Survey Research Operations with the Center for Global Democracy and LAPOP Lab.
- 2 UNODC *n.d.*
- 3 Herrera 2019; Escañó et al. 2025.
- 4 In 2024, Executive Decree No. 111 formally designated 22 transnational organized crime groups as terrorist organizations and non-state belligerent actors.
- 5 Newton et al. 2026.

TRUST IN CHINA ONCE AGAIN SURPASSES TRUST IN THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

Mariana Rodríguez¹ and Robert Vidigal²

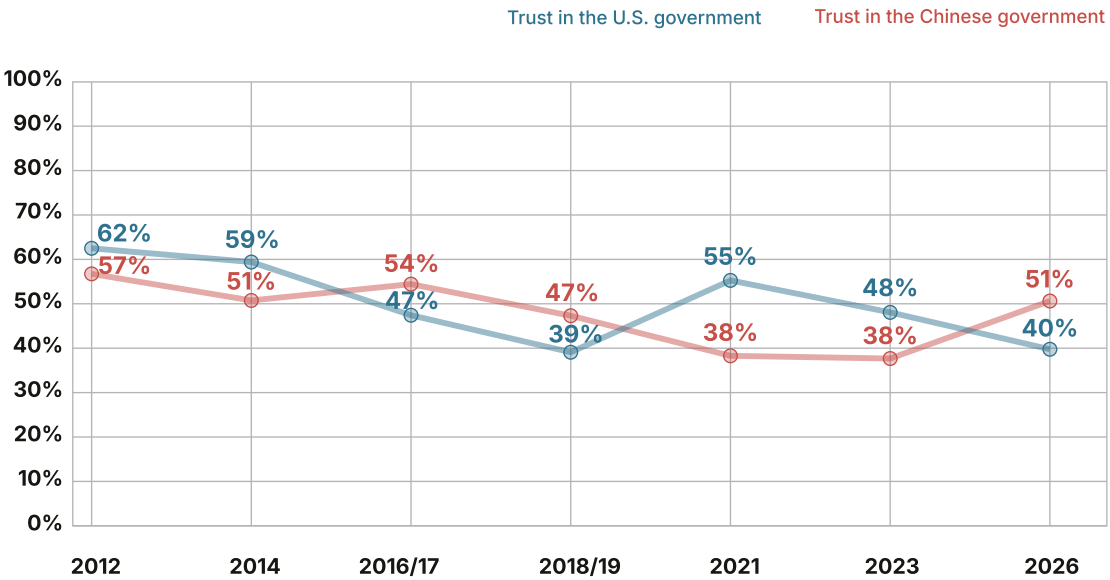
As strategic competition between the United States and China intensifies, Latin America has become an increasingly important arena for diplomatic, economic, and political influence. Over the past two decades, China has substantially expanded its trade, investment, and diplomatic engagement across the region, while the United States has sought to renew its engagement amid growing concerns over migration, security, and economic competitiveness. Although governments shape these relationships through diplomacy and policy, public opinion also matters. Citizens’ trust in foreign governments can influence how they view international partnerships and their countries’ place in an evolving geopolitical landscape. Recent analyses by the Council on Foreign Relations, CSIS, and the Inter-American Dialogue highlight the growing importance of Latin America in U.S.-China strategic competition.³

Trust in the Chinese government once again exceeds trust in the U.S. government. This change reflects declining confidence in the United States more than a dramatic

increase in trust in China. Over time, regional averages from AmericasBarometer data show substantial shifts in trust toward both governments. Across Latin America, average trust in the U.S. government exceeded trust in the Chinese government in 2012 and 2014, at roughly 62% and 59%, respectively. By 2016/17 and 2018/19, confidence in the United States had fallen sharply while trust in China remained relatively stable. Confidence in the U.S. government rebounded in 2021 and 2023 before declining again to 40% in 2026. During the same period, trust in the Chinese government increased to 51%, once again making China the more trusted of the two governments.

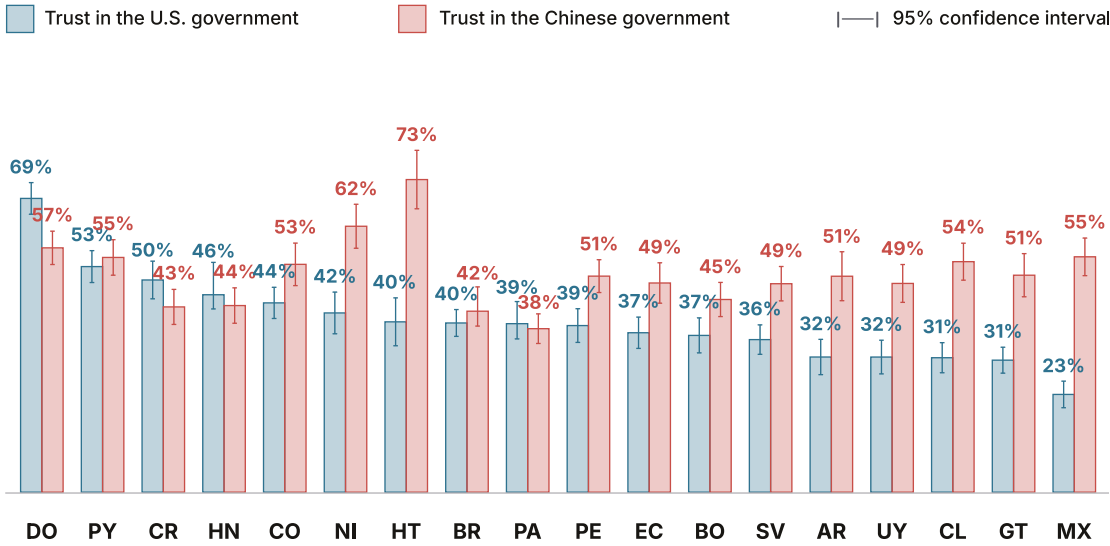
The regional average masks substantial cross-country variation. The Dominican Republic stands out as the country with the highest trust in the U.S. government (69%), well above trust in the Chinese government (57%). The United States is also more trusted than China in Costa Rica and Honduras, while the two governments receive similar levels of trust in Paraguay and Panama. In most other countries, however, the Chinese government

Trust in China rebounds as trust in the U.S. government declines



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2012–2026.

Trust in China exceeds trust in the U.S. government in most Latin American countries



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

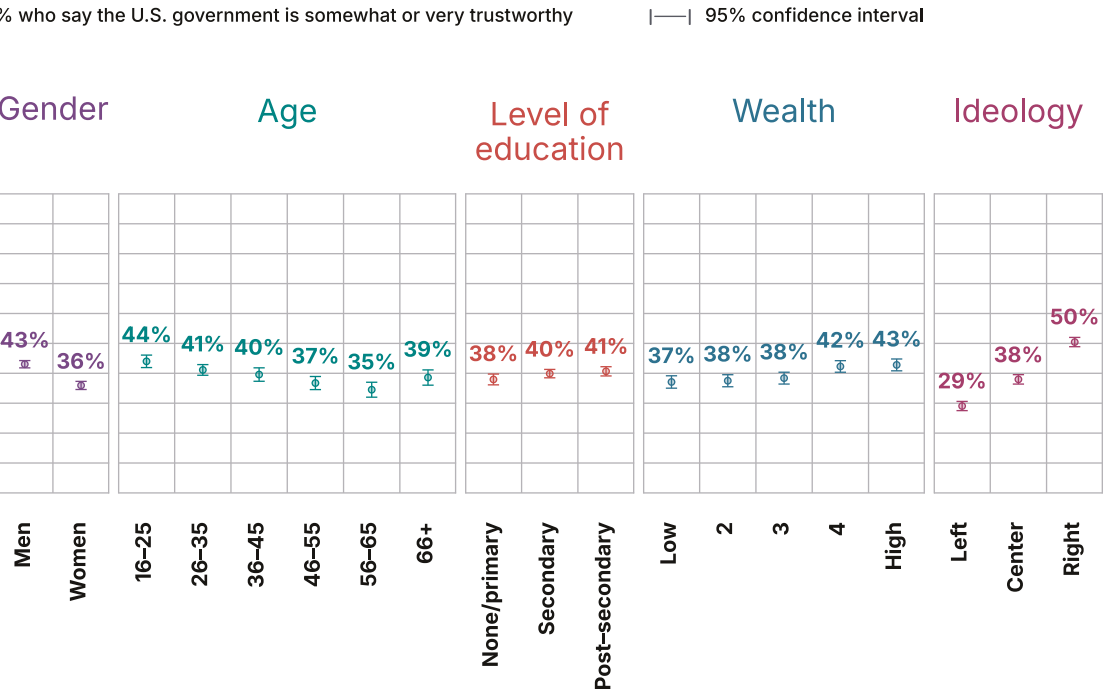
50%
of respondents
on the political
right trust
the U.S.
government,
compared with
29% on the
political left.

is more trusted than the U.S. government. The largest gaps in China’s favor appear in Haiti, where 73% express trust in China compared with 40% for the United States, followed by Mexico (55% versus 23%), Chile (54% versus 31%), Guatemala (51% versus 31%), Nicaragua (62% versus 42%), and Argentina (51% versus 32%). While these data cannot explain why trust differs across countries, Mexico’s particularly low level of trust in the U.S. government coincides with a period of heightened bilateral tensions over migration, border security, tariffs, and questions of national sovereignty.⁴

Across Latin America, trust in the U.S. government varies across demographic groups. On average, men report higher levels of trust than women (43% versus 36%), and younger respondents are generally more trusting than older respondents. Trust also increases modestly with wealth. The clearest differences, however, are ideological: trust rises from 29% among respondents on the political left to 38% among those in the political center and 50% among those on the right. Education is associated with only modest differences in trust. By contrast, political ideology is associated with trust in the Chinese government in the opposite direction, with respondents on the political left expressing greater trust than those on the right.

The United States remains LAC’s principal security partner, and China has become one of its most important economic partners. As both countries deepen their engagement across the region, public confidence has become another dimension of geopolitical competition. The findings presented here suggest that maintaining U.S. influence will depend not only on trade, investment, and diplomacy, but also on sustaining public trust among Latin American citizens.

Trust in the U.S. government is highest among men, younger adults, the wealthy, and those on the political right



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2026.

Notes

- 1 Mariana Rodríguez is Director of Research and Engagement at Vanderbilt University’s Center for Global Democracy and LAPOP Lab.
- 2 Robert Vidigal is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Brasília and former Senior Statistician at Vanderbilt University’s Center for Global Democracy and LAPOP Lab.
- 3 Hernández-Roy et al. 2025; Myers 2025; Roy 2025.
- 4 Shays and Swett 2026.

For the first time ever, CGD and LAPOP Lab collected public opinion data in Cuba. The survey provides a rare window into how Cubans understand the country's current crisis, who they hold responsible, and what they see as the country's most urgent priorities.

Four broad findings stand out. First, the public overwhelmingly blames the Cuban regime rather than the United States for the country's current crisis. Second, many continue to view the Castro family as the country's ultimate center of political power. Third, Cubans express surprisingly little expected resistance to U.S. involvement. Finally, when forced to choose between political opening and economic recovery, they overwhelmingly prioritize restoring the country's economy and basic infrastructure.

Unlike the traditional AmericasBarometer, which relies on nationally representative household surveys, the Cuba study is based on an online panel. We used this approach because conducting a fully random face-to-face national survey in Cuba is neither realistic nor safe. CubaData, our data collection partner, recruited participants from a pool of more than 400,000 internet-connected users across the country. The panel includes adults from all regions of

Cuba, but because participation depends on internet access, it is more likely to include respondents who are younger, more urban, and easier to reach online than the Cuban population as a whole.

Although the sample is not nationally representative, it provides a rare opportunity to examine public opinion in one of the world's least accessible political environments.⁴

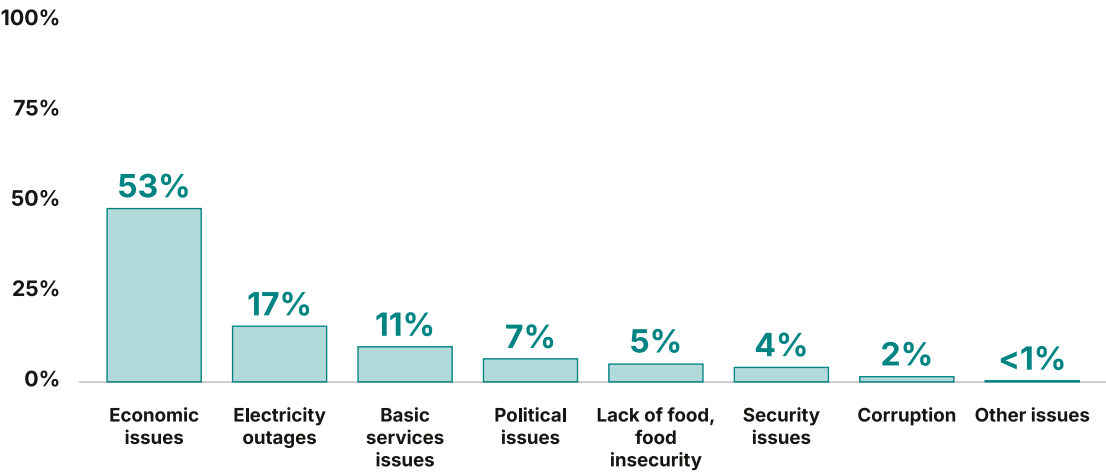
Infrastructure and Economic Collapse

Economic problems dominate public concerns in Cuba. A 53% majority identifies economic problems as Cuba's most important problem, far ahead of electricity problems (17%), problems with public services (11%), political issues (7%), and food insecurity (5%). These responses should not be interpreted as separate concerns. Electricity shortages, deteriorating public services, and food insecurity are themselves manifestations of the broader economic crisis.

Daily interruptions are the clearest example. During the month prior to the survey, 86% reported that their home was without electricity every day, and another 12% reported at least weekly outages. Water service is also highly unreliable, with 56% reporting daily interruptions and 34%

Economic problems dominate public opinion in Cuba

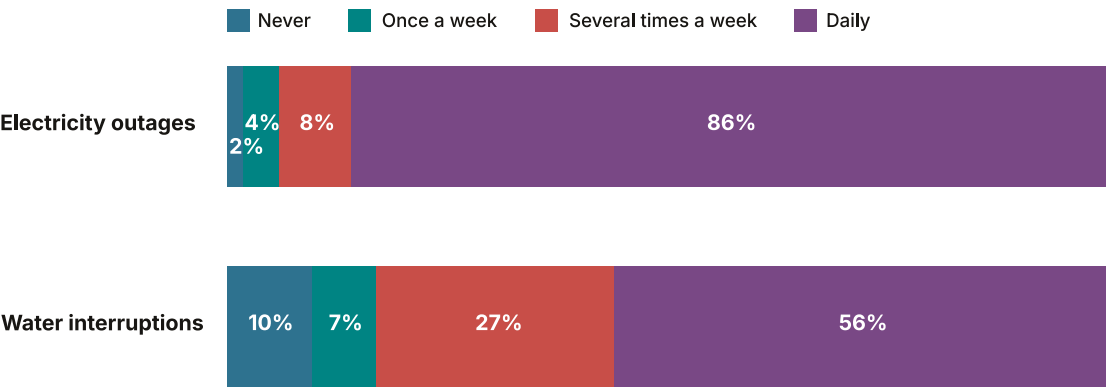
In your opinion, what is the most serious problem faced by the country?



Source: LAPOP Lab, Cuba 2026.

Daily electricity outages and water interruptions are widespread in Cuba

During the past month, how often was your household without each of the following services, even if only for a short time?



Source: LAPOP Lab, Cuba 2026.

reporting weekly interruptions. For many Cubans, the economic crisis is experienced through the repeated breakdown of the basic services that shape everyday life.

Blame Attribution Is Directed at the Cuban Regime, Not the U.S.

Individuals primarily blame the Cuban government, rather than the United States, for the country's current economic collapse. When asked who is mainly responsible for Cuba's current crisis, 74% point to the Cuban government, while 16% name the U.S. government and only small shares assign responsibility to the Cuban population, Cuban exiles, other countries, or other actors.

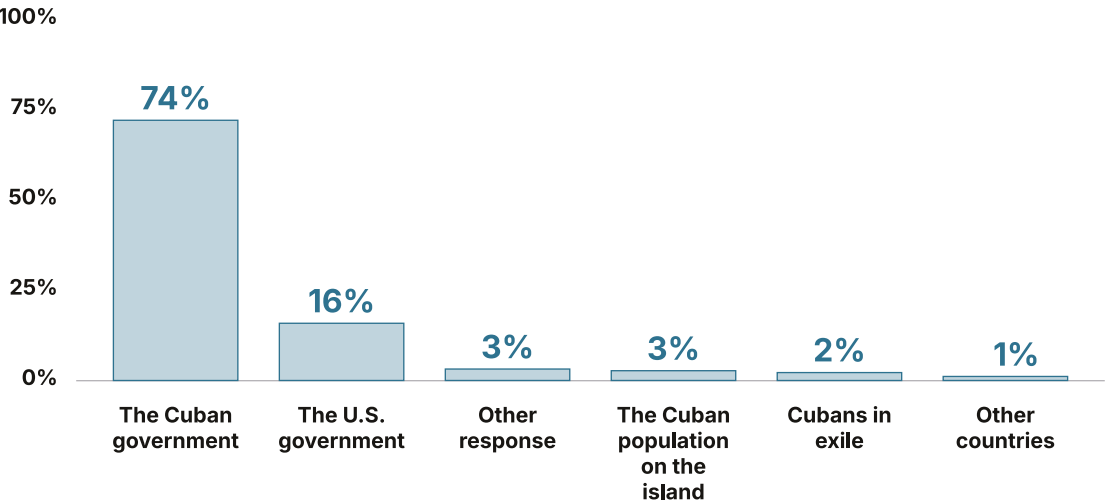
The next figure helps explain why. When asked who currently makes the most important decisions in Cuba, 46% name the Castro family, compared with 17% for the Cuban Communist Party, 14% for the current president Miguel Díaz-Canel, 12% for private actors or businessmen, and 5% for the armed forces. The United States is named by only 3% of individuals surveyed. These findings suggest that Cubans blame the regime for the crisis while continuing to view the Castro family as the country's ultimate center of political power.

Individuals hold the Cuban state responsible for the crisis, but they do not necessarily believe real authority rests with the

These findings suggest that Cubans blame the regime for the crisis while continuing to view the Castro family as the country's ultimate center of political power.

Most Cubans blame the current crisis on the Cuban government

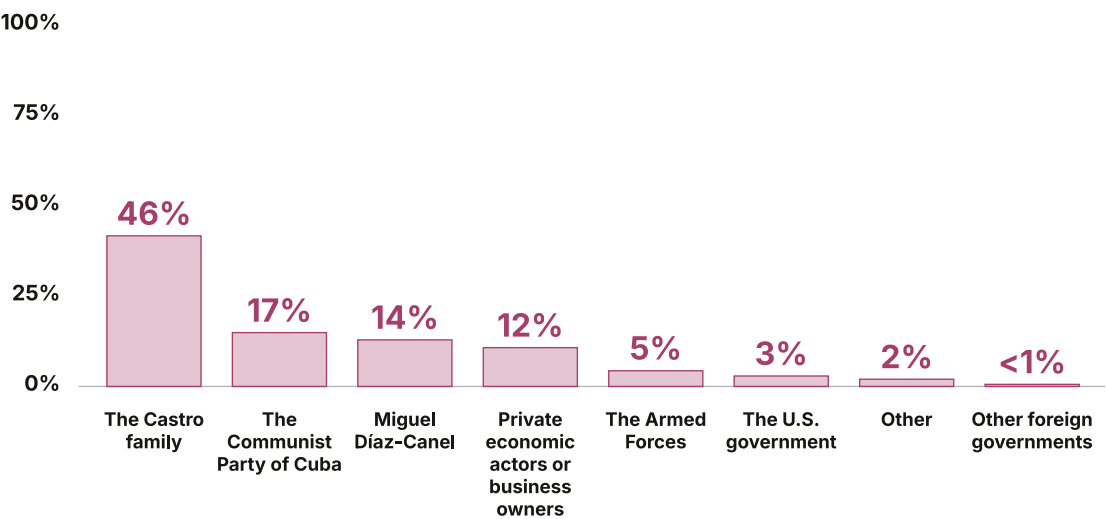
In your opinion, who is primarily responsible for the current crisis facing Cuba?



Source: LAPOP Lab, Cuba 2026.

Many Cubans continue to view the Castro family as the center of political power

In your opinion, who is currently making the most important decisions in Cuba?



Source: LAPOP Lab, Cuba 2026.

current presidency alone. Many continue to view the Castro family as the center of political decision-making, suggesting that dissatisfaction is directed at the broader governing system rather than only at current officeholders.

Openness to U.S. Involvement, but Economic Recovery Above All

The survey also suggests less anti-Americanism than many observers might expect. Views of a hypothetical U.S. military intervention are mixed, but expected opposition is limited: 43% think the majority of Cubans would support such an intervention, 13% think the majority would be indifferent,

28% think the majority would be divided, and only 15% think the majority would oppose it. The key finding is not broad support for intervention but rather the relatively limited expectation of widespread opposition. Even on a highly sensitive question about military intervention, Cubans are much more likely to expect support, indifference, or division than broad opposition.

At the same time, openness to U.S. involvement should not be mistaken for a primarily political agenda. When forced to choose what is most important for the country at this moment, 69% select economic recovery and 31% select political opening. Cubans may be disillusioned with the

Political reform matters but restoring basic living conditions is the more immediate priority for most Cubans.

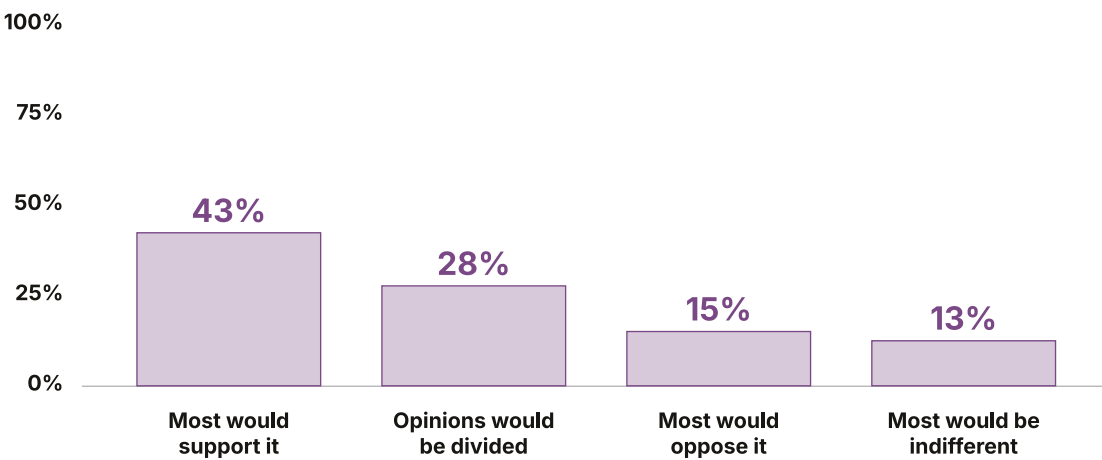
regime and comparatively open to outside involvement, but the immediate demand is relief from economic and infrastructure collapse. Political reform matters but restoring basic living conditions is the more immediate priority for most Cubans.

What We Learn from Cuba

The results point to a public living through severe economic and infrastructure collapse and placing primary responsibility on the Cuban regime. Many also continue to view the Castro family as the country's effective center of political power, suggesting that dissatisfaction is directed at the broader governing order rather than only at current

Opposition to U.S. military intervention appears limited

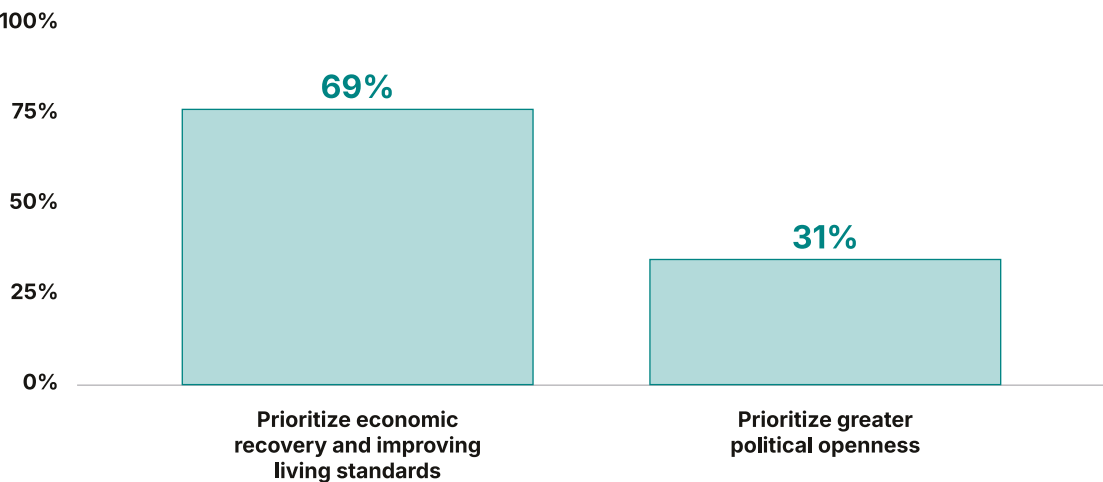
If the United States were to intervene militarily in Cuba, what do you think would be the reaction of the majority of the Cuban population?



Source: LAPOP Lab, Cuba 2026.

Economic recovery takes priority over political opening

If you had to choose, which do you consider more important for the country at this time?



Source: LAPOP Lab, Cuba 2026.

officeholders. At the same time, expected resistance to U.S. involvement appears limited: only a minority think most Cubans would oppose a U.S. military intervention. The dominant priority, however, is economic recovery. The findings suggest that Cubans are looking first for solutions to the country's economic and infrastructure crisis. Political reform remains important, but it is secondary to restoring the conditions of everyday life.

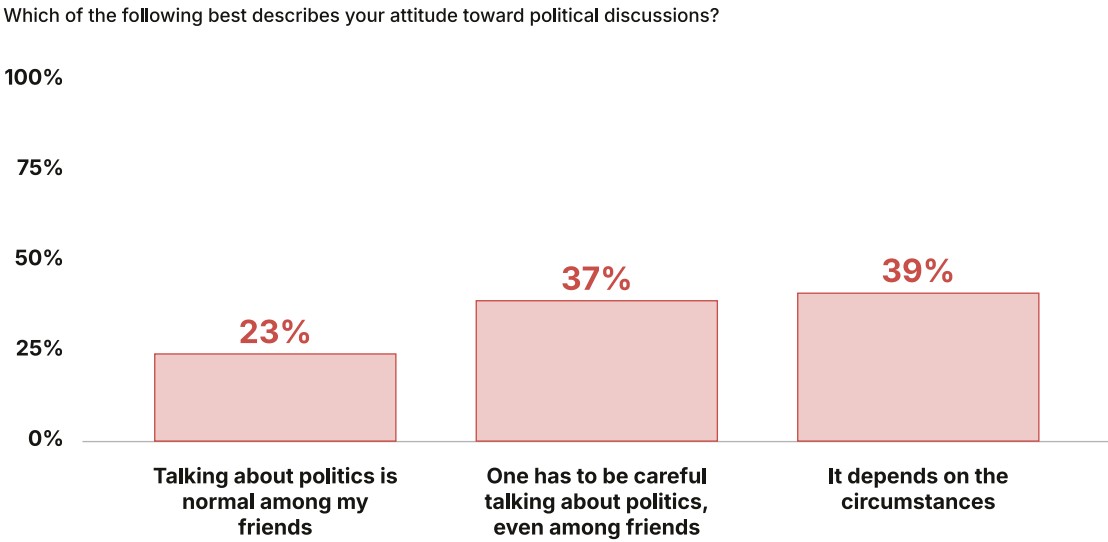
An Additional Perspective: How Safe Is It to Talk About Politics in Cuba?

Non-democratic regimes often take a direct interest in what their citizens say and do

politically, using a range of strategies to suppress dissent and discourage open political discussion, from overt repression to political violence. We find that political discussion remains socially constrained in Cuba. Only 23% say talking about politics is normal among their friends. By contrast, 37% say one must be careful even among friends, and 39% say it depends on the circumstances (the remaining individuals did not answer the question). These findings do not describe a completely silent public, but they do suggest that many Cubans approach political discussion with caution. Political conversation is possible, yet it is often conditional, selective, and shaped by perceived risk.

These findings do not describe a completely silent public, but they do suggest that many Cubans approach political discussion with caution. Political conversation is possible, yet it is often conditional, selective, and shaped by perceived risk.

Many Cubans say political discussion requires caution



Source: LAPOP Lab, Cuba 2026.

Notes

- 1 Noam Lupu is Director of the Center for Global Democracy and Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University.
- 2 Mariana Rodríguez is Director of Research and Engagement at Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy and LAPOP Lab.
- 3 Robert Vidigal is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Brasilia and former Senior Statistician at Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy and LAPOP Lab.
- 4 Survey estimates are weighted using inverse probability weighting (IPW) benchmarked to the 2012 IPUMS Cuba population by age, gender, and race. This approach adjusts for differences between the online sample and the benchmark population, improving the representativeness of reported estimates.

The AmericasBarometer is a multinational public opinion survey that measures democratic values and the behaviors of voting-age citizens and permanent residents across the Western Hemisphere.

Respondents are selected through nationally representative probability samples in Latin America and through nonprobability panels in Canada, Cuba, and the United States. 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 it uses computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), and in Canada, Cuba, and the United States, where it uses self-administered web surveys. The average country sample size of 1,000 respondents enables national and, in many countries, subnational estimates of key population variables.

Fieldwork for the 2026 AmericasBarometer was conducted between July 30, 2025, and July 6, 2026, across the 21 countries.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The AmericasBarometer survey instruments consist of a core questionnaire and country-specific modules that measure attitudes, experiences, and behaviors related to political, economic, and social systems. The core questionnaire comprises structured items that permit valid comparisons across countries and over time. Country-specific modules measure opinions on context-specific sociopolitical phenomena.

New questions were developed through workshops that drew on input from researchers at Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy, the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame, country experts, and leading scholars in the field. The average face-to-face questionnaire included 124 questions and had a median duration of about 42 minutes, while the average CATI questionnaire included 70 questions and had a median duration of about 39 minutes. The main questionnaire topics in 2026 were democratic values, system support, the rule of law, and migration intentions.

COGNITIVE PRETESTS

The core questionnaire and country-specific modules are thoroughly pretested through a three-stage iterative cognitive interviewing process. First, LAPOP Lab cognitive interviewers conduct a series of in-depth tests of new modules to develop initial drafts of questionnaire items. Second, LAPOP Lab extensively trains research assistants and consultants to conduct cognitive interviews on the full core questionnaire in selected countries across different regions of the Americas to ensure contextual variation. Third, a similar process is carried out in all participating countries using each country's customized questionnaire.

For the 2026 AmericasBarometer, local survey institutions recruited pretest participants and, in some cases, offered a small incentive for their participation. Most cognitive interviews were conducted remotely via video or telephone.

SAMPLING

LAPOP Lab 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 interviewers survey eligible respondents using standardized respondent-selection procedures. One respondent is selected per household, and no revisits are required.

In face-to-face surveys, LAPOP Lab uses frequency matching to ensure that the achieved sample closely mirrors the national distributions of age and gender within the sampling frame. Frequency matching is applied at the cluster level and enforced at the Primary Sampling Unit (PSU) level. In countries where the survey is conducted via CATI, LAPOP Lab uses random-digit dialing (RDD) of mobile phones. For unanswered calls, each number selected for the sample is called multiple times before being discarded.

WEIGHTS

The 2026 AmericasBarometer sample design strategy for face-to-face studies produces self-weighted datasets, with a few exceptions. Weights for Haiti and Nicaragua (CATI) are calculated by estimating baseline probabilities, adjusting for eligibility and nonresponse, and then calibrating them to the latest available face-to-face AmericasBarometer country data for 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

The 2026 AmericasBarometer is designed to help fieldwork personnel strengthen their knowledge and standardize data collection and monitoring practices. Training consists of two components. First, LAPOP Lab conducts mandatory virtual workshops for designated survey organization personnel on interviewer training preparation, sampling procedures, and quality control protocols. Second, LAPOP Lab and survey organizations jointly train fieldwork personnel. This includes a three-day hybrid interviewer training and certification process, as well as a quality control auditor training delivered by the survey organization using LAPOP-provided materials. Survey organizations coordinate all training logistics, including facilities, scheduling, and participation by interviewers, supervisors, and quality control auditors.

QUALITY CONTROL

The 2026 AmericasBarometer uses LAPOP Lab's Fieldwork Algorithm for LAPOP Control over Survey Operations and Norms (FALCON). FALCON collects multiple forms of paradata, including voice recordings, interviewer images, question and questionnaire timing, and interviewer performance indicators. These indicators are monitored throughout data collection so that any necessary corrections or cancellations resulting from failures to meet quality-control standards can be made while fieldwork is still in progress.

Final datasets include only interviews that meet LAPOP Lab's quality-control standards. Each country's technical report summarizes the results of this quality-control process and provides detailed information on sampling, weighting, and fieldwork procedures.

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What do citizens across the Americas want from democracy, and how are their views changing? Drawing on the 2026 AmericasBarometer, the *Pulse of Democracy* offers a timely portrait of public opinion across the hemisphere. From changing living conditions and support for democracy to migration, security, representation, and geopolitical attitudes, the report brings citizens' voices to the center of debates about the region's future, providing rigorous comparative evidence to inform policy, practice, and public understanding.



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