LAPOP’s 2021 AmericasBarometer takes the Pulse of Democracy

The AmericasBarometer is a regional survey carried out by LAPOP Lab, a center for excellence in international survey research based at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN. LAPOP has deep connections to the Latin America and Caribbean region, established during more than five decades of public opinion research. The AmericasBarometer is possible due to the activities and support of a consortium of institutions located across the Americas. To complete each round of the study, LAPOP partners with individuals, survey firms, universities, development organizations, and others in up to 34 countries within the Western Hemisphere. Project efforts are informed by the four core components of LAPOP’s mission: to produce objective, non-partisan, and scientifically sound studies of public opinion; to innovate improvements in survey research; to disseminate project findings; and, to build capacity. The AmericasBarometer project receives generous support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Vanderbilt University. Other institutions that have contributed recently to multiple rounds of the project include Environics Institute, Florida International University, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, the Universidad de los Andes, and the World Bank. Over the years, the project has benefited from grants from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development in Brazil (CNPq), the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, and numerous academic institutions across the Americas. The 2021 AmericasBarometer was carried out via phone interviews in 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries, and via the internet in Canada and the U.S. All samples are designed to be nationally representative of voting-age adults. In all, more than 64,362 individuals were interviewed in this latest round of the survey. The complete 2004-2021 AmericasBarometer dataset contains responses from over 350,000 people across the region. Common core modules, standardized techniques, and rigorous quality control procedures permit valid comparisons across individuals, certain subnational areas, countries, regions, and time. AmericasBarometer data and reports are available for free download from the project website: www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop. Individuals can also use that website to access and query the data via LAPOP’s interactive data playground. Datasets from the project also can be accessed via “data repositories” and subscribing institutions across the Americas. Through such open access practices and an extensive network of collaborators, LAPOP works to contribute to the pursuit of excellence in public opinion research and ongoing discussions over how programs and policies related to democratic governance can improve the quality of life for individuals in the Americas and beyond.
Most citizens in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region favor increased government spending on efforts to make buildings safer from natural disaster. Specifically, in the average LAC country, 70% of adults agree or strongly agree that the government should spend more to enforce building codes and regulations, even at the expense of funding other programs.²

More than two-thirds of LAC residents support greater spending to enforce disaster risk reduction policy

Support for disaster risk reduction spending is particularly high in Haiti: nine in ten adults believe the government should spend more to keep buildings safer. The need for disaster risk reduction in Haiti was starkly demonstrated in August 2021, when a magnitude 7.2 earthquake leveled buildings in the southwestern part of the country, leading to more than 2,000 deaths and more than 12,000 injuries. Support is also comparatively high in Haiti’s neighbor, the Dominican Republic, as well as in Chile, El Salvador, and Honduras. In each of those countries, at least three in four adults support trading off expenditures on other programs for more investment in the implementation of disaster risk reduction policies.

Who is more likely to support more public funding for the enforcement of building codes and regulations to keep people safe from natural disaster? The 2021 AmericasBarometer reveals that those who are less wealthy and less educated are more likely to support disaster risk reduction spending (analyses not shown).

Good governance matters as well. Those who expect that home renovation or construction in their neighborhood would require paying a bribe are less willing to support investing public money in code enforcement. People are unwilling to throw good money after bad: to the degree that they anticipate that officials will engage in corrupt behavior, they are more reluctant to support allocating resources to disaster risk reduction.

Expecting corruption predicts lower support for government investment in regulation and code enforcement

Source: AmericasBarometer, 2021
The LAC region ranks second in the world in vulnerability to natural disasters. This level of exposure is aggravated by changing climate conditions that increase weather anomalies and extreme events. The year 2020 saw a record number of tropical/subtropical storms in the Atlantic basin. In recent years mudslides in Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Venezuela, and other countries have taken lives and displaced thousands. Meanwhile, the region’s vulnerability to earthquakes has increased as populations continue to grow in densely populated urban centers and in places with weakened infrastructure.

Public opinion can generate demands that elected officials are incentivized to meet. It is important, then, to understand when public opinion shifts in favor — or against — government investment in, and enforcement of, disaster risk reduction policies. With support from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), a collaborative team of investigators at LAPOP-Vanderbilt and the Extreme Events Institute at Florida International University developed a new module on disaster risk reduction and related attitudes for the 2021 AmericasBarometer. These data can be used to further explore how governance shapes attitudes toward government investment in making buildings safer and — a key goal of the research team — how experiences with disaster alter public demand for disaster risk reduction.

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2 Question wording: The government should spend more money to enforce building codes/norms/regulations to make homes safer from natural disasters, even if it means spending less on other programs. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement? — Strongly agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree or disagree, Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree.


5 The U.S. National Science Foundation award numbers are #2019874 and #2019796.