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Spotlight on Public Demand for Disaster Risk Reduction Policy Enforcement

By Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, Barry S. Levitt, and Richard S. Olson¹



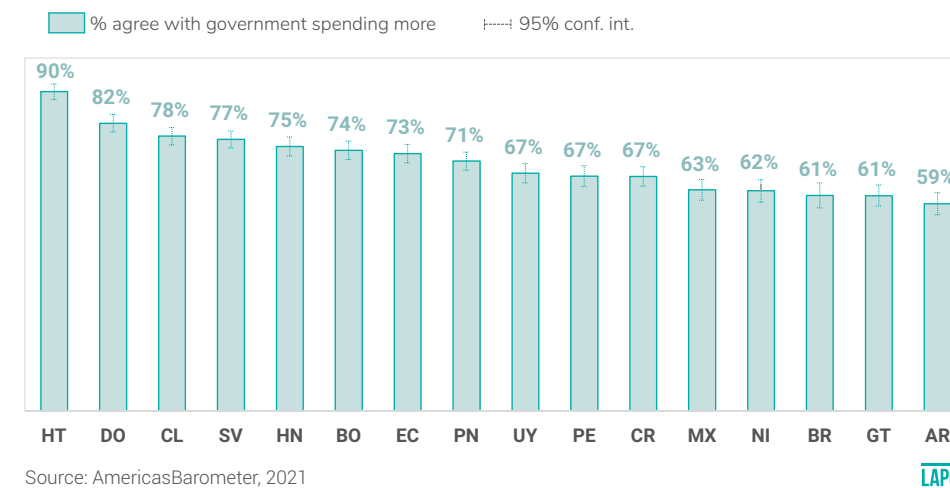
Those who expect that home renovation or construction in their neighborhood would require paying a bribe are less willing to support investing public money in code enforcement

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.



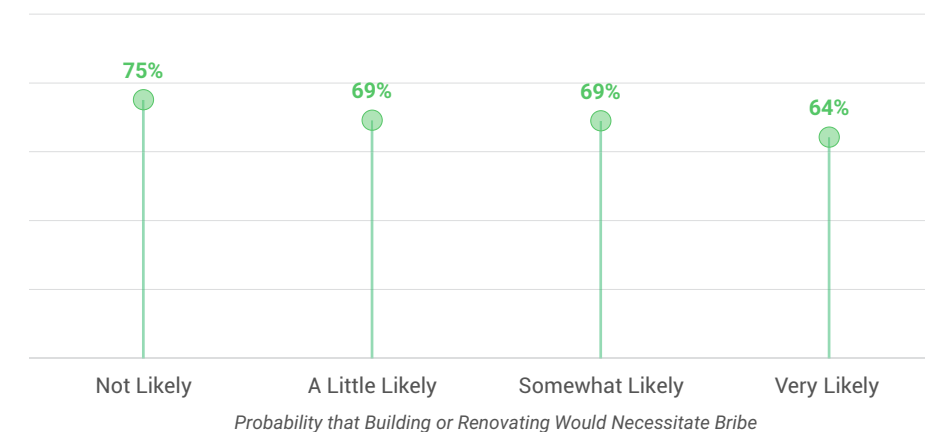
Ecuador, 2016:
House destroyed by a
7.8-magnitude earthquake
in the city of Manta
(Foto593/Shutterstock)

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).

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.

Good governance matters as well. Those who expect that home renovation or construction in their

Expecting corruption predicts lower support for government investment in regulation and code enforcement ● % agree with government spending more



Spotlight on the Public Demand for Disaster Risk Reduction Policy Enforcement *continued*

The LAC region ranks second in the world in vulnerability to natural disasters.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.

3 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). 2020. *Natural Disasters in Latin America and in the Caribbean, 2000-2007*. Report available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20191203-ocha-desastres_naturales.pdf.

4 World Meteorological Organization (WMO). 2021. *State of the Climate in Latin America & the Caribbean 2020*. Report synopsis available at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/b9e1619f4897444babf79b21907b7910>.

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



Brazil, 2020: House damaged after a mudslide caused by heavy rains in the city of Guaraja (Nelson Antoine/Shutterstock)



Brazil, 2021: Houses are submerged after flooding caused by heavy rains and the rise of the Negro River in Manaus (Nelson Antoine/Shutterstock)