

Enduring Democracies but Unsatisfied Citizens? Public Opinion's Lack of Confidence in Democratic Institutions*

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Abstract

Latin American democracies are currently experiencing their most enduring time, and there is majority support among public opinion for democracy in the region. However, surveys for this region indicate a high level of political distrust in democratic institutions. This study aims to address this puzzle of the public opinion's lack of confidence in the central institutions of a democratic regime. Perceptions on corruption, the rule of law, and countries' economic conditions are argued to be the three main factors that explain this puzzle. By using a dataset comprised of 18 Latin American countries from 2004 to 2012, the results presented here reveal that as citizens' perceptions of political corruption, the guarantee of their basic rights, and the country's economic performance are viewed negatively, their trust in political institutions decreases. Moreover, tests with objectively-measured economic variables support the hypothesis that the perceptions of the citizens on these issues follow real information about current situations in their countries. Nevertheless, when compared to long-lasting consolidated democracies, nothing in these results enable us to say that democracies in Latin America are at risk of breakdown due to their high political distrust.

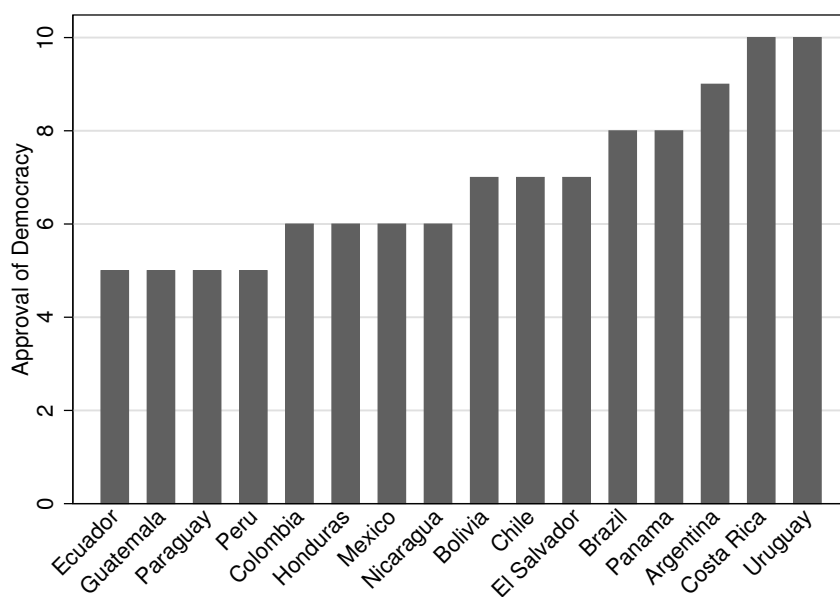
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1 Introduction - Statement of the Puzzle

Latin American democracies are currently experiencing their most enduring time, and with the exception of a few countries (especially Honduras and Venezuela), there has been no significant governmental instability in the region. Nevertheless, the region is experiencing a puzzling paradox: While the democracies in the region are enduring and there is a majority support of public opinion for the democratic regime, the majority of its citizens distrust democratic institutions such as political parties, legislative, judiciary and executive branches (Lagos, 1997; Moisés, 2006; Moisés and Carneiro, 2008; Moisés, 2011).

Figure 1: Approval of Democracy in Latin American Countries (2012)
(1 = Very Low; 10 = Very High)



Source: Elaborated by the author from “Bertelsmann Transformation Index” (BTI, 2014).

From a recent survey on the quality of democracy in 129 developing and transition countries (BTI, 2014), a particular question in the questionnaire was designed to measure citizens’ approval of democracy: “How strong is your approval of democratic norms and procedures?” From a 10 point scale—ranging from 1 = Approval of democratic norms and procedures is very low, to 10 = Approval of democratic norms and procedures is very high—the Figure 1 shows the average answers of Latin American citizens in 2012.

As we can see in Figure 1, the majority of Latin American citizens approve the democratic norms and procedures in their countries. There is no country below the value of 5, and only four countries—Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay and Peru—in the value of 5. The mean value for the region is 7, interpreted in BTI survey questionnaire as “approval of democratic norms and procedures is fairly high.”

If we have the “Churchill hypothesis” as a reference for the approval of democracy, according to which “Democracy may have its problems, but it is preferable to any other kind of government,” the result is similar from the one depicted in Figure 1.¹ The majority of the citizens in Latin America agree with the idea that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. The mean value is 5.12 (maximum value = 7), which we can interpret as a fairly high approval of democracy in the region.

On the other hand, when we analyze the confidence² of Latin American citizens in their democratic institutions, the result is far less encouraging. With a few exceptions, the confidence in most Latin American countries in their political parties or branches of the government—which are central institutions of a democracy—is quite low.

For the confidence in political parties, for example, by using a scale that goes from a value of 1 (“no confidence”) to a value of 7 (“high confidence”), the majority of the countries have a higher density in the value of 1 (see Figure 2). The exceptions are Chile and Uruguay, with a higher density in the value of 4 (the middle point between no confidence and high confidence).

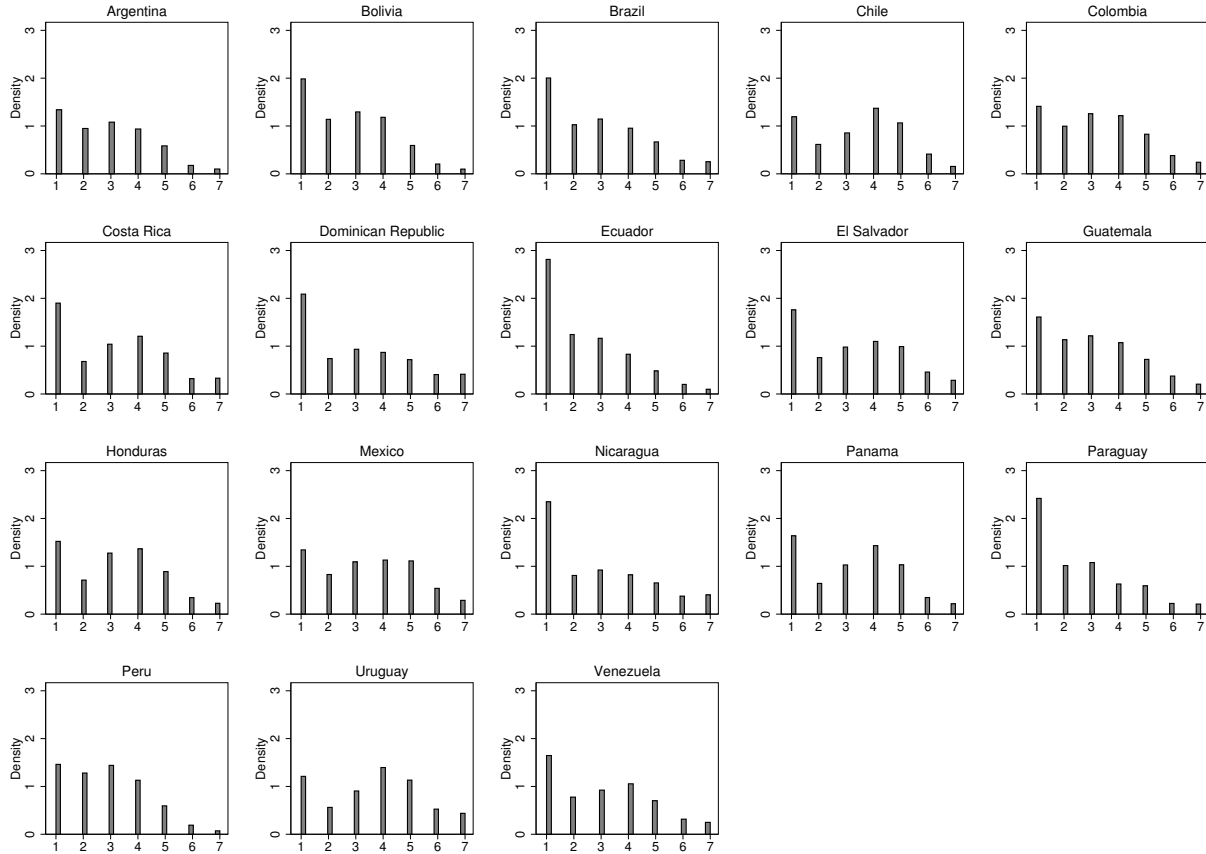
This picture of distrust in political parties (Figure 2) can be generalized to other democratic institutions such as the legislative, judiciary and executive branches, although in such cases with less intensity.³ In other words, with the exception of Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Uruguay—and these only with regards to the executive branch—not one of the three branches of government earns a high confidence rating (which would be a value of 6 or 7 on the scale with a maximum value = 7) from the majority of Latin American

¹The results for the “Churchill Hypothesis” can be seen in Figure 4 in Appendix A.

²In this paper, trust and confidence are taken as interchangeable terms.

³The figures for the Latin American citizens’ confidence in Legislative, Judiciary, Executive, and Elections can be seen in Appendix B.

Figure 2: Confidence in Political Parties
(1 = No confidence; 7 = High Confidence)



Source: Elaborated by the author from “AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project” (LAPOP, 2012).

citizens. Even the electoral process does not receive a high confidence rating from the majority of Latin American citizens (Uruguay and Costa Rica are the exceptions), although some countries (such as Brazil) have adopted measures to increase the integrity of their elections, such as the adoption of an electronic voting process since 1998 (Hidalgo, 2010).

In this research, I aim to give a tentative explanation regarding this puzzle between enduring democracies and citizens who are unsatisfied with their democratic institutions. According to the argument suggested in this study, three factors are presented as the main causes of the dissatisfaction with the political institutions in these democracies: 1. The feeling among citizens that there is outrageous political corruption in their respective countries; 2. The citizens’ feelings (current, retrospective and prospective) that the economy of their countries is not doing well, and; 3. The perception by the citizens that their basic civil rights are not being

protected by the political system.

In this study, all Latin American democratic countries will be analyzed, with data starting from the year 2004 to the year 2012. It is important to emphasize that the aforementioned factors are measured in perception of the citizens, and not by more objective measurements such as indices for the economic condition of the country (unemployment, GDP, and inflation). Therefore, I run econometric tests with more objectively-measured economic variables, and the results of these tests support the hypothesis that the perceptions of the citizens follow real information about current situations in their countries. This is important because it is different from the idea stated in classic studies on public opinion that respondents answer randomly to surveys' questionnaire (Converse, 1964). As we shall see, the findings of this study suggest that citizens' perceptions are not so distant from what happens in their reality.

Nevertheless, when we compare the degree of political distrust in democratic institutions by Latin American citizens to the degree of political distrust of long-lasting consolidated democracies (e.g., Canada and United States), there is nothing the results found in this study that enables us to say that democracies in Latin America are at risk of breakdown.

This paper is structured as follows: in Section 2, I present a literature review on distrust of democratic institutions and the concept of political trust; in Section 3, I present my argument and hypotheses; data and the method conducted in this study are presented in Section 4; in Section 5, I show and discuss the results of the hypotheses' tests, and; I present my final comments in Section 6.

2 The Distrust in Democratic Institutions

As the new democracies of the third wave democratization (Huntington, 1993)—especially those in Latin America which were established after decades of military dictatorship—proved enduring, the issue of the quality of these democracies came to the forefront (O'Donnell and Iazzetta, 2004; Diamond and Morlino, 2005; Levine and Molina, 2011). The classical Dahlsian operationalized concept of democracy—“polyarchy”—requires that all citizens must have opportunities to formulate their preferences, signify their preferences, and have their preferences

weighted equally in conduct of government (Dahl, 1971). Each of those opportunities in turn requires institutional guarantees in order to empower the citizens with ample freedom, political equality, and control over public policies and their governments. Therefore, the vote does not guarantee that the citizens are free and that their political community could be considered democratic, *per se*. What makes the opportunities addressed by Dahl (1971) guaranteed to all citizens are the representative institutions of the democracy such as the executive power, the legislative, the judiciary, and the political parties. Political institutions such as these are a fundamental aspect of democracy (Hadenius, 2001; Diamond and Morlino, 2004).

According to Linz and Stepan (1996), democracy is consolidated when it becomes the “only game in town.” In the authors’ own words, “democracy becomes the only game in town when all the actors in the polity become habituated to the fact that political conflict will be resolved according to the established norms and that violations of these norms are likely to be both ineffective and costly” (Linz and Stepan, 1996). As stated by Offe (1999), when institutions do not have the confidence of their citizens, they have difficulty functioning as a mediation between the citizens’ expectations and the collective goals proposed by governments and political leaders. In this sense, the existence of continuing levels of distrust in the political institutions would be seen by some scholars as a threat to the the democracy (Lipset and Schneider, 1983; Williams, 1985).

The political distrust phenomenon is well-documented in several comparative studies (Klingemann, 1999; Levi, 1998; Nye and King, 1997; Warren, 1999; Norris, 2011; Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi, 2014), and although institutional distrust is an issue affecting both old (Newton and Norris, 2000) and new democracies, the problem seems to be more pervasive in newly-established democracies (McAllister, 1999; Moisés, 2011). The reason would be in the poor performance of political institutions in less-developed countries. As stated by Moisés (2011, p. 339), “in many new democracies, [...] distrust of democratic institutions is associated to citizens’ negative feelings about political efficacy, low levels of political interest and political participation, and also preference for democratic models which exclude political parties and/or parliaments.”

2.1 The Concept of Political Trust

In a general sense, trust relies on integrity, suitability, effectiveness, and reliability with regards to someone or something. According to Hardin (1999), trust is a bet based on the belief that the mutual interests of the involved actors are a sufficient condition to generate common goods, and thus avoid the possibility of damages resulting from their abuse.

A minimum dose of distrust in institutions can be a healthy sign of detachment of citizens from the political sphere; a sphere over which they may have little control (Sztompka, 1999; Warren, 2001). However, too much distrust and especially with continuity in time may mean that citizens perceive political institutions as something different, if not opposite, to that for which the institutions should be. In this case, citizens can see the political institutions as inefficient, corrupted, fraudulent or non-protective of citizens' basic rights (Levi, 1998; Tyler, 1998; Miller and Listhaug, 1999; Offe, 1999; Newton and Norris, 2000).

In political analyses, the concept of trust has been addressed by different approaches such as “civic culture” (Almond and Verba, 1963), “social capital” (Putnam, 1993), and in the idea of “critical citizens” (Norris, 1999, 2011). These approaches emphasize the influence of trust in political institutions on the consolidation and stability of democracy. The fact that people trust that authorities and political institutions would act as reinforcing mechanisms of the democratic system (Seligman, 1997; Sztompka, 1999), also implies the acceptance and identification of citizens with the political system and their political community (Stokes, 2001). Thus, political trust can be seen as “judgment of the citizenry that the system and the political incumbents are responsive, and will do what is right even in the absence of constant scrutiny” (Miller and Listhaug, 1990, p. 358), and for that reason “political trust is a central indicator of public's underlying feeling about its polity” (Newton and Norris, 2000, p. 53).

This definition of political trust is in accordance with the institutionalist literature, according to which the institutions work well if they are consistent with their legal basis and legitimacy, signal impartiality, universality, integrity and fairness in the relationship with citizens, and are able to gain the *trust* of the citizens, thus constituting a benchmark for their

political behavior (Lipset, 1981; Offe, 1999; Norris, 1999; Mishler and Rose, 2001). In this sense, the empirical measurement of the political trust phenomenon must take into account that citizens combine normative and rational criteria regarding integrity, sense of justice and effectiveness of the political actors to evaluate their governments and political institutions (Almond and Verba, 1963; Miller, 1974; Dasgupta, 1988; Hetherington, 1998; Levi, 1998).

Political distrust corresponds to the opposite of what has been mentioned here, namely the situation in which citizens feel disrespected by unlawful or unauthorized institutional procedures, like irregular or fraudulent elections, corruption, or even when citizens do not find reason to believe that institutions such as public service agencies work according to the legal basis for which they were established.

3 The Roots of Political Distrust: Hypotheses

There is no consensus in the literature on what are the causes of political distrust. Yet several factors have been identified as the roots of political distrust. In this study, I will focus on three of these factors: corruption perception; perceptions of the economic condition, and; the perception of the guarantee of civil liberties. These factors were chosen based on the current literature on the topic of political distrust, but also because these factors have either been treated separately (Norris, 1999) or presented more as an assumption for a good democracy than as empirical findings. Therefore, in this study these factors will be included into a same analytical model, that includes different countries and years.

Corruption affects both new and old democracies. However, the literature on corruption tends to place less-developed societies as the most vulnerable to this issue. Corruption has been related to the ineffectiveness of legal institutions, the weakness of accountability mechanisms (Power and Taylor, 2011), and the poor performance of political institutions in less-developed countries (Moisés, 2010). Findings from local research on Brazil, for example, show that corruption is one of the factors responsible for the growth of distrust in democratic institutions (Moisés, 2010). Therefore,

Hypothesis 1. As the perception of the citizens regarding the level of corruption of the political officials increases, the trust of the citizens in democratic institutions decreases.

Theories of economic performance and political economy, such as the theory of economic voting, associate the approval of the government to the economic performance of governments and political leaders. Several studies have focused on the effects of aggregate levels of economic factors—such as inflation, unemployment or economic growth—with regard to the given to governments and political institutions, and their findings reveal, albeit with inconsistencies, that trust is a function of government performance (Kornberg and Clarke, 1992; Anderson, 1995, 2006; Anderson and LoTempio, 2002; Benton, 2005; Lewis-Beck and Ratto, 2013). Thus,

Hypothesis 2. As the evaluation of the citizens regarding the current, the past (retrospective), and the future (prospective) economic situation of their countries is perceived negatively, the trust of the citizens in democratic institutions decreases.

Studies on the quality of democracy in Latin America (Méndez and Pinheiro, 1999; Levine and Molina, 2011) also show how contexts of extreme socioeconomic inequality and poverty imposes limits on the exercise of rights for significant parts of the society in the region, undermining the notion of democracy. According to O’Donnell (1999) there is an intermediate dimension between the political regime and the broad socioeconomic characteristics of a country, defined by the extent to which the “rule of law” is guaranteed, in which the administrative enforcement or judicial decision of legal standards are consistent in similar cases, regardless of class differences, social status, or power of the participants in these processes, and where procedures are adopted that are pre-established and accessible by all.

In this sense, polyarchies in which the state treats its citizens differently and makes use of violence against those who are not having their civil rights guaranteed, have been seen as incomplete polyarchies (O’Donnell, 1999). Thus, it is reasonable to believe that citizens distrust political institutions when they are convinced that institutions are being partial and

unfair in the access that different citizens or groups have to civil, political and social rights (Nye and King, 1997). Hence,

Hypothesis 3 As the citizens feel that their civil rights are not being guaranteed and protected, the trust of the citizens in democratic institutions decreases.

All suggested hypotheses are based in the perceptions or feelings of the citizens. As a last hypotheses, I believe that these perceptions are not formulated by citizens at random. I believe that citizens' perceptions are based on real information that they gather either in news or in their day-to-day lives (Gilens, 2001).

Hypothesis 4. By adding more objective measurements of governments' economic performances into the model, the perceptions of the citizens regarding economic factors remain the same as expected in the previous hypotheses.

4 Data and Method

4.1 Data Source and Data

In this paper, I use data from the series of surveys conducted from 2004 to 2012 gathered from “The AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project” (LAPOP, 2012). It is a set of nationally-representative surveys of voting age adults conducted in all major languages, using face-to-face interviews in Latin America. According to the sample design report for 2012 (AmericasBarometer, 2012, p. 1), “samples in each country were developed using a multi-stage probabilistic design (with quotas at the household level for most countries), and were stratified by major regions of the country, size of municipality and by urban and rural areas within municipalities.” In this study, I use the surveys for the years 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012, for 18 Latin American countries⁴, comprising a total of 122,046 observations—

⁴The 18 countries included in the analysis are: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay,

having, therefore, individual respondents as the unit of analysis.

Table 1: Variables' Names and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Dependent Variables					
Trust in Political Parties	1.638	0.837	1	3	120093
Trust in the Judiciary	1.952	0.895	1	3	120093
Trust in the Congress (Legislative)	1.911	0.898	1	3	120093
Trust in the President (Executive)	2.47	0.825	1	3	120093
Independent Variables					
<i>Perceptions' Measurement:</i>					
Political Corruption	2.251	0.769	1	3	111851
Citizens' Basic Rights Guarantee	2.125	0.878	1	3	120093
Country's Current Economic Situation	2.299	0.707	1	3	120093
Country's Past Economic Situation (Retrospective)	2.207	0.729	1	3	101526
Country's Future Economic Situation (Prospective)	1.998	0.787	1	3	33945
<i>Objective Measurement:</i>					
Unemployment Rate	7.455	2.184	3.593	13.667	101691
Inflation (Percentage Change)	6.451	4.357	0.466	30.37	120093
GDP Growth (% , in Constant Prices)	5.321	2.497	-1.237	13.093	122046
<i>Control Variables</i>					
Interest in Politics	2.055	0.803	1	3	101369
Identification with Any Party	0.348	0.476	0	1	93491
Ideology	3.13	1.198	1	5	94749
Female	0.513	0.5	0	1	120093
Family Monthly Income	2.325	1.111	1	5	85723

The Table 1 presents the variables' names and some descriptive statistics. The dependent variables are four ordinal variables (ordered data) regarding political trust in four democratic institutions: 1. Political Parties; 2. Judiciary; 3. Legislative Branch, and; 4. Executive Branch.⁵ In order to deal with the limited dependent variables, I rescale the seven possible answers (from low trust to high trust) to three possibilities, thus now the variables can assume three possible values according to the confidence that citizens have in these political institutions: 1. Low Trust; 2. Some Trust; 3. High Trust. This is, different from aggregate indices that measure citizens' support of democratic institutions (Lopes, 2004; Moisés and Carneiro, 2008; Colen, 2010), because by using each democratic institution as a dependent variable in this study, it is possible to desegregate citizens' confidence for each of these institutions.

Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

⁵The questionnaire with the questions from which all the variables included in this study were constructed can be seen in Appendix C.

The independent variables were divided into two types of measurement: 1. Perceptions' measurement, and; 2. Objective measurement. For the first type, when hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were tested, six ordinal variables were included based on the perceptions that citizens have regarding specific issues. "Political corruption" measures the perception among citizens regarding corruption among public officials. I rescale the four original possible answers of this variable to three possibilities, therefore the variable can now assume three possible values: 1. Very uncommon; 2. Common; 3. Very common. "Citizens' basic rights guarantee" is the citizens' perception of how their basic rights are being protected by the political system of their country. I rescale the seven possible answers of this variable to three possibilities (from better to worse), therefore the variable can now assume three possible values: 1. Agree; 2. Indifferent; 3. Disagree. "Country's current economic situation" describes the feeling of the citizens about the economic situation of their country in the year of the survey. I rescale the five possible answers of this variable to three possibilities, therefore the variable can now assume three possible values: 1. Better; 2. Same; 3. Worse. There are two other independent variables that measure citizens' feelings regarding the economic situation, one related to the previous scenario of 12 months ago (retrospective evaluation), and the other related to a conjecture scenario of 12 months ahead (prospective evaluation). These two variables can assume three possible values: "1. Better"; "2. Same," and; "3. Worse."

The independent variables of the second type were gathered from different sources and aim to test hypothesis 4, presenting a more objective measurement for each country's economic condition. Economic data on "unemployment rate," "inflation," and "GDP growth" were gathered from the World Economic Outlook Database of the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2014). In order to be comparable among countries, inflation is measured in percentage change, and the gross domestic product (GDP) is at constant prices.

The control variables were also gathered from the "Latin American Public Opinion Project" (LAPOP, 2012). As the name indicates, "interest in politics" is measured for how much interest the citizen has in politics of his/her own country. I rescale the four original possible answers of this variable to three possibilities, therefore the variable can now assume three

possible values: 1. Low or none; 2. Some; 3. A lot. “Identification with any party” is constructed from the question “Do you currently identify with a political party?” The answer was a dichotomous yes (1) or no (0). By studying citizens’ rationalization about policy conditions, Parker-Stephen (2013, p. 1077) reveals that “partisans confront the burden of evidence when they interpret facts.” “Ideology” measures the self-declared position of the citizen on an ideological scale that goes from the value 1 (left) to the value 10 (right). I rescale the 10 original possible values of this variable to five possibilities, therefore the variable can now assume five possible values: 1. Strong Left; 2. Left; 3. Center; 4. Right; 5. Strong Right. “Female” is a dichotomous variable if the respondent was a woman (1) or a man (0). “Family monthly income” is the respondent’s self-declared total of his/her family income. I rescale the 10 original possible values of this variable to five possibilities, therefore the variable can now assume five possible values: 1. Between \$25 and \$50; 2. Between \$51 and \$150; 3. Between \$151 and \$300; 4. Between \$301 and \$500; 5. More than \$501.

5 Results and Discussion

Considering the order of the categories (from 1 to 3) assumed by the dependent variables, an Ordered Probit model with robust variance estimates will be conducted in order to test the suggested hypotheses of this study. As the interpretation of Ordered Probit coefficients is not straightforward, and may actually have opposite signs from the marginal effects associated with change in the independent variables, I present in Table 2 the results in marginal effects. The results as the marginal effects show the change in probability when the independent variable increases by one unit, holding everything else constant. For the dichotomous variables, the change is from 0 to 1.

As we can see in Table 2, the results support the first three suggested hypotheses of this study. As the perceptions of the citizens regarding political corruption, the guarantee of their basic rights, and the economic situation get worse, their distrust in democratic institutions increases. The z -test for all three predictors are statistically significant (at level 0.01) for all four political institutions considered. The interpretation of the results will focus on the value

Table 2: Citizens' Distrust in Democratic Institutions (Marginal Effects)

	Trust in Political Parties	Trust in the Judiciary	Trust in the Legislative	Trust in the Executive
Political Corruption	-0.049*** (0.004)	-0.053*** (0.005)	-0.059*** (0.005)	-0.057*** (0.006)
Basic Rights Guarantee	-0.142*** (0.004)	-0.221*** (0.005)	-0.200*** (0.005)	-0.150*** (0.005)
Current Economic Situation	-0.030*** (0.005)	-0.053*** (0.006)	-0.031*** (0.006)	-0.071*** (0.006)
Retrospective Economic Situation	0.002 (0.005)	0.000 (0.006)	0.001 (0.006)	-0.061*** (0.006)
Prospective Economic Situation	-0.029*** (0.004)	-0.033*** (0.005)	-0.034*** (0.005)	-0.102*** (0.006)
Interest in Politics	-0.055*** (0.004)	-0.028*** (0.005)	-0.035*** (0.005)	-0.027*** (0.006)
Identification with any Party (d)	0.082*** (0.007)	0.025*** (0.008)	0.053*** (0.009)	0.092*** (0.009)
Ideology	0.020*** (0.003)	0.019*** (0.003)	0.020*** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.004)
Female (d)	0.017*** (0.006)	0.015* (0.008)	0.013 (0.008)	0.004 (0.008)
Family Income	-0.013*** (0.003)	-0.027*** (0.003)	-0.016*** (0.003)	-0.029*** (0.004)
N	14057	14066	13942	14096
LogLik	-12549	-13212	-13267	-12281
R-sqr	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1

Dependent Variable: Trust in Democratic Institutions: 1. Political Parties; 2. Judiciary; 3. Legislative; 4. Executive. Marginal effects; Standard errors in parentheses. (d) for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1.

* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Two-tailed test.

of 3 (high trust) for the dependent variables.⁶ A one unit increase in the citizens' perception of corruption among the public officials translates to a decrease in the citizens' trust in democratic institutions, on average, around 5 (Model 1 and Model 2) or 6 percent (Model 3 and Model 4). The ineffectiveness of the governments to guarantee basic rights to the citizens has a bigger effect on the decrease of their trust in political institutions. When citizens do not feel that their basic rights are being guaranteed, their trust in these institutions decreases, on average, between 14 percent (for political parties) and 22 percent (for the judiciary). The variable for retrospective economic situation is statistically significant only for the trust in the executive branch. Citizens who evaluate their past economic situation as worse than the current economic situation tend to decrease their trust in the executive branch by 6 percent.

⁶The results with the probabilities for the value of 1 (low trust) and 2 (some trust) of the dependent variables, as well as a fixed-effects model can be seen in Appendix D.

The variables for current and prospective economic situations are significant at level 0.01 in all models. As the citizens evaluate the country's current economic situation as negative, their trust in political institutions decreases, on average, between 3 percent (for political parties) and 7 percent (for the executive branch). When citizens prospectively evaluate their country's economic situations as worse, their trust in democratic institutions tends to decrease between 1.5 percent (for the executive branch) and 3 percent (for political parties).

The control variables show that women tend to trust in political parties and in the judiciary more than men. For the trust in the legislative and the executive branches, the control for "female" shows no significance. Citizens identified with a political party and right-leaning citizens tend to trust more in democratic institutions than citizens with no party identification, and left-leaning citizens. Also, those citizens who declared more interest in politics and with higher family income trust less in democratic institutions than other citizens.

In order to test hypothesis 4 of this study, I added to the model variables with more objective measurements for each country's economic conditions. The results can be seen in Table 3. It is interesting to note in Table 3 that the results for the variables measuring perceptions are almost identical to those presented in Table 2.

As stated in hypothesis 4, my expectation with the economic data was that citizens are informed about what is happening in their country, and thus their perceptions would not be so distant from what happens in their reality. This expectation was partially confirmed by the results present in Table 3. The added variables are continuous variables, and thus their results represent their instantaneous change given that the 'unit' may be very small. The results for "inflation" are significant in all four models (at level 0.01). As the average consumer price increases, the citizens' trust in democratic institutions decreases. However, the estimates for "unemployment rate" (with a small effect of 0.1 percent), is in the opposite direction from expected, and it is statistically significant at level 0.01 for trust in the judiciary, and at level 0.1 for trust in the executive. "GDP growth" is also in the opposite direction and statistically significant (at level 0.05) for trust in political parties, but in the expected direction and it is statistically significant for trust in the legislative branch and trust in the executive branch (at

Table 3: Perceptions of Citizens' Distrust in Democratic Institutions Against Objective Measurements (Marginal Effects)

	Trust in Political Parties	Trust in the Judiciary	Trust in the Legislative	Trust in the Executive
Political Corruption	-0.045*** (0.004)	-0.054*** (0.006)	-0.054*** (0.006)	-0.050*** (0.006)
Citizens' Basic Rights Guarantee	-0.132*** (0.004)	-0.215*** (0.005)	-0.195*** (0.005)	-0.153*** (0.006)
Current Economic Situation	-0.040*** (0.005)	-0.063*** (0.006)	-0.037*** (0.006)	-0.101*** (0.007)
Retrospective Economic Situation	-0.003 (0.005)	0.005 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.065*** (0.007)
Prospective Future Economic Situation	-0.022*** (0.005)	-0.029*** (0.006)	-0.035*** (0.006)	-0.095*** (0.007)
Interest in Politics	-0.054*** (0.005)	-0.036*** (0.006)	-0.038*** (0.006)	-0.034*** (0.006)
Identification with Any Party (d)	0.069*** (0.008)	0.011 (0.010)	0.025** (0.010)	0.062*** (0.011)
Ideology	0.018*** (0.003)	0.018*** (0.004)	0.016*** (0.004)	0.017*** (0.004)
Female (d)	0.014** (0.007)	0.015* (0.009)	0.011 (0.009)	0.007 (0.010)
Family Income	-0.009*** (0.003)	-0.019*** (0.004)	0.003 (0.004)	-0.026*** (0.004)
Unemployment Rate	0.004 (0.003)	0.015*** (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)	0.007* (0.004)
Inflation (Percentage Change)	0.014*** (0.003)	0.024*** (0.003)	0.044*** (0.004)	0.034*** (0.004)
GDP Growth (% in Constant Prices)	0.003** (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.011*** (0.002)	-0.005** (0.002)
N	11149	11154	11046	11183
LogLik	-9615	-10335	-10309	-9556
R-sqr	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1

Dependent Variable: Trust in Democratic Institutions: 1. Political Parties; 2. Judiciary; 3. Legislative; 4. Executive.

Marginal effects; Standard errors in parentheses. (d) for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1.

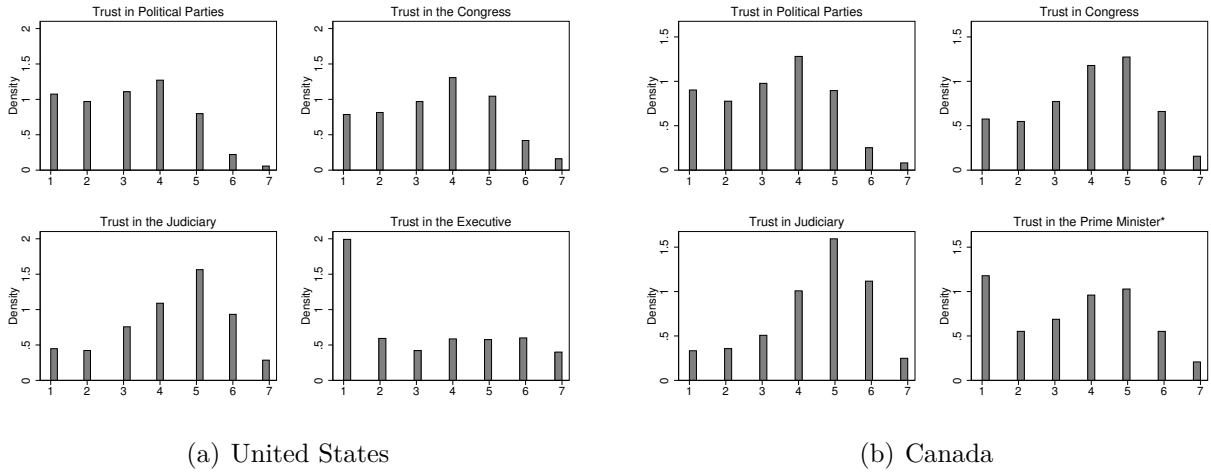
* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Two-tailed test.

levels 0.01 and 0.05, respectively).

Although it seems that the perception of the citizens in relation to the economic situation has a greater impact on trust in institutions than direct measures of economic growth (MacKuen and Erikson, 1989; MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson, 1992; Durr, 1993; McAllister, 1999; Erikson, Mackuen and Stimson, 2002), as the results of this research reveal, direct measures of countries' economic condition matters. As stated by Clarke, Nutt, and Kornberg (1993, p. 1015), "the political economy of public orientations toward polity and society in contemporary Western democracies is real but limited." Citizens' take into account cues of the real economic condition of their countries when expressing their economic expectations (Ferguson, Kellstedt and Linn 2013).

A question that arises from the results of this study is whether Latin American democracies

Figure 3: Political Confidence in United States and Canada



Source: Elaborated by the author. Information for United States from “AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project” (LAPOP, 2012). By being a parliamentary democracy, the information for Canada, including the information regarding the executive branch by the question “To what extent do you trust the Prime Minister?” was gathered from “AmericasBarometer: Canada Online Survey” (LAPOP, 2014).

are at risk due to the low levels of their citizens’ political trust in democratic institutions. The fact that Latin American democracies are currently experiencing their most enduring time itself might indicate no correlation between political distrust and democratic breakdown, but this is an empirical question worth exploring with more research. Yet, when we compare the political distrust in democratic institutions in Latin America to political distrust in the same institutions in long-lasting democracies (e.g., the United States and Canada) the contrast is minimal (see Figure 3). Particularly, American and Canadian citizens seem to trust more in political parties and in the judiciary than Latin American citizens. However, regarding the confidence in the legislative branch (Congress), the evidence from the US is similar to the level of confidence found in Latin American democracies, such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay (see Figure 6 in Appendix B). Moreover, regarding the confidence in the executive branch (i.e., the president in US, and the prime minister in Canada) the political distrust in these countries is much higher than the levels we find in Latin America (see Figure 7 in Appendix B). These results reveal that we need to be suspicious regarding claims relating political distrust and democratic breakdown. Therefore,

a high political distrust by citizens can be more a claim for reform and improvement of democratic institutions than a threat to democracy itself (Klingemann, 1999).

6 Conclusions

In this study, I addressed a current puzzle in Latin American countries: the coexistence of enduring democracies and a growing support among the citizens for this political regime with a high level of political distrust in democratic institutions of the region by its citizens. Three factors were presented as the main predictors of the political distrust in the democratic institutions: 1. The citizens' feeling that there is outrageous political corruption committed by the political officials; 2. The citizens' poor evaluation of the economic performance of their countries, and; 3. The perception among the citizens that their basic civil rights are not being guaranteed. By conducting an Ordered Probit model in a dataset that comprises eighteen Latin American countries, the results here presented support the hypotheses according to which those three aforementioned factors are the main predictors for the high level of distrust in the democratic institutions of the region. Moreover, results from the addition of more objectively-measured economic variables to the model partially supported the hypothesis according to which citizen's perceptions follow real information regarding their country's economic condition.

Among the limitations of this study are the causal mechanisms that would explain the connection between the suggested factors and their effect on the formation of the citizens' perception. Some mechanisms, such as the way people learn about current issues from the mass media (Dalton, Beck and Huckfeldt 1998), the political sophistication and differences between well- and ill-informed citizens (Zaller, 1992), and the mechanisms of priming and media agenda-setting (Erbring, Goldenber and Miller 1980; Miller and Krosnick, 2000; Iyengar and Kinder, 2010) may affect citizens' perceptions. Also, political trust is a multidimensional concept (Easton, 1965; Dalton, 2004; Norris, 1999, 2011), and just a particular dimension—i.e., confidence in democratic institutions—was addressed in this study. Other dimensions of political trust such as the *polity* (political community) (Newton, 1999), ideal principles and

concepts of a democratic political regime (Canache, 2012), and confidence in politicians (Levi and Stoker, 2000) were not explored in this study.

Another issue concerns the endogenous nature of the problem. Studies show that as citizens' trust in democratic institutions decreases, the more they see the problem of corruption as part of the political system, creating a vicious circle (Moisés, 2010). The same can occur to and between the other factors. Nevertheless, this study reveals that on the topic of political distrust, the citizens' perceptions on political corruption, the country's economic situation, and the guarantee of basic rights and the rule of law are certainly factors that should be considered. Also, studies should include not only perceptions of these issues, but also more objective measurements of them.

Last but not least, there is nothing in the results presented in this paper that allow us to say that a higher political distrust in political institutions put Latin American democracies at risk of a breakdown. The low values of political distrust analyzed in this research are similar to levels of political distrust in long-lasting consolidate democracies, such as Canada and the United States. There is no evidence that low political distrust leads to a collapse in democracies.

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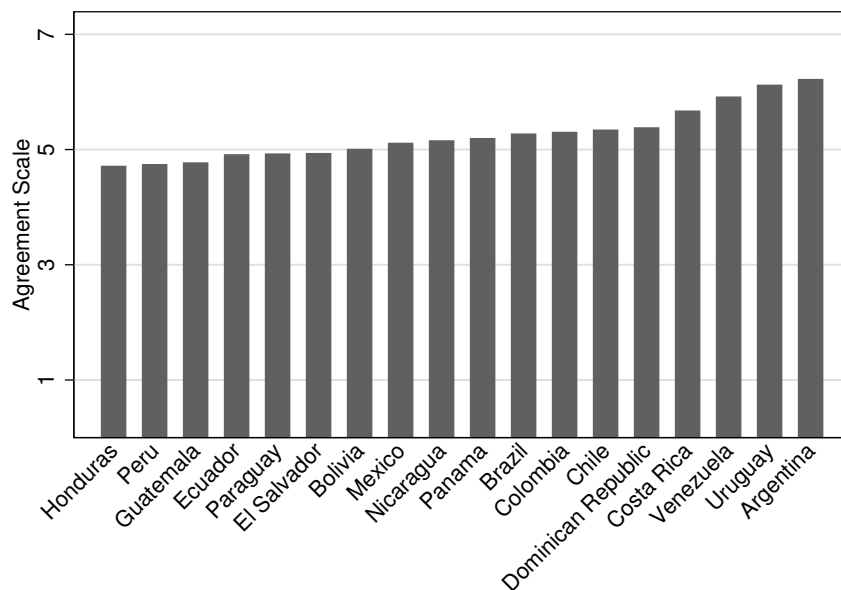
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Appendix A

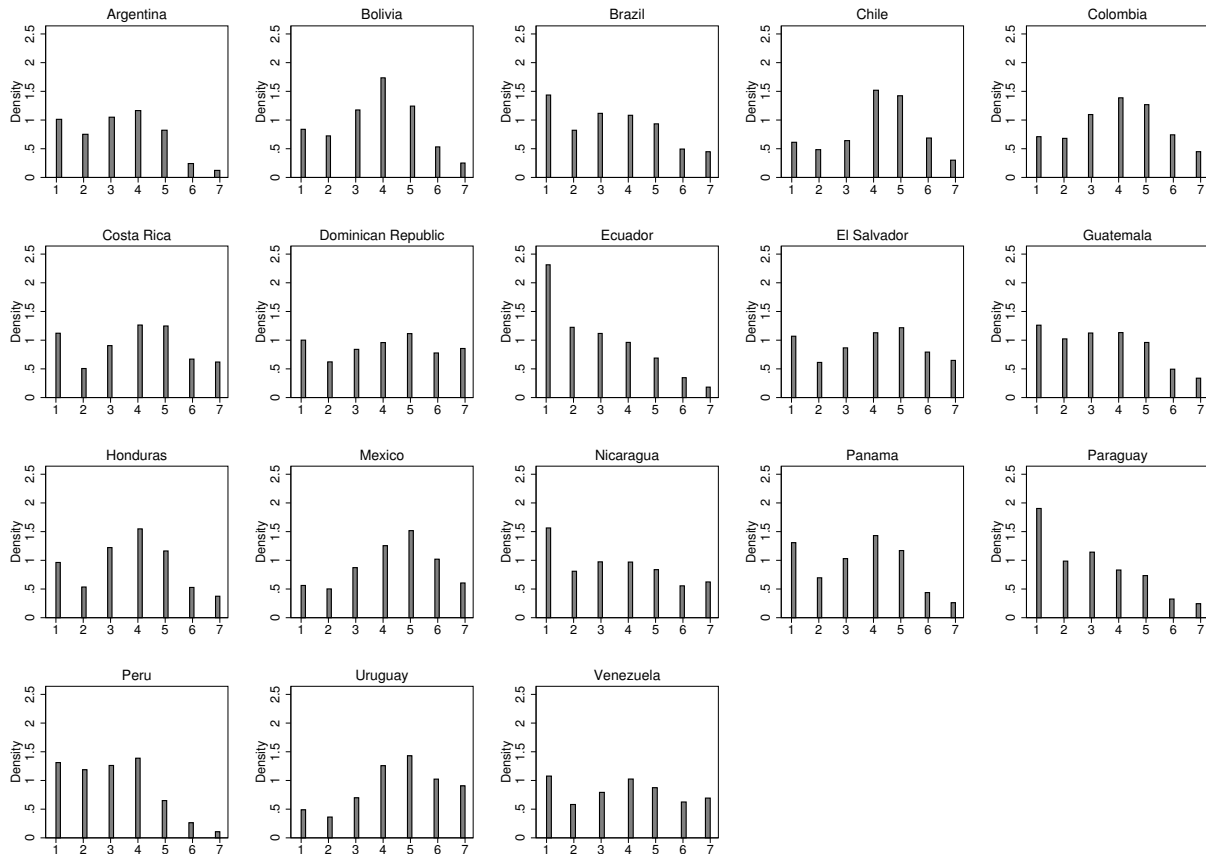
Figure 4: “Churchill Hypothesis” in Latin American Countries (2012)
(1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)



Source: Elaborated by the author from “AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project” (LAPOP, 2012).

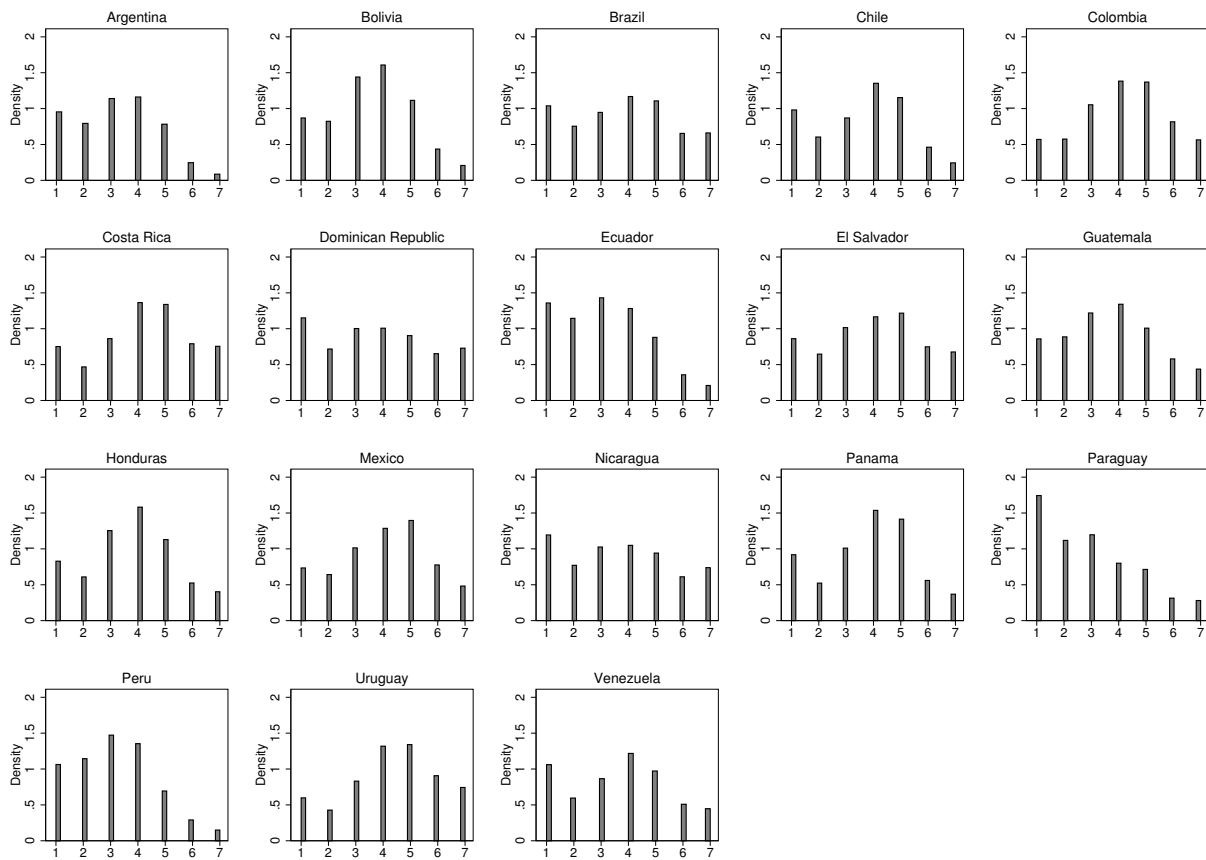
Appendix B

Figure 5: Confidence in the Congress (Legislative Branch)
(1 = No Confidence to 7 = High Confidence)



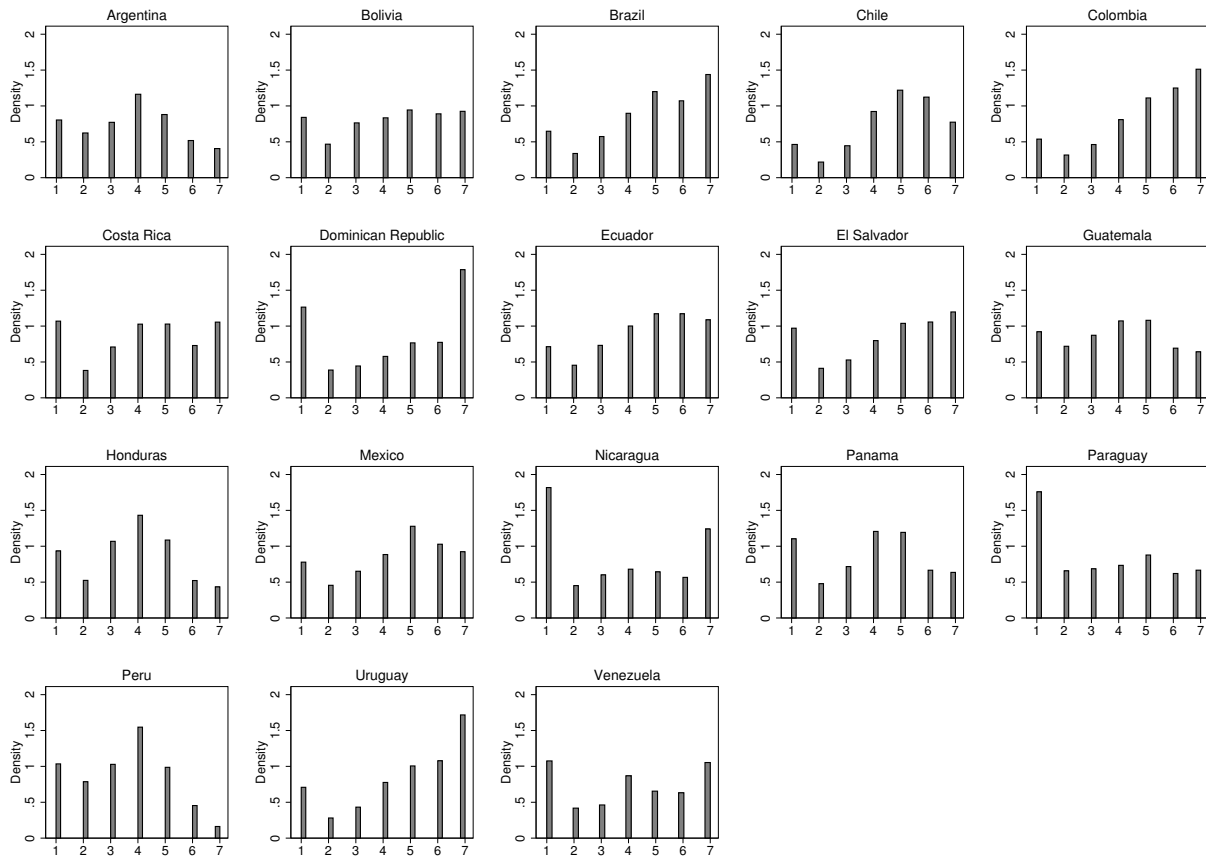
Source: Elaborated by the author from “AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project” (LAPOP, 2012).

Figure 6: Confidence in the Judiciary
 (1 = No Confidence to 7 = High Confidence)



Source: Elaborated by the author from “AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project” (LAPOP, 2012).

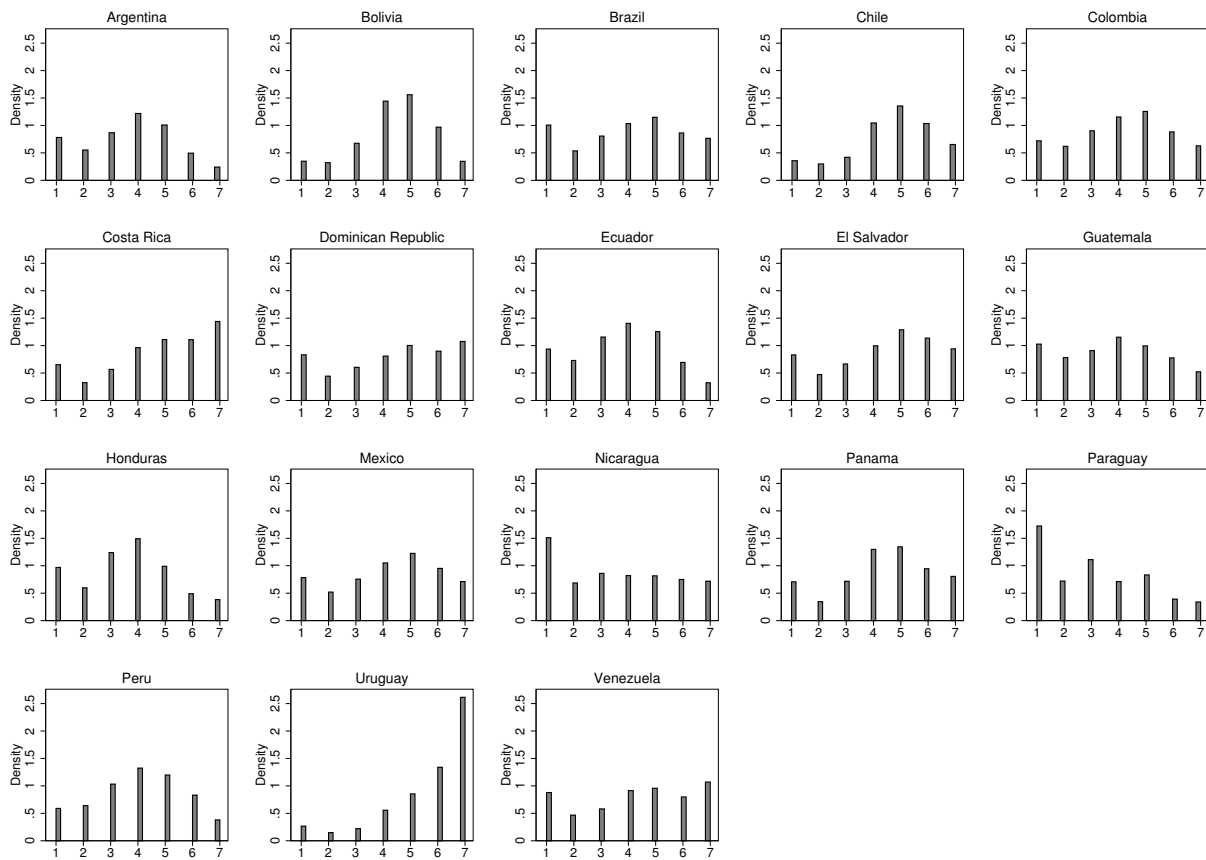
Figure 7: Confidence in the President (Executive Branch)*
 (1 = No Confidence to 7 = High Confidence)



Note: *All Latin American countries have presidential political systems.

Source: Elaborated by the author from “AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project” (LAPOP, 2012).

Figure 8: Confidence in the Elections
(1 = No Confidence to 7 = High Confidence)



Source: Elaborated by the author from “AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project” (LAPOP, 2012).

Appendix C - LAPOP Questionnaire

For Dependent Variables	
B21	To what extent do you trust political parties? ←Not at all A lot → 1□ 2□ 3□ 4□ 5□ 6□ 7□
B10A	To what extent do you trust the justice system? ←Not at all A lot → 1□ 2□ 3□ 4□ 5□ 6□ 7□
B13	To what extent do you trust the National Congress? ←Not at all A lot → 1□ 2□ 3□ 4□ 5□ 6□ 7□
B21A	To what extent do you trust the President? ←Not at all A lot → 1□ 2□ 3□ 4□ 5□ 6□ 7□
For Independent Variables	
EXC7	Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption among public officials is... (1) Very uncommon (2) Uncommon (3) Common (4) Very common
B3	To what extent do you think that citizens' basic rights are well protected by the political system of your country? ←A lot Not at all → 1□ 2□ 3□ 4□ 5□ 6□ 7□
SOCT1	How would you describe the country's economic situation? (1) Very good (2) Good (3) Neither good nor bad (4) Bad (5) Very bad
SOCT2	Do you think that the country's current economic situation is better than, the same as or worse than it was 12 months ago ? (1) Better (2) Same (3) Worse
SOCT3	Do you think that in the next 12 months the country's economic situation will be better, the same or worse than it is now? (1) Better (2) Same (3) Worse
For Independent Control Variables	
POL1	How much interest do you have in politics: a lot, some, little or none? (1) A lot (2) Some (3) Little (4) None
VB10	Do you currently identify with a political party? (1) Yes (2) No
L1	The following scale (from 1 to 10) goes from left to right. One means left and 10 means right. Nowadays, when we speak of political leanings, we talk of left and right. In other words, some people sympathize more with the left and others with the right. According to the meaning that the terms "left" and "right" have for you, and thinking of your own political leanings, where would you place yourself on this scale? ←Left Right → 1□ 2□ 3□ 4□ 5□ 6□ 7□ 8□ 9□ 10□
Q10	Into which of the following income ranges does the total monthly income of your household fit, including remittances from abroad and the income of all the working adults and children? (1) Less than \$25 (2) Between \$26-\$50 (3) \$51-\$100 (4) \$101-\$150 (5) \$151-\$200 (6) \$201-\$300 (7) \$301-\$400 (8) \$401-\$500 (9) \$501-\$750 (10) More than \$750

Appendix D

Table 4: Citizens' Distrust in Political Parties (Marginal Effects)

	1: Low Trust in Political Parties	2: Some Trust in Political Parties	3: High Trust in Political Parties
Political Corruption	0.065*** (0.005)	-0.016*** (0.001)	-0.049*** (0.004)
Basic Rights Guarantee	0.188*** (0.005)	-0.046*** (0.002)	-0.142*** (0.004)
Current Economic Situation	0.040*** (0.006)	-0.010*** (0.002)	-0.030*** (0.005)
Retrospective Economic Situation	-0.003 (0.006)	0.000 (0.002)	0.002 (0.005)
Prospective Economic Situation	0.038*** (0.006)	-0.009*** (0.001)	-0.029*** (0.004)
Interest in Politics	0.0733*** (0.006)	-0.018*** (0.001)	-0.055*** (0.004)
Identification with Any Party (d)	-0.106*** (0.009)	0.024*** (0.002)	0.082*** (0.007)
Ideology	-0.027*** (0.004)	0.007*** (0.001)	0.020*** (0.003)
Female (d)	-0.023*** (0.008)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.017*** (0.006)
Family Monthly Income	0.018*** (0.004)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.013*** (0.003)
N	14057	14057	14057
LogLik	-12549	-12549	-12549
R-sqr	0.1	0.1	0.1

Dependent Variable (DV): Trust in Political Parties. Outcome 1: Low Trust; Outcome 2: Some Trust; Outcome 3: High Trust. Marginal effects; Standard errors in parentheses. (d) for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1.
* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Two-tailed test.

Table 5: Citizens' Distrust in the Judiciary (Marginal Effects)

	1: Low Trust in the Judiciary	2: Some Trust in the Judiciary	3: High Trust in the Judiciary
Political Corruption	0.055*** (0.005)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.053*** (0.005)
Basic Rights Guarantee	0.227*** (0.005)	-0.006*** (0.001)	-0.221*** (0.005)
Current Economic Situation	0.054*** (0.006)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.053*** (0.006)
Retrospective Economic Situation	0.000 (0.006)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.006)
Prospective Economic Situation	0.034*** (0.005)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.033*** (0.005)
Interest in Politics	0.029*** (0.005)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.028*** (0.005)
Identification with Any Party (d)	-0.025*** (0.009)	0.000 (0.000)	0.025*** (0.008)
Ideology	-0.020*** (0.003)	0.000 (0.000)	0.019*** (0.003)
Female (d)	-0.015* (0.008)	0.000 (0.000)	0.015* (0.008)
Family Income	0.027*** (0.004)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.027*** (0.003)
N	14066	14066	14066
LogLik	-13212	-13212	-13212
R-sqr	0.1	0.1	0.1

DV: Trust in the Judiciary. Outcome 1: Low Trust; Outcome 2: Some Trust; Outcome 3: High Trust. Marginal effects; Standard errors in parentheses. (d) for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1.

* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Two-tailed test.

Table 6: Citizens' Distrust in the Legislative Branch (Marginal Effects)

	1: Low Trust in the Legislative	2: Some Trust in the Legislative	3: High Trust in the Legislative
Political Corruption	0.061*** (0.005)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.059*** (0.005)
Basic Rights Guarantee	0.205*** (0.005)	-0.005*** (0.001)	-0.200*** (0.005)
Current Economic Situation	0.032*** (0.006)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.031*** (0.006)
Retrospective Economic Situation	-0.001 (0.006)	0.000 (0.000)	0.001 (0.006)
Prospective Economic Situation	0.034*** (0.005)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.034*** (0.005)
Interest in Politics	0.036*** (0.005)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.035*** (0.005)
Identification with Any Party (d)	-0.054*** (0.009)	0.000 (0.000)	0.053*** (0.009)
Ideology	-0.020*** (0.003)	0.000 (0.000)	0.020*** (0.003)
Female (d)	-0.013 (0.008)	0.000 (0.000)	0.013 (0.008)
Family Income	0.016*** (0.004)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.016*** (0.003)
N	13942	13942	13942
LogLik	-13267	-13267	-13267
R-sqr	0.1	0.1	0.1

DV: Trust in the Legislative. Outcome 1: Low Trust; Outcome 2: Some Trust; Outcome 3: High Trust. Marginal effects; Standard errors in parentheses. (d) for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1.

* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Two-tailed test.

Table 7: Citizen's Distrust in the Executive Branch (Marginal Effects)

	1: Low Trust in the Executive	2: Some Trust in the Executive	3: High Trust in the Executive
Political Corruption	0.048*** (0.005)	0.009*** (0.001)	-0.057*** (0.006)
Basic Rights Guarantee	0.125*** (0.004)	0.025*** (0.001)	-0.150*** (0.005)
Current Economic Situation	0.059*** (0.005)	0.011*** (0.001)	-0.071*** (0.006)
Retrospective Economic Situation	0.051*** (0.005)	0.010*** (0.001)	-0.061*** (0.006)
Prospective Economic Situation	0.085*** (0.005)	0.017*** (0.001)	-0.102*** (0.006)
Interest in Politics	0.022*** (0.005)	0.004*** (0.001)	-0.027*** (0.006)
Identification with Any Party (d)	-0.076*** (0.007)	-0.016*** (0.002)	0.092*** (0.009)
Ideology	-0.008*** (0.003)	-0.001*** (0.001)	0.009*** (0.004)
Female (d)	-0.003 (0.007)	0.000 (0.001)	0.004 (0.008)
Family Income	0.025*** (0.003)	0.005*** (0.001)	-0.029*** (0.004)
N	14096	14096	14096
LogLik	-12281	-12281	-12281
R-sqr	0.1	0.1	0.1

DV: Trust in the Executive. Outcome 1: Low Trust; Outcome 2: Some Trust; Outcome 3: High Trust. Marginal effects; Standard errors in parentheses. (d) for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1.

* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Two-tailed test.

Table 8: Citizens' Distrust in Democratic Institutions (Marginal Effects with Fixed Effects)

	Trust in Political Parties	Trust in the Judiciary	Trust in the Legislative	Trust in the Executive
Political Corruption	-0.0431*** (0.004)	-0.0464*** (0.005)	-0.0484*** (0.005)	-0.0446*** (0.006)
Basic Rights Guarantee	-0.133*** (0.004)	-0.218*** (0.005)	-0.195*** (0.005)	-0.150*** (0.005)
Current Economic Situation	-0.0354*** (0.005)	-0.0529*** (0.006)	-0.0424*** (0.006)	-0.0748*** (0.007)
Retrospective Economic Situation	-0.00428 (0.005)	-0.00350 (0.006)	-0.0100* (0.006)	-0.0678*** (0.006)
Prospective Economic Situation	-0.0247*** (0.004)	-0.0259*** (0.005)	-0.0258*** (0.005)	-0.0933*** (0.006)
Interest in Politics	-0.0523*** (0.004)	-0.0267*** (0.005)	-0.0293*** (0.005)	-0.0267*** (0.006)
Identification with Any Party (d)	0.0639*** (0.007)	0.00470 (0.009)	0.0202** (0.009)	0.0755*** (0.010)
Ideology	0.0207*** (0.003)	0.0196*** (0.003)	0.0256*** (0.003)	0.00971** (0.004)
Female (d)	0.0143** (0.006)	0.0118 (0.008)	0.00712 (0.008)	-0.00215 (0.009)
Family Income	-0.0158*** (0.003)	-0.0187*** (0.004)	-0.0233*** (0.004)	-0.0270*** (0.004)
Brazil (d)	-0.0350** (0.016)	0.0861*** (0.022)	-0.150*** (0.018)	-0.0252 (0.023)
Colombia (d)	-0.0119 (0.017)	0.0878*** (0.023)	-0.0702*** (0.020)	0.00515 (0.025)
Costa Rica (d)	0.0356* (0.021)	0.0152 (0.025)	-0.0964*** (0.022)	-0.233*** (0.024)
Ecuador (d)	-0.0692*** (0.014)	-0.0936*** (0.018)	-0.119*** (0.018)	-0.0713*** (0.022)
El Salvador (d)	0.0718*** (0.019)	0.104*** (0.022)	0.0109 (0.021)	0.132*** (0.021)
Guatemala (d)	-0.00569 (0.019)	-0.00953 (0.023)	-0.156*** (0.019)	-0.260*** (0.023)
Honduras (d)	0.166*** (0.021)	0.0931*** (0.021)	0.0177 (0.021)	-0.0239 (0.023)
Mexico (d)	0.0285 (0.018)	0.0796*** (0.022)	0.0532** (0.022)	-0.0490** (0.024)
Nicaragua (d)	-0.0331** (0.017)	-0.0375* (0.021)	-0.170*** (0.017)	-0.281*** (0.021)
Panama (d)	0.0398** (0.019)	0.0582** (0.023)	-0.161*** (0.018)	-0.0716*** (0.024)
Paraguay (d)	-0.0312* (0.018)	-0.0653*** (0.023)	-0.168*** (0.019)	-0.118*** (0.026)
Peru (d)	-0.0403** (0.016)	-0.103*** (0.019)	-0.237*** (0.014)	-0.370*** (0.018)
Uruguay (d)	0.105*** (0.021)	0.104*** (0.024)	0.149*** (0.024)	0.00354 (0.026)
N	14057	14066	13942	14096
LogLik	-12349	-13021	-12863	-11742
R-sqr	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1

Dependent Variable: Trust in Democratic Institutions: 1. Political Parties; 2. Judiciary; 3. Legislative; 4. Executive.
 Marginal effects; Standard errors in parentheses. (d) for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1.
 * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Two-tailed test.