

Hard Times and Support for Democracy in Latin America The Aftermath of the 2008 Global Economic Downturn

Dr. Simone Bohn

Associate Professor

York University

S628 Ross Building, 4700 Keele Street

Toronto, M3J 1P3

Canada

Abstract

Did the current hard times take a toll on the mass support for democracy in Latin America? Can citizens of these countries, under these circumstances, compartmentalize their negative views of governmental performance or do the latter impinge upon their support for the democratic regime? We answer these questions using data from the 2010 Americas Barometer survey, which has more than 40,000 interviews. The analysis shows that, first of all, there is considerable cross-country diversity in terms of the perception of the crisis. Second, those who perceive the global downturn as a serious economic crisis tend to evaluate negatively the performance of their current governments and to blame the latter for the slowdown. However, a negative evaluation of governmental performance has no significant effect on support for democracy, which indicates that the current economic crisis did not put a dent on the reservoir of legitimacy of the region's democratic regime.

Keywords: democracy, values, economic crisis, Latin America, performance

Introduction

Voters' evaluation of governmental economic performance plays a key role in electoral politics in democracies. Poorly-evaluated incumbents tend to get red cards from voters, who bring the opposition into power, causing a shift in the party control of the presidency (or of prime minister)ⁱ. Interestingly, this process by which a poorly evaluated incumbent gets replaced by the opposition usually does not impinge upon citizens' views about the democratic regime. Democracies are endowed with a reservoir of legitimacy (Easton, 1965), which keeps citizens' preference for a democratic regime (over authoritarian alternatives) approximately at the same levels despite a succession of poorly evaluated administrations. At least, this has been the reality of advanced democracies for most of the time.

In newly democratized countries, in contrast, a widespread negative evaluation of the national government's economic performance can have more severe consequences. It can cause a gradual decline of the so-called "diffuse support" (Easton, 1965), which is the reservoir of legitimacy that democracies need in order to survive. Hard economic times are particularly challenging circumstances for nascent and consolidating democracies, as a prolonged overwhelmingly negative evaluation of the sitting presidents, which usually accompanies them, can result in a reduction of citizens' support for the democratic regime.

The 2008 economic crisis, in this sense, created an almost natural experiment, as it affected, albeit unevenly, most of the economies of the planet, including new democracies from the Global South. The bankruptcies that started in the financial sector spread to other economic sectors, unleashing an economic slowdown of global proportions. According to World Bank estimates, the annual growth of the world gross domestic product (GDP) went down from 4% in 2007 to 2% in 2008. In per capita terms, the reduction was more severe: from 3% to 1%ⁱⁱ. In 2009, still according to the World Bank, there was a 2% reduction in GDP growth and 3% in per capita terms. The United States, the epicenter of the crisis, besides having a negative real growth rate of the GDP in 2009, experienced a hike in unemployment, which went from 5.8% in 2008 to 9.3% in 2009ⁱⁱⁱ.

In the aftermath of the crisis not only was the world's GDP shrinking amidst a 2.3% annual growth of the population between 2007 and 2009^{iv}, but also the cost of averting a deepening of the economic crisis was considerable. It has been estimated that approximately 8% or 9% of the globe's GDP has been spent to accelerate the economic recovery (Whitehead, 2010).

Furthermore, at the time of this writing (third quarter of 2011), there are fears that the fragility of some economies from the Euro zone might weaken even further the already fragile recent economic recovery. In other words, there is no denying that these are indeed hard times.

For students of democracy, the current times are extremely important. They provide a unique opportunity to verify whether, under harsh economic conditions, a weak evaluation of governmental economic performance impact negatively the mass support for democracy in areas of the globe where the democratic rule has traditionally been more fragile. Are voters of these countries able to separate their evaluations of the government from their judgments about the political regime? In other words, does their democratic commitment remain unshaken by their dissatisfaction with the sitting head of state?

In this article, we focus on the Latin American region, which, despite few exceptions, has not had a long and continuous history of democratic stability. Rather, it was only after the mid-1970s that the majority of the countries of the region became democratic (Smith, 2005). Thus, this is one of the areas of the globe in which the impact of difficult economic times could potentially be more devastating. What has happened to the mass support for democracy in this area since the 2008 global economic downturn? Did Latin Americans, by and large, perceive the economic slowdown as a serious economic crisis? If so, have the current hard times put a dent on – or, what is worse, depleted – the reservoir of legitimacy of the region’s democratic regime?

The goals of this article are twofold. First, it seeks to understand how Latin Americans perceive the current economic crisis. Do they believe it to be a serious economic crisis of great proportions? Second, among those who blame the (current or previous) national administration for the crisis, does this disapproval have a bearing on their support for democracy? We utilize the AmericasBarometer 2010 wave of public opinion survey, which was carried out by LAPOP (the Latin American Public Opinion Project) in the first half of that year in twenty three countries of the Americas, including the United States and Canada, generating more than 40,000 interviews. For being developed countries and older democracies, the United States and Canada have been excluded from the analysis.

This article proceeds as follows. In the first section, we discuss some theoretical considerations on the relationship between economic hard times and the decline in democracy’s reservoir of legitimacy, along with some empirical situations of democratic breakdown in the aftermath of protracted and intense economic crises. Section two analyzes Latin Americans’ perceptions of the current economic crisis to verify whether they overwhelmingly consider the current situation to be particularly troublesome. The third unit analyzes whether citizens who blame their governments for the crisis and evaluate their performance negatively see democracy as the most “preferable” type of regime. The last section shows that, in most of the region, the current economic slowdown has not adversely affected the democratic regimes’ reservoir of legitimacy.

Hard times and democracy

In the twentieth century, some democratic breakdowns have succeeded hard economic times, even in countries from the so-called North. In the aftermath of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, for instance, the democratic regime succumbed in a number of European countries (Gourevitch, 1986), such as Germany (1933), Austria (1934), Estonia (1934), Latvia (1934), Greece (1936) and Spain (1939).

In Latin America, the economic downfall of the early 1930s hit hard some of the countries of the region, especially the resource-based economies, as the large fall in the volume of exports fostered widespread bankruptcy in several economic sectors, massive unemployment and, in some cases, a spike in the inflation levels (Bulmer-Thomas, 1996; Thorp, 1998). The collapse of some of the previously existing class coalitions led the new ruling elites to close the channels of “political contestation” (Dahl, 1971), and, in some cases, to make widespread use of coercion as a means to curb unrest and maintain social order (Weaver, 2000). As a result, as in Europe, a number of Latin American countries also experienced the fall of democratically elected presidents or full-blown coups after 1929, including Argentina (1930), Brazil (1930 and 1937), El Salvador (1931), Honduras (1932), and Uruguay (1933).

Despite this considerable number of democratic breakdowns in the aftermath of the Great Depression, for the most part it is unknown whether during that period there was a substantial change in the mass public evaluation of the sitting heads of government and, especially, whether a supposedly massive dissatisfaction with incumbents impacted negatively citizens’ preference for a democratic regime.

Survey instruments, which could have gauged eventual changes in mass values, only became important analytical tools much later in the history of the Social Sciences (Lazarfeld, 1969). Thus, in the case of the Great Depression, there is a missing link that cannot be possibly recovered. Works based on aggregate data on democratic survival and economic performance have pointed to a relationship between governmental economic performance and democratic breakdowns. Przeworski et al (1996 and 2000) have shown that, among several other elements, democracies need declining levels of socio-economic inequality to survive over time. Successive negative performance of governments operating under democratic rule has been found to correlate with a reduction in democracy's longevity.

More contemporary survey-based research has helped hone the correlation between citizens' overwhelmingly negative evaluation of governments and their support for democracy. Citizens from advanced capitalist democracies are said to have grown into "dissatisfied democrats" or "critical citizens", whose support for democracy is unflagging, but who are very critical of politicians and the performance of political institutions and governments (Norris, 1999).

Hard economic times, as a consequence, are critical tests for democracies. Their maladies, such as high unemployment levels and a rise in inflation, correlate with citizens' dissatisfaction with their government's performance. In some specific contexts and very particular circumstances, the latter may foster a decline in the overall support for the democratic regime. In other words, in these rather extraordinary situations, a widespread unfavorable evaluation of government can have adverse spillover effects on the mass support for democracy.

Perceptions of the economic downturn

How did Latin Americans view the 2008 economic crisis? How people perceived the crisis is the very first question to be answered in order for one to assess the political ramifications in Latin America of the current hard times. In this regard, the 2010 AmericasBarometer specifically asked respondents about their views concerning the extent of the crisis. The survey question reads as the following: "*Some say that our country is suffering a very serious economic crisis, others say that we are suffering a crisis but it is not very serious, while others say that there isn't any economic crisis. What do you think?*" Table 1 presents the percentage of respondents who, in 2010, believed that their country was suffering one of the worst economic crises. It also displays their countries' macroeconomic performance in the year before the crisis (2007) and in 2008 and 2009, particularly their GDP real annual growth rate and the annual rate of unemployment. The data point to at least three considerations.

First, on average, four in every ten Latin Americans consider the crisis to be serious. Furthermore, in 10 out of 23 countries (or 43.5% of them), this perception is shared by the majority of the respondents. Second, there is considerable intra-regional variation in how the global economic downturn that started in 2008 was perceived. Several countries strayed away from the 45.4% average. Actually, the percentage of respondents who considered the economic slowdown to be a grave crisis ranged from 10.4% in Uruguay to 81.2% in Jamaica, which is a testament to the region's diversity. Third and perhaps more interestingly, people's perceptions of the crisis do not always match their country's macroeconomic performance. Jamaica, for instance, had negative economic growth in GDP terms for three years (2007-2009) and it is a country where 8 in 10 citizens deem the global downturn to be serious. Similarly, Honduras had an extremely high level of unemployment in the last few years, which makes it understandable that more than two-thirds of its citizens consider the present times very challenging. On the other hand, over the last three years before the 2010 survey (i.e. 2007-2009), Suriname, for example, had a comparatively high level of unemployment and only 14.9% of its citizens believe the current crisis to be serious. In the same way, Brazil and Guyana had similar rates of unemployment and their nationals' perceptions of the crisis vary greatly.

Consequently, one of the first lessons of the current crisis is the fact that, despite it being truly worldwide in nature – given the high degree of interconnectedness of the current stage of global capitalism –, it has had different degrees of severity in distinct parts of the world. For the most part, since the beginning of the 2008 economic crisis, advanced capitalist countries – such as the United States and the Western European nations – have experienced slower rates of economic growth than upper-middle income economies from the Global South, such as Brazil, for example. The economic slowdown has also presented differences across varied economic sectors and regions within the same country.

For instance, in the OECD countries, besides the financial sector, building and construction, and manufacturing have been very negatively affected and have shed scores of jobs; and, in some countries, the crisis has also spread to the auto-industry as a result of declining sales stemming from a low level of consumer confidence^v. Other economic sectors were not hit as hard, and, as a consequence, did not experience a spike in unemployment. Hence the not-so-perfect association between a country's macroeconomic performance during the current economic crisis and its citizen's perception of the latter^{vi}. What are the key socioeconomic, evaluative and attitudinal determinants of the perception of the current downturn as a serious crisis across twenty-three Latin American countries? In other words, what is the profile of Latin Americans who deem the crisis to be grave? Furthermore, what are their values and opinions?

We ran a multinomial logistic regression, whose dependent variable was whether respondents perceived the crisis to be serious (coded as 1) or not (coded as 0). The explanatory variables were the respondents' gender (1=male; 0=female); educational level (1=illiterate; 5=university level), age (1=16 to 24 years; 5=over 65 years), marital status (1=married or having a common-law partner; 0=otherwise), and employment situation (1=unemployed; 0=otherwise); whether they have children (1=yes, 0=otherwise); what their monthly personal income is (0=no income; 10= over US\$751); how religious they are (1=never attend church; 5=attends church more than once a week); their satisfaction with their own lives (1=dissatisfied; 0=otherwise); whether they reported a decrease in household income (1=yes; 0=otherwise); whether they believed the country's economic situation was better at the time of the interview than it had been 12 months before the survey (1=yes; 0=otherwise); whether they believed their own economic situation was better at the time of the interview than it had been 12 months before the survey (1=yes; 0=otherwise); whether they believed their own economic situation got worse in the last 12 months whereas the country's got better or remained the same (1=yes; 0=otherwise); whether they believed the existing national government's performance was bad or very bad (1=yes; 0=otherwise); whether they believed Congress' performance was bad or very bad (1=yes; 0=otherwise); whether they believed the existing national government was putting a lot of effort to fight poverty (1=yes; 0=otherwise) or unemployment (1=yes; 0=otherwise); and whether they blamed the current or previous administrations for the economic crisis (1=yes; 0=otherwise). The results are presented on Table 2^{vii}.

The data show that women had a higher likelihood than men of believing that the economic slowdown was a serious crisis. This is somewhat surprising, given the fact that the economic sectors mostly affected by the crisis – building and construction and manufacturing, besides the financial sector – tend to be overwhelmingly dominated by male workers in most countries. The respondents who were married or live with a common-law partner had a higher chance of *not* seeing the slowdown as a serious crisis than those who were single, divorced, separated or widowed. Similarly, those belonging to lower income brackets expressed greater concern with the crisis than the more affluent individuals, who presumably have better safety nets to which they can resort on rainy days. The level of education and age of the respondents did not have any impact on their perception of the crisis, which means that there are no statistically significant differences across educational or age groups when it comes to their view of the crisis. Being unemployed also was not a predictor of a serious concern with the downturn. This result helps us understand the disconnection in some countries, as mentioned above, between the levels of unemployment and people's perception of the crisis.

Essential to deeming the crisis serious was not individuals' employment condition, but their narrative about the evolution of their finances, their reported loss of income and their evaluation of both their own economic situation and the country's. First, those highly concerned with the crisis reported a decrease in their household income. This finding goes hand in hand with their views about their own life condition. Individuals who considered the global downturn to be serious believed that their economic situation was worse at the time of the interview (in early 2010) than it had been one year before. Thus, it is not necessarily being out of work the key to understand how the crisis was perceived, but the loss of income and the resulting feeling that one's standard of living was deteriorating. Unsurprisingly, those concerned with the economic downturn reported being dissatisfied with their lives^{viii}. Interestingly, they also thought that everybody else's life conditions have changed for the worse. Those who believe that the whole country was worse off after the economic downturn took place saw the crisis as a serious event. In formulating their views about the crisis, therefore, individuals assessed their personal economic situation and their country's overall situation. However, they were not resentful. Individuals who believed that their lives got worse after the crisis *and* who considered that the country's situation was the same or better did not have a statistically significant higher chance of deeming the crisis serious^{ix}.

The resentment stemming from the constant attempt to keep up with the joneses was not a predictor of how individuals perceived the 2008 global downturn. The concern with the crisis has clear political repercussions. Those who point to the severity of the economic downturn disapproved of their national government's performance, and did not believe the latter was doing enough to fight poverty and to tackle unemployment. These individuals felt that their personal situation had deteriorated and did not deem their national government particularly helpful in addressing their concerns. Interestingly, they blamed either the current or the previous administration for the crisis. Thus, there was a clear attribution of responsibility: individuals who saw the economic crisis as a deleterious event of great magnitude unequivocally held their national governments responsible.

In sum, different types of factors shaped Latin Americans' perception of the 2008 slowdown: personal (being a female, not married), financial (low-income individuals, those who lost income) and evaluative (beliefs about one's own personal situation and their country's situation, dissatisfaction with life, and opinions about governmental performance). When we look at the Latin American countries individually, the results are similar. Table 3 displays a summary of the country-by-country determinants of a grave concern with the crisis^x. The most common determinant of the perception of the downturn as a serious crisis was disappointment with the governmental performance among the individuals who were gravely concerned with the crisis. They saw their presidents' performance in a negative light. Second, there was a widespread sense that the country's overall situation was deteriorating (this factor was statistically significant in 11 out of 23 countries of the sample). Third, in a large number of countries, those most concerned with the crisis reported having lost income since the beginning of the global meltdown. Fourth, consistent with what we described before, in just one country does being unemployed affect how people perceived the crisis, which further strengthens the point that it was a reported worsening in one's economic situation the key determinant of a very negative perception of the crisis. Fifth, low-income individuals and those dissatisfied with their lives also manifest a grave concern with the crisis in quite a few countries of the region.

Hard times and support for democracy

So far we have shown that Latin Americans varied a lot in their perception of the global economic slowdown. We have also seen that the key predictors of a grave concern with the crisis were a decrease in household income and the perception that one's personal life situation and the country's situation were deteriorating, which were accompanied by dissatisfaction with one's life and a negative evaluation of governmental performance. Now we have to verify whether a severe concern with the economic downturn led individuals to doubt or disbelieve the legitimacy of the democratic regime. In other words, did the belief that the crisis is serious put a dent on the democratic regime's reservoir of legitimacy and associate with indifference towards democracy or even openly anti-democratic views?

The importance of a widespread consensus that, despite its flaws, democracy is the most preferable form of government resides in the fact that, when this reservoir of democratic legitimacy exists in a country, it creates disincentives to strategies of ascension to power that involve democratic breakdowns or the weakening of democratic institutions. Evidently, the existence of diffuse support for democratic rule in a country does not preclude its elites, counter-elites or some of their segments from attempting to pursue a non-democratic via to power. Nevertheless, it does make the costs of suppressing opposition and dissent much higher than the cost of tolerating them (Dahl, 1971), which is the balance needed in order for democracies, first, to exist and, second and most important, to survive over time.

One survey item of the 2010 AmericasBarometer directly addresses this point. It refers to the social acceptance of democratic regimes and enables us to assess the impact of people's perception of the hard times on their support for democracy. The survey question asks respondents to decide "*which of the following statements [they] agree with the most: (1) For people like me it doesn't matter whether a regime is democratic or non-democratic; (2) Democracy is preferable to any other form of government; (3) Under some circumstances an authoritarian government may be preferable to a democratic one.*" We focus on the second response, which indicates an unequivocal support for democracy, and use it to create a dependent variable for the analysis: "unequivocal democrats". Our goal is not to analyze the basket of *all* elements that predict a strong societal support for democracy, but to understand the impact of hard times on the unequivocal preference for the democratic regime.

Our analysis includes the same explanatory factors used in the study of the perception of the economic crisis, plus three additional ones^{xi}. First, what we call “interpersonal trust”, which evaluates whether respondents consider their fellow countrymen “very trustworthy” and “somewhat trustworthy”, or, alternatively, “not very trustworthy” and “untrustworthy”. The widespread existence of high levels of social trust is said to correlate positively with the presence of values and norms favorable to democracy (Putnam, 1993). Thus, we expect respondents who consider others to be trustworthy (“very trustworthy” and “somewhat trustworthy”) to be unequivocal democrats. Second, we include whether respondents are satisfied with the way democracy works in their country (coded as 1 for yes, and 0 for no). Third, we also add controls for whether the respondent sees his or her country as democratic (coded as 1 for yes and 0 for no). Evidently, individuals who live under circumstances of “electoral authoritarianism”, for instance, have a very tainted experience with democracy^{xii}. We analyzed all these elements for Latin America in general (controlling for country) and for each of the countries taken individually. The results are presented on Tables 4 and 5.

When it comes to the region in general, the data show that Latin Americans who are unequivocal democrats – i.e. who believe, like Winston Churchill, that “democracy is the most preferable form of government” – tend to be more highly educated, older rather than younger, and to belong to higher income brackets (Table 4). They possess high levels of interpersonal trust, believe that their country is democratic and are satisfied with the way democracy presently works where they reside. The good news is that, when we focus on the region as a whole, the data show that blaming the current or previous administration for the crisis does not influence one’s opinion about the democratic regime. Neither does a negative view of the performance of the current president or prime minister in office. That is to say that, *ceteris paribus*, Latin Americans in general are able to separate their views of the actions of the incumbent head of government from their appreciation of the democratic regime. Nevertheless, governments have to deliver on the social front.

Interestingly, the statistically significant but *negative* coefficients for fighting poverty and unemployment indicate that unequivocal democrats believe that their national governments are not putting enough effort into the task of tackling these social maladies. That is to say that staunch democrats in Latin America have a great concern with social issues: they want state’s active involvement in the attenuation of social inequalities. It remains to be seen whether this group of unequivocal democrats will retain their democratic commitment if social inequality, instead of decreasing, becomes even more rampant in the region.

This view that the social performance of governments matters for the mass democratic support in Latin America is further corroborated by the coefficient pertaining to the perception of the crisis. Individuals who perceive the economic downturn as a serious crisis do not partake in the view that democracy is the most preferable political option. On the contrary, they are either ambivalent about democracy or decidedly pro-authoritarian. As mentioned, these are individuals whose households have accrued income losses, who believe the country’s economic situation and their own situation have deteriorated after the crisis and who are utterly dissatisfied with their lives. This profile suggests that these are social segments that are poorly integrated in whatever social safety net their country might possess, which can be taken as evidence of the need of governments under democratic regimes to deliver on the social front.

Now we turn to country-specific data. Table 5 contains the country-by-country summary of the impact of a negative evaluation of governmental performance on the probability of one being an unequivocal democrat, i.e. deeming the democratic regime the most preferable political alternative. The data show that in most of the countries of the region, citizens clearly separate their views on the current administration from their support for democracy. In other words, negative evaluations of the performance of the sitting presidents do not impinge upon democracy’s reservoir of the legitimacy, which is tremendously important for nascent or consolidating democracies.

In only two countries do the individuals who are critical of their national government’s performance display indifference towards democracy or a clear preference for authoritarian solutions under some circumstances. These countries are Argentina and Venezuela. In the case of the latter, those who disapprove of Hugo Chávez’s administration – who evaluate negatively the sitting president’s performance in of office – tend to be ambivalent about democracy. Within the limits of this article, it is not possible for us to determine whether these individuals have always espoused anti-democratic views, or whether they have become indifferent or hostile against the democratic rule in response to the process of de-institutionalization of the liberal representative democracy that has taken place since Chávez’s rise to power (McCoy and Myers, 2004).

In Argentina, the same indifference or hostility towards the democratic regime exist among those who are dissatisfied with the national government's performance. It is important to note that President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's administration did try to encroach upon the autonomy of certain political institutions, thereby increasing unduly the strength of the executive power^{xiii}. However, the Chávez-style dismantling of the liberal-democratic institutions that provide checks-and-balances has not been visible in Argentina under Fernández de Kirchner. Interestingly, in both Venezuela and Argentina, those who deem the current economic downturn a serious crisis do *not* have a statistically significant higher chance of being indifferent or hostile towards the democratic regime. Hence, the wear and tear that the reservoir of legitimacy of the democratic regime faces in these seems to stem from factors other than the current economic downturn – which nevertheless might have aggravated them. In sum, even though it is beyond the scope of this article to clearly spell out all the factors that explain a negative evaluation of the national government in these two countries – Argentina and Venezuela –, the analysis carried out here suggests that elements other than the effects of economic hardship could be slowing eroding the diffuse support for democracy in some countries of the region.

Table 5 also brings in good news when it comes to a Latin American country that has recently experienced a democratic setback. It is the case of Honduras. Even before the 2009 coup, as it has been reported (Seligson and Booth, 2010), Hondurans displayed alarmingly high levels of dissatisfaction with the government's economic performance and with the democratic institutions. The results reported here show that disapproval of the national government's performance does not associate with a lack of support for the democracy. Hondurans are now able to separate their evaluation of governmental performance from their democratic convictions, which can be taken as a sign of the social rooting of democratic values in that country with a troubled democratic past.

Final considerations

Unlike other moments of global economic downturn, Latin America has not witnessed a significant democratic setback in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis. With the exception of the difficult times for Honduran democracy in 2009, there have not been outright democratic breakdowns in the region: since 2008 nowhere in Latin America have non-elected presidents usurped power from elected sitting heads of state.

This article has shown that the economic downturn that began in 2008 was perceived very differently across Latin America and within countries. In some countries, such as Jamaica for instance, eight in every ten individuals perceived the global meltdown as a serious crisis. This view, as shown before, was shared by only 10.4% of Uruguayans. We have also seen that lower income individuals and those whose households had lost income as a result of the recessionary period suffered disproportionately with the crisis, as they were typically the ones who viewed the current downturn as an economic crisis of significant proportions.

Individuals who expressed a great concern with the current economic crisis evaluated their national governments' performance negatively, blamed them for the crisis, and questioned their record on social policies, especially when it comes to their efforts concerning poverty and unemployment reduction.

Interestingly, even though there is a relatively defined segment of Latin Americans badly affected by the crisis and who do not have strong democratic credentials, the analysis presented in this article indicates that, by and large, citizens from the region are clearly able to distinguish between governmental and regime performance. In other words, occasional negative performance of the sitting heads of government does not deplete the democratic regime's reservoir of legitimacy, which points to the incipient process of strengthening of mass democratic values in region.

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Table 1. Perception of the current economic crisis and economic performance, by country

Percentage of individuals who believe their country was suffering one of the worst economic crisis (a)		GDP annual growth (b)			Unemployment (c)		
		2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009
Uruguay	10.4%	7.6	8.9	1.9	9	8	7.6
Suriname	14.9%	5.4	7	2	9.5	9.5	9.5
Chile	21.0%	4.7	3.2	-1.7	7	8	9.6
Costa Rica	28.8%	7.8	2.6	-1.5	5	4.9	7.8
Brazil	30.3%	6.1	5.1	-0.2	9	8	8.1
Panama	30.8%	12.7	10.7	2.4	7	5.8	7
Peru	32.0%	0.9	9.8	8.9	7	8.1	8.1
Paraguay	36.0%	6.8	5.8	-3.4	6	6	7.9
Bolivia	38.3%	4.6	6.1	3.3	7.8	7.5	8.5
Ecuador	38.9%	2.5	6.5	-0.8	10.6	7	8.5
Trinidad & Tobago	46.2%	5.5	3.5	-3.2	7	4.6	5.8
Venezuela	48.4%	-3.3	4.8	8.2	8	7	7.9
Dominican Republic	49.8%	8.5	5.3	2.5	16	15.6	15
Colombia	51.7%	7.5	2.4	0.1	11	12	12
Guyana	55.6%	9.1	3	2.3	9.1	9.1	9.1
Mexico	55.9%	3.3	1.5	-6.5	3	4	5.5
Argentina	57.6%	7.6	5	-2.8	9	7	8.7
Nicaragua	58.9%	3.2	3.2	-2.9	4.9	6.1	8.2
Belize	60.0%	1.2	3.8	-0.9	9	8	8.1
Guatemala	60.9%	6.3	3.3	0.6	3.2	3.2	3.2
El Salvador	61.3%	4.7	2.5	-3.1	6.2	6.3	7.2
Honduras	74.8%	6.3	4.2	-2.1	27.9	27.8	36 (d)
Jamaica	81.2%	-2.8	-0.9	-2.8	9	11	12.9
Average	45.4%	5.05	4.67	0.01	8.75	8.46	8.10

Sources: (a) 2010 AmericasBarometer, (b) and (c) World Bank.

Table 2. Determinants of the perception of the economic downturn as a serious crisis

Independent Variables	“Most serious crisis”
Male	-.071*** (.015)
Married	-.048** (.018)
Education	-.006 (.019)
Age	-.023 (.018)
Has children	.026 (.019)
Income	-.137*** (.020)
Unemployed	-.027 (.015)
Country’s situation got worse	.217*** (.030)
Individual’s situation got worse	.080* (.024)
Country’s situation is better or the same, but individual’s got worse	-.013 (.028)
Decrease in household income	.173*** (.016)
Dissatisfied with life	.062*** (.017)
Religiosity	-.005 (.018)
Performance of current government is bad or very bad	.284*** (.019)
Congress performance is bad or very bad	.079*** (.017)
Believes government is fighting poverty	-.075*** (.016)
Believes government is fighting unemployment	-.070*** (.017)
Blames current or previous government for the crisis	.158*** (.017)
Constant	-.218*** (.213)
N	25,023

Note: Country effects were included in the regression, but are not shown here.
Standard errors in parentheses; ***p<.001, **p<.010, *p<.050.

Table 3. Determinants of the perception of the global downturn as a serious crisis, by country

Country	Argentina	Belize	Bolivia	Brazil	Chile	Colombia	Costa Rica	Dominican	Ecuador	El Salvador	Guatemala	Guyana	Honduras	Jamaica	Mexico	Nicaragua	Panama	Paraguay	Peru	Suriname	Trinidad & Tobago	Uruguay	Venezuela	Number of countries	
is female								X											X					2	
is married	X												X								X				3
is not married												X													1
belongs to older age groups																				X					1
belongs to higher educational brackets														X						X					2
belongs to lower income brackets	X				X	X	X			X	X							X	X						8
is unemployed																X									1
believes the country's situation is worse now that it was 12 months ago			X		X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X				X					X	11
reports a decline in household income							X		X	X		X			X	X	X	X		X				X	10
is dissatisfied with life	X						X						X		X					X	X				6
believes performance of current government is bad of very bad	X		X		X		X	X	X		X	X				X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	15
believes congress' performance is bad or very bad	X		X			X		X										X	X						6
does not believe the national government is fighting poverty			X						X			X			X			X						X	6
government is fighting unemployment	X											X			X	X	X				X				6
blames government for the crisis	X			X				X	X	X		X					X								7

Note: Figure based on twenty-three country-specific multinomial regressions, each of which included all variables listed on Table 2. However, only statistically significant variables are presented above.

Table 4. Determinants of the belief that “democracy is preferable to any other form of government”

Independent variables	Democracy is preferable
Male	-.004 (.017)
Married	.037 (.021)
Education	.087*** (.022)
Age	.276*** (.022)
Has children	-.032 (.022)
Income	.068** (.025)
Unemployed	-.018 (.016)
Country's situation is worse now than 12 months ago	.020 (.034)
Individual's situation is worse now than 12 months ago	.014 (.028)
Country's situation is better or the same, but individual's got worse	-.038 (.032)
Decrease in household income	-.006 (.018)
Dissatisfied with life	-.006 (.018)
Religiosity	.034 (.019)
Performance of current government is bad or very bad	.015 (.021)
Congress performance is bad or very bad	-.013 (.021)
Believes government is fighting poverty	-.083*** (.021)
Believes government is fighting unemployment	-.070*** (.020)
Has high levels of interpersonal trust	.080*** (.018)
Is satisfied with the way democracy works in their country	.110*** (.022)
Believes the country is democratic	.105*** (.021)
Believes is one of the most serious crisis	-.103*** (.019)
Blames current or previous government for the crisis	-.002 (.018)
Constant	1.332*** (.025)
N	23,195

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; ***p<.001, **p<.010, *p<.050.

Table 5. Separation between evaluation of governmental performance and preference for democracy, by country

Is there indifference towards democracy or preference for an authoritarian regime among the individuals who...		
	...believe the performance of the national government is bad or very bad?	...blame the current or previous administration for the crisis?
Argentina	yes*	no
Belize	no	no
Bolivia	no	no
Brazil	no	no
Chile	no	no
Colombia	no	no
Costa Rica	no	no
Dominican Republic	no	no
Ecuador	no	no
El Salvador	no	no
Guatemala	no	no
Guyana	no	no
Honduras	no	no
Jamaica	no	no
Mexico	no	no
Nicaragua	no	no
Panama	no	no
Paraguay	no	no
Peru	no	no
Suriname	no	no
Trinidad & Tobago	no	no
Uruguay	no	no
Venezuela	yes*	no

Note: Figure based on twenty-three country-specific multinomial regressions, each of which included all variables listed on Table 4.

*Coefficients are statistically significant at the level of $p < .010$

ⁱ This type of voter's behavior has been named retrospective voting. For a discussion of this pattern of electoral behavior, see the classical work of Fiorina (1981).

ⁱⁱ <http://data.worldbank.org/> (Accessed on July 14, 2010).

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html> (Accessed on July 14, 2010).

^{iv} <http://data.worldbank.org/> (Accessed on July 14, 2010).

^v OECD Economic Outlook, No. 84, November 2008, <http://www.oecd.org> (Accessed June 28, 2010).

^{vi} This finding matches the results of other survey analyses. Using empirical evidence from several countries, Kenworthy and McCall (2008), for example, show how increases in socioeconomic inequality do not always lead to an increase in citizens' perception of them.

^{vii} The country-effects have been included in the logistic regression, but are not shown on the table.

^{viii} This result about life dissatisfaction is consistent with the findings reported by other authors, such as Córdova and Seligson (2009).

^{ix} Some authors point out that some class fractions, such as upper-middle class individuals, formulate their views about their own life conditions through a comparison with the life-style of more affluent individuals, which leads them to be resentful. See Graham and Pettinato (2001) on the issue.

^x We ran twenty-three multinomial logistic regressions (one for each country) with exactly the same variables used on Table 2. Table 3 notes the variables that attained statistical significance in each country.

^{xi} We ran a multinomial logistic regression, controlling for country, with the same variables listed on Table 2, plus the three new elements listed on the text. The dependent variable (the unequivocal preference for democracy) in this regression takes up the values of 1 for those respondents who believe that "democracy is the most preferable form of government" or 0, for those who do not. Then, we ran twenty-three separate regressions with the same dependent and explanatory variables, one for each country to capture country-based singularities.

^{xii} These are regimes based on elections, but which lack all the institutional elements typical of a liberal representative democratic regime (Schedler, 2006).

^{xiii} "Constitutional showdown in Argentina. President Cristina Kirchner tries to seize control of the central bank", *The Wall Street Journal*, Online Edition, January 10, 2010.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703948504574648981639549484.html>