

Dynamics of Political Trust in Latin America

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Introduction

This chapter explores how political trust has evolved among Latin American countries between 1996 and 2011. We probe how much political trust there is in Latin America, whether it has increased or decreased across time, and try to understand variations looking at both individual and contextual (i. e. country-level) factors.

Latin America is an interesting setting for studying political trust for three reasons. First, Latin America has lower levels of political trust than other regions of the world (Catterberg and Moreno, 2006; Mainwaring, 2006; Segovia, 2008). For instance, Segovia (2008) shows that average levels of trust in parliament and the civil service in Latin America are significantly and substantially lower than in industrialized European countries. Latin America thus provides regional variation in a topic that has been most intensely studied within the more industrialized countries.

Second, most Latin American democracies seem to be on the path of consolidation after decades of authoritarianism or continuous reversals between democracy and dictatorships. Political trust may not operate in the same ways in such a context than in the more consolidated democracies. For instance, Mainwaring (2006) suggests that low political trust in Latin America (and especially in the Andean countries) derives not from the usual suspects (such as generational value change or social capital decline) but from the systematic under-provision of public goods by national states.

Finally, Latin American politics have been presumably shaped by populism and client-patron networks to a greater extent than other regions of the world. This carries complex implications for political trust: while particularistic politics may strengthen trust to leaders, it may erode trust in institutions. A focus on Latin America can advance our knowledge of the dynamics of political trust in such settings.

We also advance a novel analytical perspective. While most existing studies explain cross-sectional variations in political trust *between* countries, we also study how political trust has evolved *within* countries across time. We examine how both individual and contextual characteristics have possibly triggered (or not) changes in political trust among the population. We employ the Latinobarometer dataset, which contains relevant measures of

political trust since 1996 onwards. Among the contextual factors we include not only commonly used variables such as corruption and economic development (Mishler and Rose 2001, Anderson and Tverdova 2003, Uslaner 2011) but also consider the possible impact of a regional specific trend, namely, the so called “left turn”. Specifically, we consider whether changes in the ideological orientation of governments are associated with changes in political trust at the aggregate as well as the individual level. With this in mind, the specific questions that guide our explanatory effort are: to what extent are individual political orientations related to political trust? Are left governments characterized by an increase or a decrease of political trust?

The chapter begins with a historical overview of Latin America. We develop two broad claims. First, since their independence Latin American nations faced chronic challenges for building efficient and stable - and therefore trustworthy - political institutions. Second, there are reasons to believe that this situation may have been changing in the last two decades as democracies consolidate, economies grow, and authorities become more responsive to people’s needs. Followed by our historical assessment, we describe the major trends in political trust occurred in the region since 1996. In the data analysis, we employ ordinal probit multi-level models to assess the main correlates of overall levels and changes in political trust among Latin American countries between 2002 and 2011.

Historical challenges to political trust in Latin America

Democratic developments: unequal, contradictory, and discontinuous

For understanding the reasons behind low political trust in Latin America we first look at the process of political institution building. This process has been contradictory and discontinuous, and took place amidst great socioeconomic inequalities.

First, the building of Latin American political institutions was shaped by contradictions - which, we claim, had implications for political trust. Most present-day Latin American republics were born in the 1820s, after four centuries of Spanish domination. Independence leaders rejected the monarchical model. They were propelled by the novel ideals of democratic constitutionalism heralded by Great Britain, France, and the United States. They wanted to create free nations where the people would rule through elected representatives. They wrote constitutions and electoral laws, gathered friends and followers around electoral pacts, celebrated elections for national and regional authorities, and created public spheres where newspapers, street-level discourses, and salon discussions abounded (Posada Carbó 1996, 1998; Valenzuela 2006). Long periods without elections or with completely farcical ones were relatively rare, and they belong to the most well-known experiences of nineteenth-century authoritarianism (such as that of Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina).

The contradiction comes from the fact that these democratic developments were shaped by agents who often resorted to anti-democratic practices - at least by Dahlian (1971) standards. Specifically, contenders and especially incumbents soon developed a repertoire of techniques for manipulating electoral outcomes. These ranged from adulterating electoral registries and jailing members of electoral colleges during the election day to

stuffing the ballot boxes (Posada Carbó 2000). Aware of fraud, disgruntled challengers often resorted to armed insurgencies for reaching power – and countries such as Mexico, Colombia, and Uruguay excel in their record of insurgencies during the nineteenth century (Valenzuela 2006). Important for our purposes, this combination of profuse and usually respected electoral calendars with recurrent electoral fraud created the widespread feeling among Latin Americans that their governments, and the institutions they represented, merited little trust.

Second, the development of democratic institutions was not only contradictory but also discontinuous. After the first, turbulent century of independent life, the twentieth century seemed more auspicious for cultivating democracy and political trust in the region. During the 1920s and 1930s, lower-class Latin American males were enfranchised, and women followed suit by mid-century. Under populist regimes electoral turnout increased notably, raising hopes for the strengthening of a sui-generis type of paternalistic mass democracy - although populist leaders rarely were genuine democrats. Yet after the Great Depression many countries faced authoritarian reversals. And although democracy blossomed in the 1950s, a new wave of military coups spread during the 1960s and deepened in the 1970s – to the point that by 1978 only Colombia, Venezuela and Costa Rica had democratic regimes (Mainwaring and Pérez Liñán 2005).

By the early 1990s, most Latin American countries had recovered democratic institutions, but the frequent alternations between authoritarianism, democracy, and semi-democracies in previous decades created uncertain prospects for the building of solid political trust. In particular, after experiencing harsh military dictatorships, many people acquired an instinctive distrust towards the military and intelligence police units. Overall, the discontinuities of Latin American regimes stand in sharp contrast with Western developed nations, who enjoyed uninterrupted democracies for decades (Germany France) or centuries (Britain, the United States).

Finally, it is important to note that Latin American political developments took place in the midst of intense socioeconomic inequalities. By 2008, the region as a whole had a Gini index of 48.3, far above high-income countries (30.9) and all other regions of the world, including Sub-Saharan Africa (44.2) (Ortiz and Cummins 2011:26). These staggering inequalities are not new. They can be traced to the concentration of huge land extensions in the hands of a few families since colonial times. This had political implications. While it sometimes was the case that individuals from popular class backgrounds and indigenous ancestry reached the presidency (like Benito Juárez in nineteenth-century Mexico or Evo Morales in current Bolivia), top-level officers and congressmen typically came from the upper classes and were white; differences in political power became intertwined with class and racial inequalities. These inequalities could not be justified by resorting to a feudal past (like in Europe) or a religious doctrine (like Hinduism). Large and (perceived as) illegitimate inequalities provided a constant source of distrust toward the political and economic elites and the institutions they represented (Zmerli and Castillo 2015).

Weak states and political personalism

Political distrust in Latin America can also be traced to the chronic difficulties for building strong, far-reaching, and efficient states. According to Centeno (2003), the paucity of international wars after independence created few incentives to Latin American state-makers for improving the methods of taxation and administration that were the crucibles of solid state-building in Europe. This had consequences to our days. Compared to the developed West, Latin American states have been traditionally unable to provide decent education, health services, or retirement pensions to large segments of their populations (Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay are partial exceptions). Ill-designed or underfunded state programs do little for protecting the labor force - a large portion which has informal jobs - from economic shocks. And during the 1990s the spread of policies that deregulated labor markets did not help. State institutions unable to protect people elicit little trust. According to Mainwaring (2006), bad state performance is the main explanation of low political trust in the Andes.

Additionally, in a region containing some of the most violent countries of the world like Honduras, El Salvador or Venezuela (UNODC 2011), states have been unable to protect their peoples from organized crime and gangs. Even worse, poor civilian populations - from the Guatemalan jungles to the Brazilian *favelas* - have often been victims of brutal state repression carried out under the banner of fighting guerrillas or crime (Goodwin 2003). Law systems often work biasedly, with the poor, women, peasants, and those of darker skin color receiving unfair treatment. According to O'Donnell (2001:607), sometimes "laws (...) are not more than a piece of paper". And in some regions, enriched networks of organized crime bribe underfunded police agents to impose their law (Altman and Luna 2012). Occasionally this is linked to insufficient state territorial penetration - drug cartels sometimes control considerable regions, as happens today in Colombia or Mexico. Private security firms have proliferated recently to protect those who can pay (Eaton 2012), thus undermining even more the concentration of coercive capacity in the state apparatus¹.

Latin American societies crafted two complementary responses to chronic state deficiencies. The first one was the creation of functional equivalents of the state by civilian populations. Thus, in parts of Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Guatemala, populations residing in areas located outside of the state's reach have resorted to indigenous law and other informal practices for solving disputes and providing security. These include, for instance, Peruvian community patrols (*rondas campesinas*) and Bolivian neighborhood meetings (*juntas vecinales*) (Helmke and Levitsky 2006). Likewise, in the Mexican state of Guerrero, communities organize patrols for limiting the actions of abusive state police forces (Eaton 2012).

A second response was "political personalism". It consists of leaders that take care of people's unmet needs in particularistic ways, often in exchange for political favors. Sometimes arising to the status of messiahs (as noted in O'Donnell's 1994 notion of

¹ However, it would be too much to speak about state collapse or failure for Latin America – even in Colombia (Rotberg 2002) states do work. Instead, Mainwaring (2006) suggests the term "state deficiencies" for Latin America.

delegative democracies), the origins of these leaders can be traced to the turbulent days of independence wars, when destitute populations needed protection from wandering armies and bandits. These leaders may range from local brokers that help people to obtain health assistance or a phone line (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984), to mythical nation-level figures such as Domingo Perón in Argentina or Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. Formally, they represent political institutions. But due to their charisma and supposedly exceptional abilities, they go beyond institutions – when they disappear, institutions may crumble, or so many believe.

The relationship between personalism and political trust is ambiguous. It may be negative: as people get used to solve their problems thanks to the willingness of a leader, trust goes to the leader, not to the institutions he or she is supposed to represent. Criminal variations of personalism also erode institutional trust. Consider the Colombian drug czar Pablo Escobar, who provided food, popular housing and soccer fields to poor communities. In some regions he became way more trusted and loved than the Colombian state. But the relationship may be positive: trust in an exceptional leader may be transferred to institutions or his followers under certain conditions.

Intimately related to state weakness is the problem of corruption (see the chapter by Uslaner in this volume). Perceived corruption, especially among political elites, decreases public trust in political institutions because authorities are supposed to protect public interests rather than their own. Also, corruption diverts public resources away from public goods, which harms the quality of public policies and decreases trust. Recent Latin American history is peppered with corruption accusations towards top political figures, from Carlos Menem in Argentina and Lula's congressmen in Brazil to Alberto Fujimori in Peru and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. And consistent with the international literature, comparative cross-sectional studies in Latin America by Segovia (2008) and Morris (2004) indicate that more corrupt countries elicit lower political trust among their citizens. Still, many Latin Americans do not consider corruption to be the worst of sins, and messianic or charismatic leaders may be highly popular despite solid corruption charges against them. Therefore it may not be surprising if the relationship between corruption and trust is not as strong as expected.

A more auspicious scenario for political trust in Latin America?

We argued above that Latin American history does not provide a fertile ground for high political trust. However, a series of interrelated trends taking place during the last one or two decades suggest a different, more favorable scenario.

First, Latin American economies are growing fast since 2003. The average growth of per capita gross domestic product between 2003 and 2012 was 3.3%, way more than the 1.4% of the 1991-2002 period and of course than the “lost decade” of 1980-1990 (-0.4%). During the 2003-2012 period all country averages were positive, and four countries (Argentina,

Panama, Peru, and Uruguay) had averages above 5%. Only three countries – El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico – had an average growth lower than 2%.²

Economic growth helped to fight poverty, which decreased in the region as a whole from 43.9% of the population in 2002 to 28.8% in 2012 (indigence almost halved, going from 19.3% to 11.4% in the same period; ECLAC 2012). Other socioeconomic indicators improved too. While there is no automatic link between socioeconomic progress and political trust, better living conditions may promote among broad sectors of the population the belief that politicians and political institutions are using public resources effectively for addressing popular demands in areas such as education, health, and housing.

A second trend, presumably positive for political trust, is that Latin American states have also strengthened in other dimensions beyond their capacity of delivering socioeconomic goods. For instance, during the last two decades some of them have regained control over territories that were hitherto in the hands of non-state actors. In the early 1990s the Peruvian government defeated the Shining Path and the government of El Salvador deactivated guerrilla movements. The same happened in Guatemala in 1996. Nowadays (late 2014) the Colombian government seems closer than ever to reach a peace agreement with the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), which seriously undermined Colombian stateness since the 1960s.

In the third place, the consolidation of Latin American democracies after the transitions from authoritarianism during the 1980s and 1990s is another important trend with potential implications for political trust. While democracy was far from granted a few decades ago, in the last two decades most Latin American countries established democratic or semi-democratic regimes that proved resistant to economic shocks and other national crises. By late 2014, only Cuba is clearly non-democratic. According to the Polity score, the mean level of democracy in the region (variable *polity2*, which ranges from -10=strong autocracy to 10= strong democracy) increased dramatically, from -0.8 in 1980 to 7.5 and over in the 2000s³. Likewise, the chances that popularly elected governments be overthrown by force are much lower nowadays than it was the case, say, in the 1960s.

But the links between democracy and political trust are complex. Presumably, in the long run democracy is important to political trust because democratic governments are supposed to better address people's demands, and because democracy fosters transparency and accountability. In the short run, however, new democracies may have to deal with disproportionate expectations from civil societies damaged after harsh authoritarianisms. Democratic disenchantment may promote "critical citizens" (Norris 1999) that trust little in institutions and embark in violent protests, which in turn may destabilize democracy - as almost happened in Argentina in late 2001.

² Analyses based on data from the World Development Indicators, World Bank, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx> (retrieved on December 11, 2013).

³ Based on the Polity IV dataset, available at: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>; retrieved on January 8th, 2014.

In the fourth place, we consider the implications of the so-called “left turn” for political trust. The “left turn” refers to a regional trend of repeated electoral success of leftist governments. It began with the election of Socialist Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1999 (although Chile might be classified as a pioneer given the 1990 triumph of the center-left *Concertación*). Venezuela was followed by leftist ascensions in Brazil (2002), Argentina (2003), Uruguay (2004), Bolivia (2006), Ecuador and Nicaragua (2007) and Paraguay (2008). With the exception of Paraguay and Chile, all these countries have since then (and up to late 2014) been ruled by left or center-left governments.

We claim that left turns in Latin America may be propitious for political trust, in the short term at least, for several reasons. First, these governments typically favor (in discourse and often in practice) more inclusive social programs and greater social spending. By doing so, leftist governments try to move away from the neoliberal policies and conservative governments that are associated with the “lost decade” of the 1980s and the feeble progress of the 1990s. In a highly unequal continent, this appearance of heightened awareness to social inequalities and demands may improve political trust. Second, leftist governments have often attempted to mobilize communities in self-government practices. This ranged from participative budgets (following Brazil’s pioneer experience in 1989, which soon spread to other countries) to Chávez’s social programs like the *Misiones Bolivarianas*, which created strong emotional links between the government and the beneficiaries (Handlin 2012). Grassroots mobilization nurtures the belief that political institutions are open to people’s competences and skills. And governments trusting the people may be reciprocated.

Finally, some leftist governments (such as those in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela) promoted new constitutions through their corresponding constitutional assemblies (Cameron, 2009). These new legal frameworks included and recognized typically underprivileged ethnic groups as well as women (Ellner, 2012). This may have also created the impression of more open and responsive governments, which in turn should foster trust.

Trends in Political Trust

In this section we provide a brief descriptive glance at the aggregate levels and evolution of trust in Latin American countries. We employ survey data from the Latinobarometro Corporation, a survey project that has been applying yearly surveys since 1996 to national samples of the adult population of seventeen Latin American(with or without hyphen?; consistency) countries.⁴ Our analysis considers trust in three political institutions: the national Congress, political parties and the government. Focusing now on country differences, Figure 1 shows the averages for the three political institutions considering country-aggregated data from 1996 to 2011. Countries are sorted in the graph from the

⁴The Latinobarometro organization surveyed annually each of the countries included in our study (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela). The samples are about 1,200 cases per country every year. Each year the study realizes about 19,000 face-to-face interviews of adult population, representing more than 400 million Latin American inhabitants (www.latinobarometro.org).

lowest (Ecuador) to the highest (Uruguay) average. Interestingly, for all countries the institutions with lowest trust are political parties whereas the institution with higher trust is the government, with the exception of Mexico and Honduras where Congress depicts a slightly higher level of trust. Furthermore, this rank order also corresponds to the variability of each measure, being the government the institution with the largest variability ($sd=.97$) and political parties the institution with the lowest variability ($sd=0.85$) at individual level. Figure 1 also illustrates the differences between institutions within countries. Countries with lower trust (as Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala and Nicaragua) seem to display smaller differences between institutions when compared to countries with higher trust, while the opposite tends to occur among countries with higher levels of political trust. This last pattern is particularly remarkable in the cases of Costa Rica and Chile.

****Figure 1 ABOUT HERE ****

Figure 2 offers a broad view of political trust trends between 1996 and 2011 for the entire region. There is a remarkable u-type trend in which trust in all three political institutions decays between 1996 and 2003, but recovers up to its original levels around 2011. The timing of these trends may not be accidental: above we saw that, during the last decade, several important socioeconomic and political changes took place in the region. They might be pushing trust upwards.

**** Figure 2 ABOUT HERE ****

Figure 3 shows the evolution of political trust by country in the three political institutions. In many countries it is possible to observe a systematic increase in trust levels between 2000 and 2010. However, the increases are far from linear. Ups and downs for different institutions seem to be related. All in all, the institution that displays the largest changes in trust are governments. Some particularly sharp changes in governmental trust coincide with presidential elections (e. g. Uruguay in 2004, Ecuador in 2006, and Paraguay in 2008).

**** Figure 3 ABOUT HERE ****

The previous graphs show that the trends of trust in each of the institutions we consider tend to co-vary strongly. For example, average correlation between the trends of confidence in Congress and political parties for the seventeen countries is 0.93. Even more interesting, the strong covariation between the different confidence items is also visible at the individual level. Indeed, the level of internal consistency between respondents' answers to each of the three institutions is quite high across countries and time. Figure 4 shows for each country the average Cronbach's alpha for the three trust items for the entire period (1996-2011). Additionally, the segments at the sides of each average point indicate the minimum and maximum score that was observed in any single year during the period under consideration. As can be seen, the results indicate fairly high levels of internal consistency. For all countries, the average Cronbach's alpha was higher than 0.70 (with the exception of Bolivia that scores 0.69). The pooled Cronbach's alpha considering all countries and all years simultaneously is 0.73.

**** Figure 4 ABOUT HERE ****

Lastly, an important feature highlighted in Figure 3 is the relatively high level of variation in aggregate levels of trust within each country. While trust in government is certainly the most visible case, trust in Congress and political parties also show sizable changes across time. In some cases the trends are positive such as in Bolivia and Venezuela, while in others the evolution of trust seems more trendless (such as in El Salvador and Honduras). Results from Table 1 corroborate this intuition more formally. It shows the estimates from three-level hierarchical Anova models that estimate the proportion of all variation in trust attributable to variation within each country (within-country variance) and to variation across countries (between-country variation) for each institution separately, and for a combined index that averages responses to the three institutions.

****TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE****

Results indicate that trust in Congress, political parties, government, and for the combined index is more variable within countries than between countries. More simply, political trust for these three institutions tends to vary, on average, more within a single country across time, than across countries. In fact, estimates for the average trust index indicate that there is three times more variability within countries than across countries. We will exploit this within-country variation later, when we statistically model political trust among Latin Americans.

Research Design and Measurement

Before turning into the statistical modeling of the evolution of trust in political institutions, we detail the survey data we will use. Although the Latinobarometer surveys have been applied since 1996, some key questions were not asked in every year, so we restrict our analysis from 2002 onwards. In total, our analysis includes 161 surveys from 17 countries during a time span of nine years, all of which totals more than 175,000 respondents.

The questions employed to measure trust in political institutions, as well as their four-point response categories, have been exactly the same for all countries during all applications.⁵ All surveys were applied in Spanish, save in Brazil where interviews took place in Portuguese. Needless to say, this high degree of methodological consistency assures us that changes in the level of political trust reflect actual changes in the evaluations of Latin American citizens, and not changes in the survey instrument.

Our analysis considers both individual and aggregate level variables. Among the former, we include a series of socio-demographic variables, which include gender (dummy variable), birth cohorts (5 ten-year age groups), education (dummy variables representing primary, secondary, and tertiary levels), and religious affiliation (dummies for Catholics, and Evangelicals and other religion, with non-affiliated individuals as reference category). Following the literature we also incorporate indicators related to respondents' perception of the performance of government (presidential approval) and evaluations of the national

⁵ The employed question is: “Please look at this card and tell me, how much trust you have in each of the following groups, institutions or persons: A lot, some, a little, or no trust?”

economy (Mainwaring, 2006; Segovia 2008; Mishler and Rose, 2001, 2011; van der Meer and Dekker, 2011). We expect that favorable assessments of both are associated with more confidence in political institutions. Lastly, we incorporate a left-right 11-point self-location scale in order to control for ideological preferences.⁶ Although the specific meaning of this last variable might change from country to country (see Kitschelt et al. 2010), there is increasing evidence about its widespread usage as a heuristic device across Latin American societies (Carreras and Castañeda-Angarita, 2013). We do not have any specific expectations about the relationship of this variable and political trust, but it is an important individual level control given the contextual variables we incorporate into the statistical models, which are detailed below.⁷

At the country level we incorporate four variables: a) level of control of corruption as measured by the World Bank Governance Indicators project; b) per capita income, using GDP per capita adjusted by purchase power parity (taken from the World Bank Development Indicators)⁸; c) level of economic inequality among the population of each country as measured by the Gini index and d) the ideological platform of governments (or governmental ideology).⁹ While the first two variables are commonly employed in empirical analysis predicting trust in political institutions (Segovia, 2008; Mishler and Rose, 2001, van der Meer and Dekker, 2011), the latter two require further elaboration. The ideological platform of government variable classifies in terms of left-right ideological inclinations the economic policies implemented by each government during its tenure in office. This variable was originally measured by Murillo, Oliveiros and Vaishnav (2010), which rely on previous data sets and the expert judgments of more than thirty scholars. An important feature of this measure is that it was coded considering the economic policies that presidents effectively implemented during their tenure in office, as opposed to the platform he or she might have campaigned on. The original data set covers the period 1976-2007. We thus had to code some more recent governments following the guidelines contained in

⁶ To capture individuals' ideological inclinations we actually introduce two variables. Following work from Jackson et al. (2010), we introduce the left-right position of all survey respondents who explicitly mentioned a position, while those who didn't (which represent roughly 23% of the sample) are assigned the country-year survey mean. We distinguish these respondents from the rest with an additional dummy variable in which they receive a value of "1".

⁷ Political trust is also commonly associated to interpersonal trust and institutional fairness (Grimes, 2006; Segovia, 2008; see also Grimes in this Handbook). Several authors (Mishler and Rose, 2001; Mainwaring, 2006) claim that the relationship with interpersonal trust is endogenous, reason because of which we do not incorporate this variable in the analysis. So far we haven't found a variable capturing institutional fairness that has been applied across all (or at least most) years in the Latinobarometer surveys.

⁸ The World Bank Data Bank indicators does not report income per capita data for Argentina from 2005 onwards. Therefore we complement this data source for the missing years with data provided by the website <http://www.economywatch.com/>

⁹ We omit an indicator that qualifies the level of democracy of each country (i.e. Freedom Score) given that for the period covered in our analysis there is very little variation. For example, using the Freedom Score there are 5 countries that do not change their score any year and six which change only one point during one year. Therefore, any results from this variable would be driven primarily by the few countries that indeed experience more change on this variable. An alternative which we will explore in the future is the age of the democratic regime of each country. This variable can be considered as an indicator of democratic consolidation, and indeed varies significantly across our sample.

the codebook of Murillo, Oliveiros and Vaishnav (2010).¹⁰ This variable scores government's ideological platform on a 5-point scale, where 1 is Left, 2 is Center-Left, 3 is Center, 4 is Center-Right and 5 is Right. According to the authors a left wing position applies "*to political actors who seek, as a central programmatic objective, to reduce social and economic inequalities*" (Murillo, Oliveiros and Vaishnav, 2010). Through this variable we attempt to capture whether the "left-wing turn" that several Latin American countries have experienced had any consequences over Latin Americans' level of trust in political institutions.

Lastly, we include in our statistical models the Gini index. We expect that increases in the aggregate level of economic inequality promote distrust toward political institutions. Indeed, following Zmerli and Castillo (2015), we argue that rising levels of inequality erode citizens' perception of the level of fairness and trustworthiness of the country's political institutions, and therefore, their level of trust.¹¹

Statistical Modeling

Given that the Latinobarometer surveys are applied annually, when the data is pooled we obtain a repeated (or time-series) cross-sectional design, with respondents nested in yearly surveys, and these nested within countries. With this type of data it is not only possible to estimate the association between individual and contextual factors, and political trust, as in a common multilevel research design. But more interestingly, we can analyze how changes in contextual factors within a single country across time are associated with alterations in the level of political trust. In other words, we can model simultaneously between-country and within-country variance. Now, given that our main objective is to assess how political trust has evolved among Latin Americans, we concentrate our modeling efforts into capturing the latter type of variance. In fact, we incorporate in our statistical models country-level fixed effects in order to "absorb" all between-country variability, so that all stable features of the countries in our sample - such as electoral systems or levels of ethnic and religious diversity among many others - are held constant in the empirical analysis (see Duch and Stevenson 2008 and Fairbrother 2013 for similar research designs). This implies that the coefficients of the aggregate level variables can be interpreted in our models as the

¹⁰ Specifically we coded Piñera's (Chile) government initiated in 2010 as centrist (code 3), Morales' government after the 2009 election as left-wing (code 1), Funes' government in El Salvador since 2009 as center-left (code 2), Lobos' government in Honduras since 2009 as center-right (code 4), and Mujica's government in Uruguay since 2009 as center-left (code 2).

¹¹ Given that there is no single data source that provides the Gini index for all Latin American countries for every year between 2002 and 2011, we ended up employing the information provided by both the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the World Bank Data Bank. However, both sources combined did not cover all the required years. Therefore, we linearly interpolated the Gini index for a total of 31 country-years. Out of these, in 17 cases the interpolation was between adjacent years, while in 14 cases we had to fill in the data for countries that missed three of four consecutive years of data. We deliberately avoided extrapolating this measure to years that were not covered among the data series. This implies dropping 13 country-years (surveys) from the analysis.

average change of the dependent variable within a country associated with a unit change of the contextual variable.¹²

We estimate five random-intercept regression models in which the dependent variable is an additive index of respondents' level of trust in political parties, Congress and government.¹³ As shown in the descriptive section, responses to the political trust questions tend to covary highly at the individual level, which justifies our decision to model political trust as a single construct. The first four models include, one by one, four survey-level independent variables, while the final model includes all of them simultaneously. Individual-level observations are grouped by the country-year in which respondents were interviewed.

Following van der Meer and Dekker (2011), we incorporate the left-right self-location scale to assure that, if the presidential ideology has a significant effect, it is not due to possible compositional effects of the public that live in countries that experience ideological turns in their political system. Similarly, we incorporate economic evaluations not only because some authors claim that political trust is conditioned by performance evaluations (Mainwaring, 2006; Mishler and Rose, 2005), but also to assure that, if we find significant effects associated with GDP per capita, it is not attributable to some specific configuration of economic evaluations within the populations included in our sample (for a further discussion of the effect of economic performance and perceptions thereof, see the chapter by Van der Meer in this Handbook). We should note, however, that this strategy risks minimizing the influence of aggregate economic outcomes to the extent that they condition political trust indirectly through their effect over respondents' economic evaluations.

Empirical Results

Table 2 shows the parameter estimates for the linear random intercept models. At the individual level we find several variables with significant and very stable estimates across the different model specifications. Perhaps most interesting, respondents' religious affiliation shows some strong and positive effects. Specifically, self-declared Evangelicals and Catholics, compared to non-religious individuals, report higher levels of political trust. This may result from the role of religion, in particular of Catholicism, in connecting people with public issues in many Latin American countries (Levine & Mainwaring 1989), or from the intuition among believers that political institutions protect their moral values on religiously charged issues such as homosexual rights and abortion. While the coefficients of both groups are highly significant (p value <0.001), the estimates from the full model (model 5) suggest that being Catholic increases the level of trust in about 0.06 points, which corresponds approximately to 8% of a standard deviation of the dependent variable. The estimate for evangelicals corresponds to a 7% change.

¹² Additionally, if we had included a country-level random effect we would add to our model the potentially unwarranted parametric assumption of a normally distributed country-level random effect. This assumption will hardly occur given that the sample includes only 17 countries. Stegmueller (2013) finds that hierarchical models with few countries can have several problems.

¹³ We included in the analysis the average response to the trust items of all respondents who answered at least two items. This implied dropping from the analysis 1.8% of the sample.

On average, birth cohorts and, to a lesser extent, educational level also affects trust in political institutions. The coefficients of the cohort variables indicate that younger people often trust less. Notice though that the negative estimates of birth cohorts decrease monotonically up to the youngest cohort, which still shows lower levels of trust than the reference cohort (those born before 1941), but trust more than the preceding cohort. On the other hand, the coefficients for education also show a non-linear pattern: groups with completed secondary education show significantly lower levels of trust than the reference group (who are those with primary education only), while people with technical and college education do not differentiate themselves from the least educated group.

When we consider respondents' economic and political evaluations we find much stronger results. Respect to the former, all statistical models indicate that a better assessment of the national economy is strongly related with higher levels of political trust, as measured by our additive index. The coefficient of the evaluation of the national economy indicates that, on average, a one unit change in the perception of the economy (out of a 5 point ordinal scale) increases in 0.178 points the level of the political trust index. This change corresponds to 24% of a standard deviation of the dependent variable. Moreover, a change from the lowest to the highest response category indicates a cumulative change of 0.712 points, which is larger than an entire standard deviation of the dependent variable. As one can expect, a more favorable assessment of the president is also strongly associated with more political trust. Indeed, those who mention to approve the president, while holding all other variables constant, score 0.409 points higher on the political trust index.

The estimate for the left-right self-identification scale shows that higher values, which indicate a more right-wing position, are associated with more confidence in political institutions. However, the size of the coefficient indicates that the associations are relatively modest. For example, an increase of 5 points in the left-right scale increases the political trust index in only about 0.035 points. On the other hand, those who did not mention a political position on the scale have significantly lower levels of trust than those who did mention it.

****TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE****

Among the contextual variables we find several interesting patterns. In first place, if we compare the models that include a single system-level predictor with model 5 (that incorporates all four aggregate level predictors), we observe important changes in the magnitude of the coefficients. In all cases they reduce their size in about half their original size.

The most dramatic reduction occurs for the coefficient of the World Bank Control of Corruption index. When the effect of this variable is estimated without system-level controls, it is significant ($p < 0.05$), but once we control for all predictors it reduces its size

to less than a third and is statistically undistinguishable from 0. This is a very interesting result that contrasts sharply with results from many cross-sectional studies, which find strong negative and highly significant associations (Segovia, 2008; Uslaner 2011; Hakhverdian & Mayne 2012). Previously we speculated that more lenient views of corruption among Latin Americans might weaken the expected relationship between corruption and trust in within-country analyses like ours (also see the chapter by Uslaner in this Handbook). But there could be two additional reasons for explaining this lack of significance. First, Latin Americans publics might be slow learners, such that collective levels of political trust do not react immediately to changes in corruption. It might take some time for the public to react to corruption events. Second, yearly changes in political corruption tend to be very small; they may be too small to produce a statistically detectable change in political trust. Clearly, this point merits further research.

Our variable about government's ideological platform (governmental ideology in short) contains statistically significant estimates when it is entered as the only system-level variable (model 2), as well as when we control for the other system-level predictors, though the size of the coefficient decreases almost in half (from -0.062 to -0.034). The negative signs of the coefficients indicate that when governmental ideology moves to the right, political trust decreases within a country. The full model indicates a marginal effect of -0.034, which implies that, within a given country, a change from a deliberately left wing government (such as the current government of Morales in Bolivia or Correa in Ecuador) to a right wing government (as the one of Bolaños Geyer in Nicaragua) leads to a decrease in the level of trust of 0.136 points. This corresponds to 19% of a standard deviation of the dependent variable.¹⁴ Among many possible implications, this result indicates that political elites can influence directly the level of trust that citizens confer to their political institutions. They also suggest that the "left turn" discussed at the beginning of this chapter may have boosted political trust. Finally, the negative signs of the coefficients of this variable also contrast directly with the positive signs of the left-right ideological scale (which is coded in the same direction). Therefore, while a more right-wing ideological position at the individual level is associated with higher political trust, changes towards the right in the position of governments reduce political trust.

Our results also show positive and significant effects for changes in the average income level of countries. As indicated by the full model, a one unit increase in the logarithm of the per capita gross domestic product, which could be represented as a change from the 20th to the 80th percentile of the average income, leads to an increase of 0.37 in the dependent variable. This corresponds to half of a standard deviation of the dependent variable. Therefore, as societies become wealthier, and perhaps states are able to provide better public services and assure better living conditions to the population, a more fertile ground for political trust is created (also see the chapter by Van der Meer in this Handbook). This is consistent with the fact that, as noted above, from 2003 onwards both economic growth

¹⁴ In addition to the current linear specification of this variable in the regression models, we also treated it as a categorical factor with each level as an independent variable. Results strongly suggested that a linear specification adequately captured the association with political trust. Fit statistics BIC and AIC favored the linear specification in all instances.

and political trust grew in tandem (see Figure 2). Still, this presumed effect should not be immediate. Further tests of different time lags in the independent variable are needed.

Lastly, our models also account for the level of income inequality each country experiences at different points in time. Similarly to the other cases, once we introduce this variable in conjunction with the other system level variables, the effect of the Gini index drops in about half its size. Nonetheless, the estimate remains significant even in the most demanding specification. The negative sign indicates that as the Gini index increases from one year to another, and therefore the level of inequality increases, the average level of political trust decreases. This is entirely consistent with our initial expectations, as well as with the work of Zmerli and Castillo (2014), who argue that rising levels of inequality erode citizens' level of trust. In more substantive terms, a yearly change from the 25th percentile level of inequality to the 75th observed level of inequality would add up to a change equivalent to 0.012 of a standard deviation. Considering that such a change is very large and unlikely to be observed empirically, we consider the effect of this variable as relatively small.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have analyzed political trust in Latin America. Our historical perspective has stressed the political context from which trust judgments emerge. We have also described, and tried to explain, the evolution of such changes during the last decade.

Our analysis of the Latinobarometer survey data suggests interesting patterns regarding how much and why Latin Americans trust their national political institutions (specifically, Congress, political parties and the national government). First, trust in these political institutions does not only vary across countries, but tends to do so even more within countries across time. Political trust in Latin America is not static. Rather, it seems to be sensitive to the ups and downs of political events. Moreover, this aggregate variation does not seem trendless, but quite the contrary: there is a modest increase in the aggregate level of political trust in most Latin American countries beginning around 2003-2004. Second, and consistent with previous research, we find that individual-level performance evaluations, as well as survey respondents' political inclinations, significantly affect trust in political institutions. Those who perceive that the national economy is doing well and those who approve the work of the president, trust at much higher rates than those with more negative opinions towards these political objects.

Third, we find that within-country variation in political trust across time is strongly influenced by changes in per capita income and the ideological orientation of governments. Our repeated cross-sectional design shows that annual increases in per capita income - which could be interpreted as variation in economic performance - boost the aggregate level of political trust within a country. Our estimates also indicate a positive relationship between left-wing changes in government policy and political trust. These results confirm our initial suspicion about how the so called "left turn" may have boosted political trust. Above, we speculated that this association might result from the propensity of recent Latin American leftist governments to create more inclusive social programs and legal frameworks, as well as their emphasis in organizing and mobilizing the popular classes.

Moreover, the effect of government ideology was significant even after controlling for the changes in the level of income inequality and average income, which suggests that the mechanism by which this effect takes place not only occurs through changes in the economic conditions of the population, but also through attitudinal changes triggered by the presence of left wing political actors. Lastly, our estimates also indicate that within-country variation in political trust responds, though in a more moderate fashion, to changes in the level of inequality.

We believe these results have interesting implications. On the one hand, our finding that within-country changes across time substantially affect political trust should move us away from any rigid path-dependence perspective emphasizing the “trust traps” of Latin American societies. Moreover, the combination of economic development, democratic consolidation, and (modest) increases in political trust across time suggests that Latin America may be becoming more similar to the more established Western democracies. The notion of a closing gap is also consistent with the economic recession in Europe and the United States after 2008 and the ensuing reservations about and challenges of their political institutions by the citizenry, which may eventually erode their political trust levels.

On the other hand, some deeply ingrained features of Latin American politics – such as the gravitation toward populist leaderships and the particularistic distribution of benefits – creates quite unique situations. For instance, the association between “left turns” and increases in political trust may be specific to the region’s current conjuncture, in which leftist forces are seen as the saviors of excluded groups (women, indigenous groups and the poor) deeply hurt by neo-liberalism. Given the more “sober” style of European social-democrat and socialist parties, a “left turn” in Europe may not boost political trust to such an extent. Likewise, the finding that political corruption does not decrease trust as massively as expected may not be surprising if we consider that in many Latin American countries moderate levels of corruption are normal - and even act as a lubricant for arriving at binding political decisions.

In this paper we have considered only the marginal effects of both individual and contextual variables. Further research may explore the eventual presence of heterogeneous effects through cross-level interactions between individuals’ partisan and ideological allegiances, and contextual variables. For example, one could hypothesize that the positive effect over trust of changes towards the left in government ideology should be stronger among individuals who approve the current government. Indeed, the positive effect of changes towards the left should reinforce the opinions of individuals who are already supportive of a left-wing government. Similarly, the positive effect of changes towards the left should be larger among individuals who locate themselves on the left side of the ideological scale than among those on the right side. By contrast, it should be very interesting to identify whether the effect of changes towards the left on government ideology extend to those who do not necessarily sympathize with the changes in the ideological platforms of their current government. In a similar fashion it would be interesting to uncover whether a positive interaction effect between government ideology and political inclinations also emerges for political parties and Congress. IN case of a positive finding, it would indicate that the influence of government ideology would somehow spread onto other political institutions.

Expectations of the same nature could apply in reference to individuals' evaluation of the economy and positive changes in economic performance: the positive association between respondents' opinion of the economy and political trust could be magnified when national income increases from one year to another.

We believe that future research should not only address questions about moderation, but should also consider questions about mediation. For example, how do individual-level variables mediate the contextual effects on political trust? For instance, is the positive effect of "left turns" mediated by the acquisition of tangible benefits and the reception of social programs provided by the government? Or is it mediated through cross level mechanisms such as participation in government-sponsored grass-root activities, or by stronger political efficacy feelings? Likewise, is the positive effect of aggregate economic performance mediated by citizens' evaluation of the economy? If so, we could potentially find that the effect of changes in economic performance could affect political trust directly as a contextual force, as well as indirectly, through the positive effect that economic evaluation have over political trust.

Additionally, our empirical analysis was performed under the simplifying assumption that the contextual factors have a concurrent effect over respondents' level of political trust. However, the relationship between these variables might have a more complex temporal structure. For example, the effect of economic and political changes might take some time in order to condition mass level opinions. Consequently, we suggest that further research taking advantage of repeated cross sectional designs, such as ours, should also evaluate whether a temporal lag of level-two variables yield a better model fit.

In general, the possibilities for future research in relation to political trust, and more broadly to public opinion, in Latin American are many. With the growing amount of cross national public opinion data sets such as the Latinobarometer and the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) the avenues of future research that we have suggested, as well as many others, can started to be addressed by the academic community.

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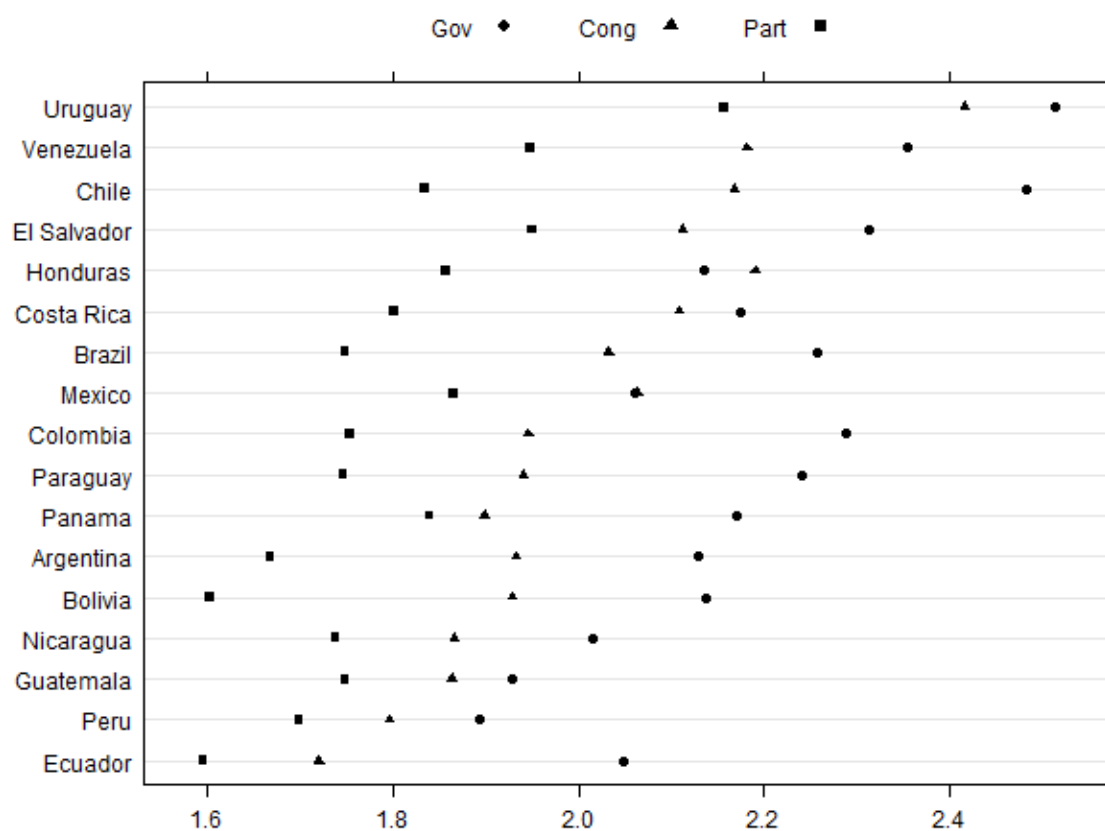
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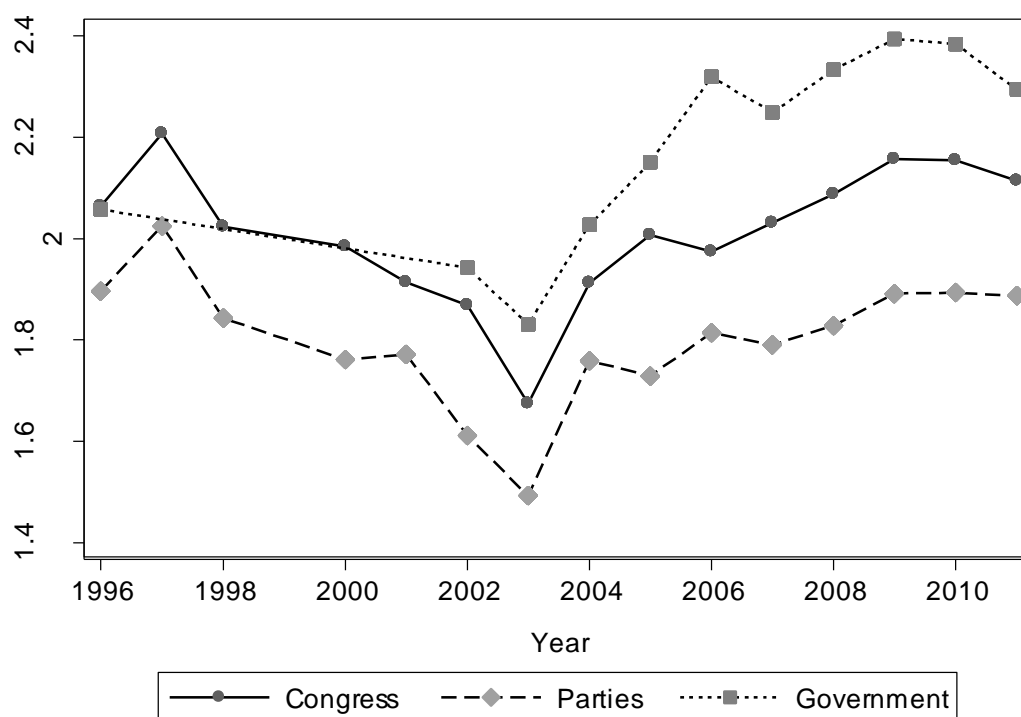
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Figure 1: Trust in political institutions by country in Latin America (average from 1996 to 2011)



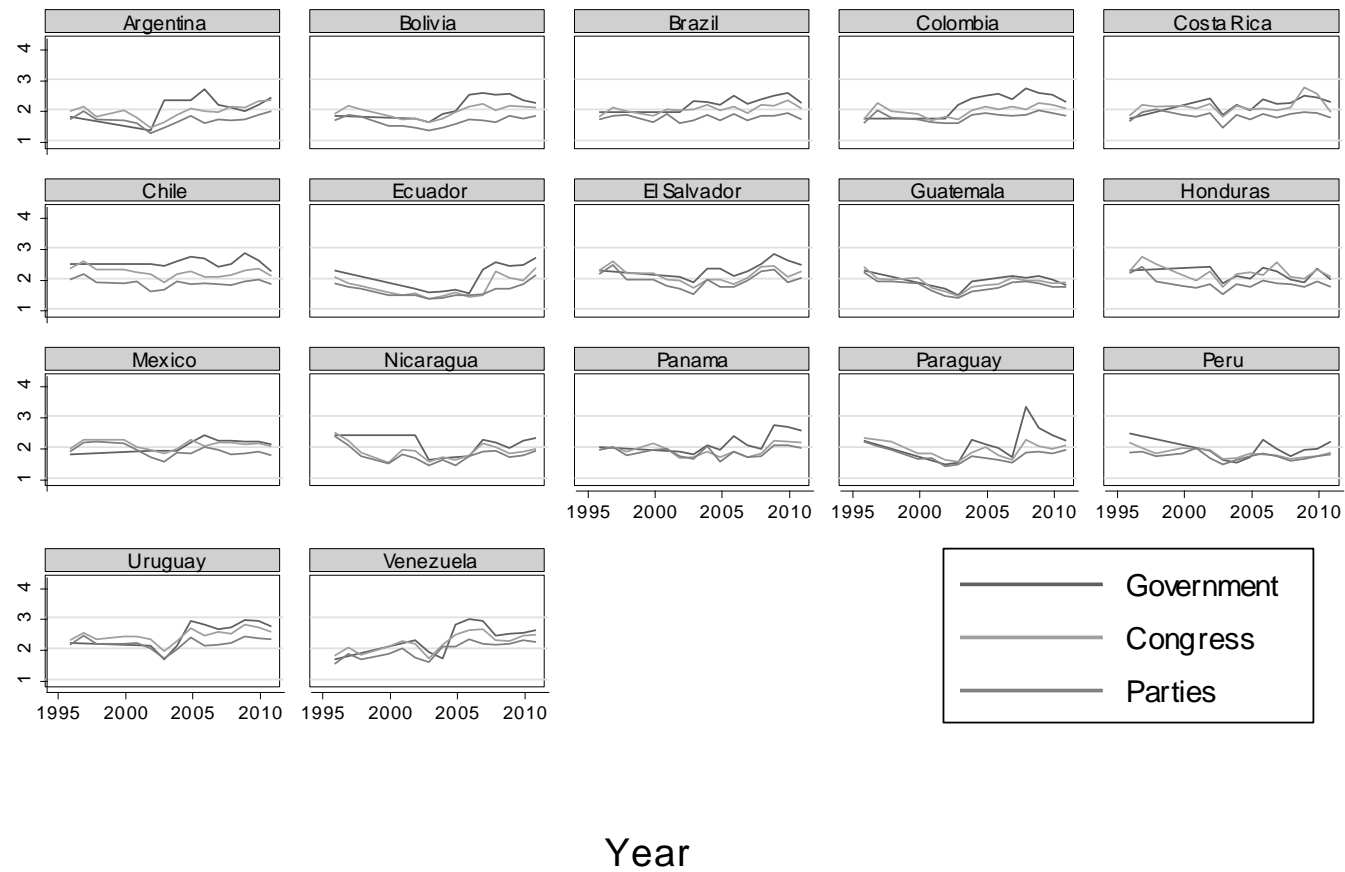
Source: Latinobarometer, own elaboration

Figure 2: Evolution of political trust in different institutions



Source: Latinobarómetro, own elaboration based on Castillo & Zmerli (2012)

Figure 3: Evolution of trust in political institutions in Latin American countries



Source: Latinobarometer, own elaboration

Figure 4: Average Cronbach Alpha of Political Trust Index by Country, 1996-2011 (segments indicate minimum and maximum scores observed during a year across observed period).

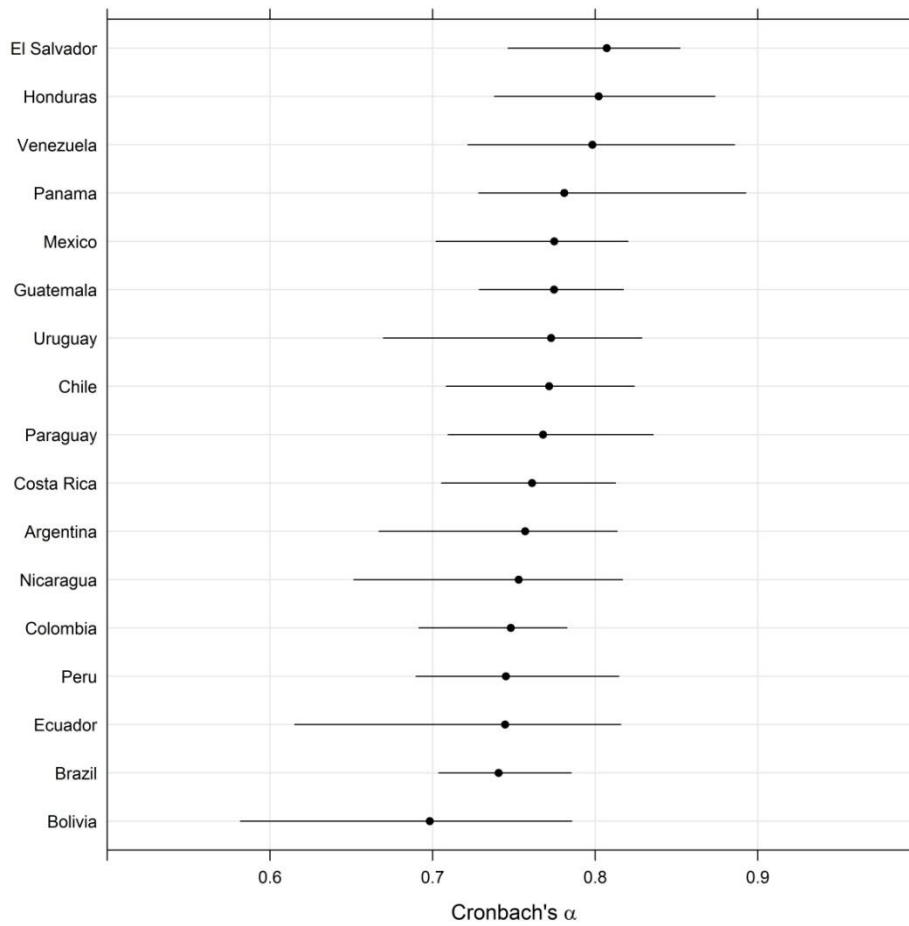


Table 1: Anova Models for Trust in Political Institutions and Political Trust Index.

	Congress Ordinal Probit	Parties Ordinal Probit	Government Ordinal Probit	Average Index Linear model
Threshold 1	-0.431 ^{***} (0.052)	-0.148 ^{***} (0.044)	-0.597 ^{***} (0.049)	
Threshold 2	0.584 ^{***} (0.052)	0.859 ^{***} (0.044)	0.372 ^{***} (0.049)	
Threshold 3	1.629 ^{***} (0.052)	1.877 ^{***} (0.044)	1.365 ^{***} (0.049)	
Intercept				1.989 ^{***} (0.037)
Sigma ² survey (Within-country)	0.082	0.072	0.163	0.055
Sigma ² country (Between-country)	0.041	0.028	0.026	0.018
Sigma ² Residual	-	-	-	0.463
N cases	268413	272420	205107	204576
N surveys	255	255	187	187
N countries	17	17	17	17

^{***} $p < 0.001$, ^{**} $p < 0.01$, ^{*} $p < 0.05$

Table 2: Linear Mixed Model for Political Trust Index (Restricted Maximum Likelihood Estimates)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept	1.323 (0.051)	1.280 (0.062)	-2.269 (0.528)	2.485 (0.206)	0.269 (0.927)
Gender (male=1)	0.009 (0.003)	0.009 (0.003)	0.009 (0.003)	0.009 (0.003)	0.009 (0.003)
Cohort 1941-50	-0.027 (0.007)	-0.027 (0.007)	-0.027 (0.007)	-0.027 (0.007)	-0.027 (0.007)
Cohort 1951-60	-0.032 (0.007)	-0.032 (0.007)	-0.033 (0.007)	-0.033 (0.007)	-0.033 (0.007)
Cohort 1961-70	-0.044 (0.006)	-0.043 (0.006)	-0.044 (0.006)	-0.044 (0.006)	-0.044 (0.006)
Cohort 1971-80	-0.056 (0.006)	-0.056 (0.006)	-0.056 (0.006)	-0.056 (0.006)	-0.056 (0.006)
Cohort 1980 or after	-0.032 (0.006)	-0.031 (0.006)	-0.032 (0.006)	-0.032 (0.006)	-0.032 (0.006)
Secondary Education	-0.015 (0.004)	-0.015 (0.004)	-0.015 (0.004)	-0.015 (0.004)	-0.015 (0.004)
Technical Education	0.000 (0.007)	0.000 (0.007)	0.000 (0.007)	0.000 (0.007)	0.000 (0.007)
College Education	0.005 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.005 (0.005)
Catholic	0.059 (0.005)	0.059 (0.005)	0.059 (0.005)	0.059 (0.005)	0.059 (0.005)
Evangelical	0.050 (0.006)	0.050 (0.006)	0.050 (0.006)	0.050 (0.006)	0.050 (0.006)
Other Religion	0.011 (0.008)	0.011 (0.008)	0.011 (0.008)	0.011 (0.008)	0.011 (0.008)
Evaluation National Economy	0.178 (0.002)	0.178 (0.002)	0.178 (0.002)	0.178 (0.002)	0.178 (0.002)
Presidential Approval (yes=1)	0.409 (0.003)	0.409 (0.003)	0.409 (0.003)	0.409 (0.003)	0.409 (0.003)
Left-Right Scale	0.007 (0.001)	0.007 (0.001)	0.007 (0.001)	0.007 (0.001)	0.007 (0.001)
Doesn't mention Left-right position (dummy)	-0.112 (0.004)	-0.112 (0.004)	-0.112 (0.004)	-0.112 (0.004)	-0.112 (0.004)
Presidential party economic Ideology	-0.062 (0.012)				-0.034 (0.012)
Control of Corruption		0.193 (0.085)			0.060 (0.076)
Log GNI per Capita (ppp)			0.370 (0.056)		0.176 (0.077)
Gini Index				-0.026 (0.004)	-0.013 (0.006)
Deviance	333973.449	333989.547	333957.377	333963.971	333959.183
N cases	176769	176769	176769	176769	176769
N surveys	161	161	161	161	161
Sigma ² Intercept	0.017	0.020	0.016	0.016	0.014
Sigma ² Residual	0.385	0.385	0.385	0.385	0.385

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$
Note: All regression models control for country-level fixed effects. variables centered?