Class and the Development of Trust in Police in Latin America*

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Abstract

Trust in police is a critical input in the co-production of public security. We show that the positive socioeconomic status (SES)-trust in police gradient observed in the US does not generalize to Latin America. In 146 surveys spanning 20 countries, we find that trust in police is weakly and negatively correlated with SES—a fact that neither regional nor subject-matter experts anticipated. We propose that rich citizens are more likely to interpret everyday experiences as signals about the police. Because bad experiences like crime victimization and bribe solicitation are more common in Latin America than in the US, rich citizens's tendency to interpret poor security outcomes as signals of police untrustworthiness leads to a lower trust–SES gradient. In our account, cross-country differences in the trust–SES gradient are driven by differences in policing outcomes coupled with universal class-based differences in people's readiness to see the world around them as signals about police.

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Local public services rely on inputs from citizens and service providers alike (Ostrom, 1996). Victims and bystanders report information to the police (Levine and Fisher, 1984); parents bolster teachers' efforts through support for student learning (Ostrom, 1996); and participatory governance can inform the design of infrastructure (Tendler, 1997). However, the provision and quality of these services can vary substantially across communities, often reflecting differences in citizen-provider relationships influenced by citizens' characteristics (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995).

Improving service provision is a pressing objective in the diverse settings of low- and middle-income countries (Grossman and Slough, 2022). Nevertheless, characterizations of these citizen-provider relationships, which produce critical inputs that shape the quality of service provision, draw heavily from experiences in the United States (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). Policy interventions to improve service provision in the US, in turn, are advocated elsewhere. But if baseline features of citizen-provider relationships in a target context differ from those in the US, the adoption of a common intervention may fail to achieve similar results.

Policing in Latin America is an important case for the study of the co-production of public security. Latin America and the Caribbean have the highest rates of crime and violence of any region (Muggah and Tobon, 2018; Vilalta, 2020). These high crime rates impose substantial welfare costs (Soares and Naritomi, 2010; Jaitman et al., 2015) and, in public opinion surveys, regularly register as important concerns of citizens (LAPOP, 2022). One common metric used to characterize important features of citizen-police relations is citizen trust in police (Corbacho, Philipp, and Ruiz-Vega, 2015; Denny et al., 2023). In contemporary Latin America, our data suggest that increased individual-level trust in police predicts (1) increased downstream information sharing about crime (Table A7); (2) increased downstream engagement with police in community fora (Table A8, see also Hanson, Kronick, and Slough, 2024); and (3) a lower contemporaneous propensity to feel the need to arm oneself to provide security (Figure A7). Consequently, higher individual trust in the police is associated with increased willingness of citizens to rely on, interact, and cooperate with the police in the world's most violent region.

Yet, the modal setting for existing research on trust in police is the United States. Data from

Google Scholar in Appendix A reveal that literature on trust and policing in the US outpaces every other country with 211% of the cites of the second-ranked country (France). There are more cites from the US than from all 21 countries in Latin America combined, and the US remains over-represented in the literature even relative to its population.[1] Arguably, the best-known empirical regularity from this research in the US has been written about for decades: white and/or rich Americans trust the police at higher rates than do Black and/or poor Americans (Decker, 1981; Skogan, 2005; Macdonald and Stokes, 2006).[2] This disparity in trust is typically attributed to disparities in police service to poor and minority populations relative to their rich or white counterparts.

In this paper, we evaluate whether the positive socioeconomic class-trust in police gradient from the US travels to Latin America. Latin America is the world's most unequal region (Hoffman and Centeno, 2003; Gasparini and Lustig, 2011) where social class has long been considered a highly salient social cleavage.[3] Work on police abuse and repression suggests that police abuses disproportionately target poor and marginalized communities (Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo, 2020; González, 2020; González and Mayka, 2022). Anti-poor bias is believed to be pervasive in many Latin American justice systems more generally (O'Donnell, 1999; Brinks, 2007, 2019). Following the conventional logic from the United States, if poor treatment and bad security outcomes reduce trust in police, we would expect trust in the police to be increasing in socioeconomic status.

Leveraging 146 cross-sectional surveys from 20 countries in the region and three panel surveys, we do not find support for this conjecture. Indeed, pooling the 236,892 individual responses from

[1]Beyond its outsize role in the literature, the US serves as a useful benchmark for the study of citizen-police relations in other regions with different experiences of crime. Policing interventions developed in the US are routinely deployed in Latin America. Community policing—an innovation popularized after its implementation in Chicago (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997)—is now deployed and studied in Latin America and the Global South more broadly (Blair et al., 2021). Our original data from an expert survey (detailed below) suggests that empirical patterns from the US closely resemble expert beliefs about trust in the police in Latin America.

[2]For example, in a 2021 Gallup survey, 56% of white respondents and 27% of Black respondents expressed "quite a lot" or "a great deal" of confidence in the police (Gallup, 2021).

[3]Other identity-based cleavages (e.g., ethnicity or race) in Latin America vary more substantially between countries.

the cross-sectional surveys, we estimate that the correlation between income and trust in police is -0.053, and the correlation between education, a proxy for social class with less missingness, is -0.084. The negative correlation suggests that low socioeconomic-status individuals trust the police slightly more than their high socioeconomic counterparts. Both correlations are statistically distinguishable from zero. Disaggregating across countries, we do not find a positive correlation that is statistically distinguishable from zero between either measure of socioeconomic status and trust in police in *any* of the 20 Latin American/Caribbean countries for which we have data. This represents a significant departure from decades of findings from the US, where income and the same trust question exhibit a *positive* correlation of 0.12 on the same survey.[4]

These results are surprising in light of conventional wisdom about the relationship between policing outcomes and trust in police. We measure the degree to which two groups of experts anticipated these findings through a forecasting exercise (DellaVigna, Pope, and Vivalt, 2019). The first group, the academic experts, consisted of scholars of politics and public administration in Latin America, some of whom actively design tests of policing interventions in the region. The second group consisted of activists working on criminal justice issues in Mexico. We show that the modal expert and the average forecast anticipated a positive correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in the police. Interestingly, inaccuracies in forecasts stem from underestimates of trust by poor respondents (those at the 10^{th} percentile). Respondents we much more accurate in their assessment of trust by median and rich respondents (those at the 50^{th} and 90^{th} percentiles, respectively). This exercise affirms that our findings challenge conventional wisdom, not only from the US but also from subject-matter and regional experts.

Why do our results depart so substantially from existing understandings of the correlates of trust in police derived from decades of research in the US? Comparing our findings to those from the well-studied US case where trust increases in socioeconomic status, we measure manifestations of multiple mechanisms that could produce correlations between class and trust in police. We

[4]In the US, the racial disparity in trust in police between Black and White respondents is approximately twice the magnitude of the difference between respondents in the top and bottom income decile.

thereby probe the external validity of the mechanisms thought to generate canonical findings from the US (Slough and Tyson, 2023).

We argue that citizen trust in police evolves through observation of police or security outputs. When citizens are victims of police abuse or crime, for example, they update negatively on the trustworthiness of the police. Good service, on the other hand, leads to positive updating. Correlational evidence from cross-sectional and average treatment effects on the treated (ATTs) from panel surveys suggest that crime victimization, exposure to police corruption, and experiences of neighborhood insecurity reduce trust in police.

The conventional wisdom from the US holds that rich citizens receive better service from the police—in other words, they are more likely to see "trustworthy" signals—and thus are more likely to update positively than poor citizens. As this process perpetuates, the rich come to trust the police at higher rates thereby inducing the observed positive correlation between class and trust in police. This mechanism—the rich receive more positive signals—was cited (in some way) by many experts in our elicitation exercise. We show that on the basis of self-reported survey data, this is not the case: in contrast to the US, in Latin America, rich respondents self-report *higher* rates of crime victimization and police corruption than poor respondents. Further, perceptions of insecurity do not vary substantially in socioeconomic status. While these observations help to explain the negative correlation between trust and socioeconomic status observed in Latin America, they stand in contrast to administrative data on *violent* crime (e.g., homicide) and expert beliefs that the poor are disproportionate victims of crime, insecurity, and abuse by police.

This apparent contradiction between conventional wisdom and survey data can be resolved through two observations. First, survey and administrative data suggest that police corruption, perceived insecurity, and (in general) crime rates are higher in Latin America than in the US, corresponding to a greater overall probability of observing a poor signal of police performance (i.e., an intercept shift). Second, we provide suggestive evidence that the translation of observed outcomes of police service into *perceived* signals varies by socioeconomic status. Here, we argue that the probability of perceiving a negative signal of police performance is *higher* for rich than

for poor citizens, holding fixed (latent) policing quality. This increases the exposure of the rich to signals of poor police performance, holding constant actual performance.[5] This mechanism is likely present in the US, but it should be less influential (and thereby harder to detect) given the lower rates of crime and insecurity.

This paper contributes to the extensive literature on institutional trust (Levi and Stoker, 2000; Citrin and Stoker, 2018). We build on the insight that trust is cognitive (Bhattacharya, Devinney, and Pillutla, 1998; Hardin, 2003) by using data to isolate different attributes of citizens' updating on police agent trustworthiness. We show strong evidence that citizens of all socioeconomic statuses update in a roughly Bayesian manner (on average) in response to *perceived* signals of low trustworthiness. Yet, we note that these signals of police performance are ultimately perceptions, which vary in the their fidelity to actual service provision. To the extent that this mapping between service provision and citizen perceptions varies in demographic features—like class—similar state outputs may beget very different levels of trust.

More broadly, our findings from the case of policing in Latin America suggest that relationships between citizens and bureaucratic service providers may well be more context-specific than recognized by the existing literature. The differences we document in the class-trust in the police gradient in the US versus Latin America suggest a broader need for the comparative study of citizen-service provider interactions across multiple cases to understand how these relationships vary from those observed in the US.

Our paper is primarily descriptive, responding to important calls for larger-scale quantitative description (Gerring, 2012; Munger, Guess, and Hargittai, 2021). Methodologically, we extend the use of expert forecasting from experiments (DellaVigna, Pope, and Vivalt, 2019; DellaVigna, Otis, and Vivalt, 2020: e.g.,) to reveal blindspots in expert beliefs. Substantively, our descriptive findings complement causal evidence from recent randomized interventions have explicitly sought

[5]We show that conditional on perceiving such a signal, poor and rich citizens update in the same direction by a similar magnitude. Thus, one need not be highly educated in order to rationally update on police trustworthiness from these signals, unlike arguments in other domains (Weitz-Shapiro and Winters, 2017).

to increase citizen trust in police (Blair et al., 2021; Karim, 2020; Peyton, Sierra-Arévalo, and Rand, 2019). our descriptive findings characterize status-quo or baseline levels of trust in police in Latin America. Because causal effects of policing interventions are ultimately differences from these baseline levels, a richer descriptive understanding of this important outcome has two benefits. First, we can better interpret the causal and welfare effects of interventions. Second, for policymakers, police forces, and scholars intent on increasing trust in police, we show that these interventions are less easily targetable (on the basis of income) than in the US context.

1 Trust in Police: Concept and Context

1.1 Concept of institutional trust

Social scientists have devoted substantial attention to the measurement of citizens' trust in government or governmental institutions (Citrin and Stoker, 2018; Levi and Stoker, 2000). Nevertheless, the definition of "trust"—and, indeed, the possibility of institutional trust—remains contested (PytlikZillig and Kimbrough, 2016). Building upon the conceptualizations of Hardin (2003) and Gerbasi and Cook (2009), we conceive of institutional trust as being *cognitive* and *relational*.

By cognitive, we mean that trust is fundamentally a belief. Bhattacharya, Devinney, and Pillutla (1998: p. 465) characterize trust as "an expectancy of positive (or nonnegative) outcomes one can receive based on the expected action of another party in an interaction characterized by uncertainty." In other words, individuals hold a belief about how the other party is likely to act or behave. In the context of policing, this could be an individual's expectation about how police will treat them or an expectation of whether and how police will respond to a tip about a crime or misdemeanor.

By relational, we emphasize interactions between two parties, citizens and police agents. This is implicit in the formulation of trust by Bhattacharya, Devinney, and Pillutla (1998). Within this conception of trust, beliefs can be changed (updated) by observation of the other party's behavior. In the context of citizen trust in police, thus, when citizens observe police behavior, they gain information about police trustworthiness. This signal can be used to update a citizen's belief about

how the police might behave toward them in subsequent encounters. An unsavory encounter with a police agent, for example, can lead citizens to negatively update about the trustworthiness of police, in general, thereby reducing trust in police.

Hardin (2003) was skeptical of whether institutional trust is possible, largely because of limits to citizens' ability to form relationships with an institution. Whereas citizens may be able to interact with individual police agents, Hardin (2003) argues, it is nonstandard to think of an institution as an actor with whom these interactions might take place. We argue that interactions/relationships between individual citizens and individual police agents shape trust in police. In this context, citizens can hold beliefs about whether an individual officer is trustworthy. Moreover, they can make assessments about the share of trustworthy officers on a police force (or in a given police unit). Institutional trust is, therefore, both cognitive and relational.

It is useful to clarify two alternatives distinct from our concept of institutional trust. First, some authors view or evaluate political trust as a trait (e.g., Ojeda, 2016; Mondak et al., 2011). Individuals from different groups may have different baseline propensities to trust other individuals or agents of institutions. If this were the case, environmental or genetic traits could confound the relationship between social class and trust. Alternatively, social/political trust may facilitate economic advancement, thereby increasing an individual's social class and generating a positive association between the two measures (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 1993). Second, individuals undoubtedly hold varying preferences over what police should do or how the institution should function. The accounts of motivated reasoning or inference proposed by Kunda (1987) and Taber and Lodge (2006) suggest that these preferences may affect how citizens form beliefs about police trustworthiness. While it is, of course, possible that preferences condition updating processes (Little, Schnakenberg, and Turner, 2022), we contend that experiences with the police—good or bad—shape future expectations about police agents in the direction of the signal.

1.2 Policing and class in Latin America

Despite Latin America's regional turn towards democracy, police forces routinely engage in corrupt and abusive behavior (Macaulay, 2012; Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo, 2020; Johnson,

Mendelson Forman, and Bliss, 2012). Citizens' opinions of police in the region tend to be by and large negative (Malone and Dammert, 2021; Cao and Zhao, 2005). Yet, experiences with police are far from uniform: research indicates that police forces can behave repressively toward lower-income individuals and individuals from marginalized groups while being responsive to the demands of privileged community members (González and Mayka, 2022; González, 2020). Additionally, regional scholars have pointed out bias against poor, indigenous, and other marginalized communities in the region's justice systems that lingers even after recent reforms (O'Donnell, 1999; Brinks, 2007, 2019).

To our knowledge, no study has systematically analyzed how support for police covaries with class across Latin American countries. Nevertheless, existing accounts support a common premise: socioeconomic status predicts an individual's exposure to policing or the outcomes of policing. These distinct experiences with police agents or crime outcomes should provide different opportunities for learning about the trustworthiness of the police.

2 Research design

Our primary research question is descriptive: How does trust in police vary in social class? Accordingly, we estimate the correlation between measures of socioeconomic status and reported trust in police. We view these correlations as important in characterizing citizen-police relationships in Latin America and elsewhere.

This quantity—correlation between socioeconomic status and trust—is likely to capture information relevant to interactions between citizens and police. Levels of trust are not an outwardly observed characteristic, but individuals' level of trust in the police predicts at least some citizen behaviors toward the police. For example, Hanson, Kronick, and Slough (2024) show that citizen behavior toward police—in the context of community-police meetings—does vary in levels of trust in Medellín, Colombia. In the context of interactions with citizens, it is plausible that police officers may want to ascertain a citizen's level of trust when deciding how to engage. Because beliefs are unobserved, police may use observable characteristics to infer a citizen's trust and their likely

behavior, a form of statistical discrimination (Phelps, 1972). In contrast to levels of trust, in Latin America, socioeconomic status is typically easily observable through an individual's dress, way of speaking, comportment, and surroundings (Britto Ruiz and Ordóñez Valverde, 2005; Sabatini, 2006; Villarreal, 2010).

2.1 Data

Our principal data source is LAPOP's AmericasBarometer (LAPOP, 2022). The sample incorporates the responses of 236,892 individuals collected from 146 unique surveys in 20 Latin American countries between 2004 and 2019. Each survey round was designed to be representative of the country's voting-age population that year. Table A1 lists the years and countries where the surveys were collected.

We use respondents' self-reported income bracket to measure socioeconomic status or class. We supplement this measure with individuals' educational attainment in years of schooling to assuage concerns that systematic misreporting of income might drive any results. In each round, respondents are asked about their trust in several institutions. We measure trust in the police with the question "To what extent do you trust the Police?" Responses range from 1 (not at all) to 7 (a lot).[6]

We complement the (repeated) cross-sectional data from LAPOP with three panel surveys that measure trust in police: a five-wave nationally representative survey from Chile (COES, 2022), a two-wave representative survey from Medellín, Colombia conducted in 2018 and 2019 (Hanson, Kronick, and Slough, 2024), and a quarterly representative rolling panel from Mexican cities spanning 2017-2023 (INEGI, 2024). While these surveys cover just three settings (Chile, Medellín, and Mexico, respectively), they allow us to examine within-individual variation over time.[7] We focus on individual variation in exposure to poor police service provision—crime victimization, police corruption, and perceived insecurity.

[6]We report all survey questions and response scales in Table A5.

[7]While other existing longitudinal surveys cover other Latin American countries, we are unaware of others that include repeated questions about policing.

2.2 Estimation

We use ordinary least squares (OLS) to estimate the correlation between trust in police and socioeconomic status, as detailed in Equation 1. We regress individual i's self-reported trust in the police, Trust_i, on a self-reported measure of class (income or education), Class_i. For the purpose of comparing across countries and survey waves, we standardize both variables within country-year to account. To denote standardized versions of these variables, we use the superscript Z. To estimate the correlation between trust in police and socioeconomic status, we estimate (1) using OLS and cluster standard errors at the level of each survey's primary sampling unit. Because the dependent and the independent variables are standardized, β is the estimator of the correlation coefficient.

$$\text{Trust}_i^Z = \alpha + \beta \text{Class}_i^Z + \epsilon_i \tag{1}$$

Correlation summarizes a linear relationship. We allow for non-linearities in the relationship between trust and socioeconomic status by binning measures of socioeconomic status by decile and further estimating the following equation by OLS:

$$\text{Trust}_i = \sum_{d=1}^{10} \beta_d \mathbb{I}[\text{Class}_i = d] + \epsilon_i \tag{2}$$

In this expression, the β_d's are estimators of the average level of reported trust in police by respondents in each decile d.

Finally, when considering explanations for observed patterns of trust in police, we examine how individual experiences of police abuse or poor security outputs affect trust in police (both unconditionally and by a respondent's socioeconomic class). To do so, we rely on the panel surveys at the individual level to estimate the average treatment effect on the treated (ATT). We report estimates from standard two-way fixed effects estimators to estimate the ATT. We denote a binary observation of poor performance $S_{it} \in \{0, 1\}$ and estimate:

$$\text{Trust}_{it} = \delta S_{it} + \gamma_t + \psi_i + \epsilon_{it}, \tag{3}$$

where γ_t and ψ_i are time and unit fixed effects, respectively. In this specification, δ is our estimator of the ATT. We also employ a more general fixed effects counterfactual estimator proposed by Liu, Wang, and Xu (2022) to ensure robustness of our ATT estimates to a variety of weighting problems that arise with two-way fixed effects estimators.

3 Baseline results

We present estimates of the correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in the police for the entire pooled sample of Latin American respondents in Figure 1. In addition, we also plot country-specific correlations and include the US-specific correlation as a benchmark. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the overall pooled correlation and all but one country-specific result are close to zero and slightly negative. The estimated correlation for the pooled Latin American sample is -0.053 [95% CI: -0.059, -0.046] when class is operationalized as income and -0.084 [95% CI: -0.089, -0.078] when we use education as a proxy. El Salvador has the most negative country-specific correlation, with an estimated correlation of -0.18 [95% CI: -0.20, -0.-0.16] when class is operationalized as education. For the rest of the countries, the correlation oscillates between -0.15 and .01. In the cases of Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, and Peru, at least one correlation estimate is not statistically distinguishable from zero. Conversely, the estimated correlation for the US is 0.12 [95% CI: 0.09, 0.15] when class is operationalized as income and 0.025 [95% CI: 0.002, 0.05] when we use education as a proxy.

Correlation measures a linear relationship. Do the weak, negative correlations reported in Figure 1 mask a stronger, non-monotonic relationship between socioeconomic status and self-reported trust in the police? To explore the possibility, we divide respondents into class deciles and plot the mean level of trust in the police for the members of each decile. As before, we compute the means for the entire pooled sample and each country. Figure 2 reveals no evidence of a non-monotonic relationship between the two variables: the mean levels of trust are stable or decreasing only slightly in income or education in all countries and the pooled sample.

One limitation of our analysis is that we measure class using self-reported education and in-

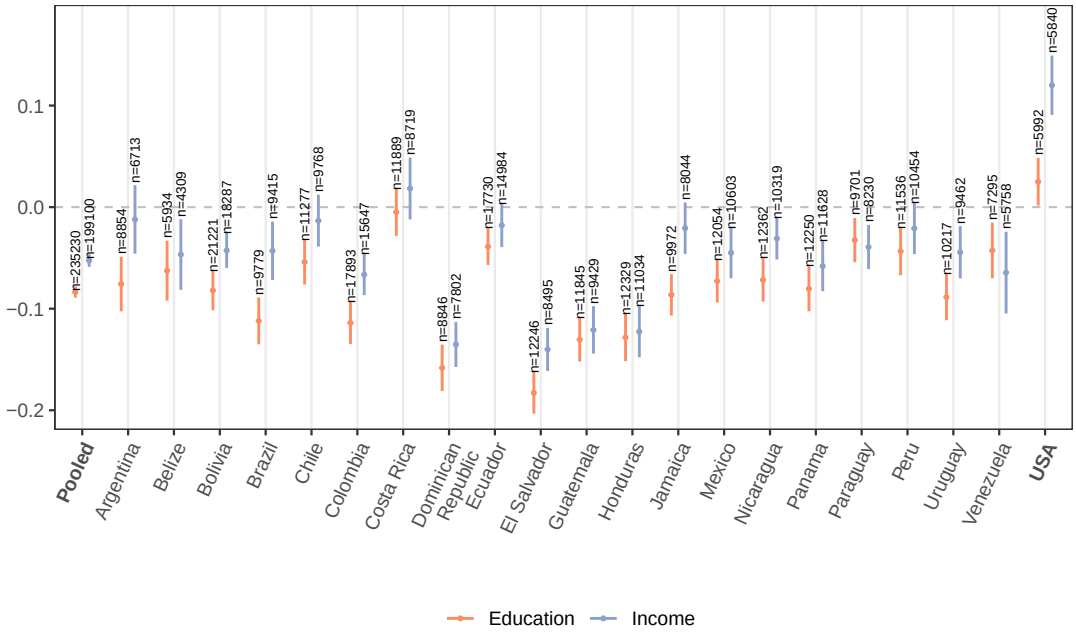

Figure 1: Correlation between LAPOP respondents' self-reported trust in police and two class measures: income (in blue) and education (in orange).

come measures, which are indirect measures of socioeconomic status. Three alternative measures may be preferable for different purposes. First, some countries have administrative classifications of class. For example, in Colombia, dwellings are categorized by *estrato* (socioeconomic stratum) to prorate public utility charges. Similarly, based on census data, the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) classifies primary sampling units of dwellings into sociodemographic *estratos*. Drawing upon the original panel survey in Medellín, we estimate a correlation between dwelling *estrato* and trust in the police of 0.068 [95% CI: 0.029, 0.107]. We note, however, that the sample is not representative of Colombia and is not weighted to the population of Medellín. Nevertheless, this figure is substantially lower than the correlation between income and trust in police that we estimate from US data. The correlation estimated using the Mexican panel data is similar to the LAPOP estimates based on self-reported education and income: -0.073 [95% CI: -0.093, -.052] and -0.045, [95% CI: -0.070, -.020], respectively.

Second, citizens may identify with a higher or lower class than their income or education would suggest. From panel data in Chile, in which class identification is measured subjectively,

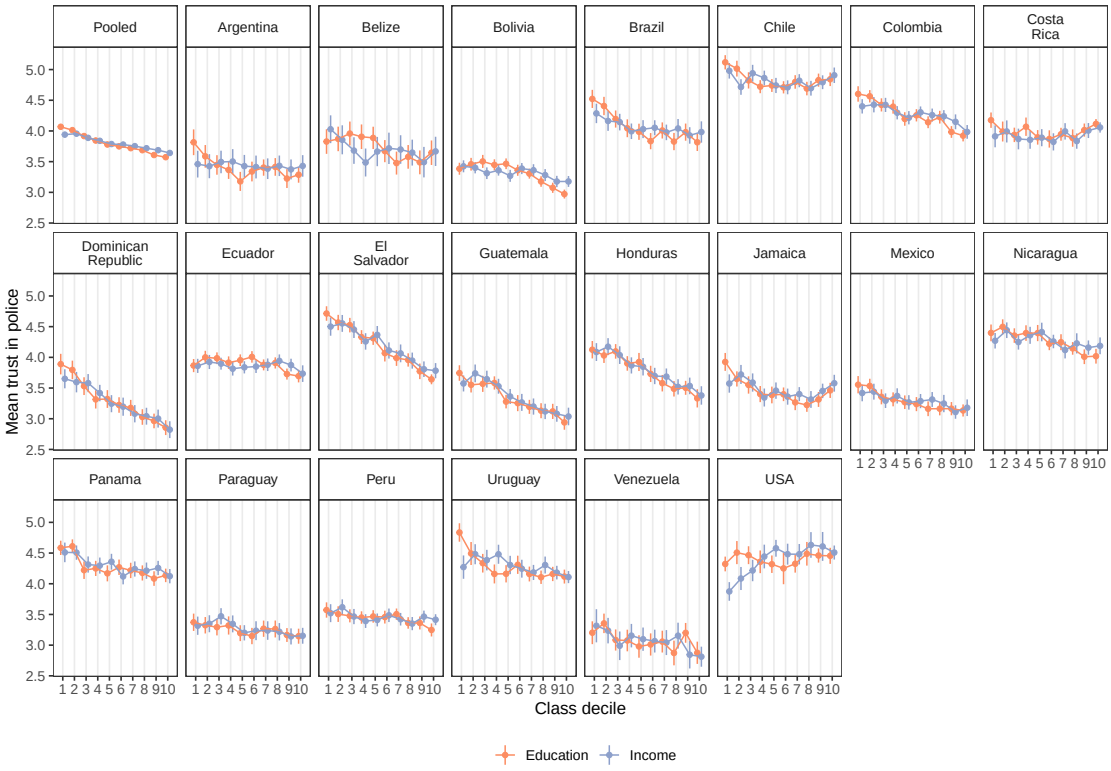

Figure 2: Mean trust in the police on a seven point scale (1-7) by decile of income (in blue) and education (in orange).

we estimate a correlation of 0.038 (95% CI: [0.003, 0.073]) between self-identified class and trust in police. Again, this correlation remains substantially weaker than correlations between class and trust in police observed in the US.

Third, some researchers argue that expenditure-based economic status indicators might be more accurate than measures based on self-reported income. We follow Córdova (2009) and construct a wealth index using a battery of LAPOP questions measuring possession of household assets. Appendix A2.4 details the construction of this index and reports consistent pooled and country-specific results in Figure A2. However, the index is difficult to substantively interpret in a repeated cross-section, where factor loadings vary substantially (and non-monotonically) across time and between countries (see Figures A3 and A4). For this reason, we prefer analyses based on self-reported income and education. Overall, these ancillary surveys suggest that our findings from the widely available LAPOP proxies of class do not substantially mislead relative to plausible alternative measures.

One may be concerned that respondents of different socio-economic classes interpret questions about "trust in police" in different ways, and that resultant measurement error would bias our estimates of this correlation. We have only one measure of trust in police from the LAPOP surveys, so we assess this possibility by considering the correlation between socio-economic status and trust in *other* entities. If, for example, poor respondents were simply more prone to express trust in any entity (e.g., the president or other community members), we would expect to observe negative correlations for all class-trust pairings. This is not the case. Figure A9 shows a mix and of positive and negative correlations between class measures and trust in various entities. Moreover, comparing these correlations to those from the US shows that trust in police is the only trust measure for which the sign of this correlation is both: (1) statistically distinguishable from zero in the US and Latin America; and (2) takes different signs in the US and Latin America.[8] These comparisons suggest that differences in the correlation between trust in the police and class reflect differences

[8]The correlation between education and trust in elections is negative (and significant) in Latin America but positive (and significant) in the US. However, this finding is not robust to the income-based measure of class.

in the relationship between citizens and police across socioeconomic classes in Latin America as opposed to a systematic difference between class and institutional trust more broadly or a spurious relationship driven by measurment error.

4 Expert Forecasts

The finding that trust in the police covaries weakly and, in general, negatively with socioeconomic status in Latin America was surprising to us. We conducted an expert forecast elicitation with two samples to assess whether our findings were similarly surprising to other experts. Expert forecasts are increasingly used to measure experts' prior beliefs about quantities of interest in social science research (DellaVigna, Pope, and Vivalt, 2019).

Our two expert samples are (i) scholars of Latin American politics and (ii) activists working on issues of human rights and policing. We used a recent program of a Latin American politics conference known for the participation of scholars from all regions as our sample frame for the academic sample. While the scholars mantain varied research portfolios, a subset of these researchers study crime and policing in the region, including some who actively conduct evaluations of policing interventions (typically with local police partners). To assemble the sampling frame of activists, one of the authors identified a network of activists through past non-academic employment related to policing in Mexico. All participants were invited to share the survey with other interested colleagues and students. In sum, we collected 121 country-level forecasts from 101 unique experts. Table A9 in the Appendix shows the count of forecasts by country and respondent type. Appendix A6.1 details ethical considerations relevant to this data collection.

We asked experts to provide at least one *forecast* for one country in Latin America (or the region as a whole). A forecast consists of three quantities: mean levels of trust—per the LAPOP survey question—at the 10th, 50th, and 90th percentiles of household income. As depicted in Figure A11, our forecasting instrument contextualized the income range by reporting average income at each level. Respondents had access to the text of relevant LAPOP questions in English and Spanish.

Figure 3 shows that, on average, expert respondents expected a positive correlation between

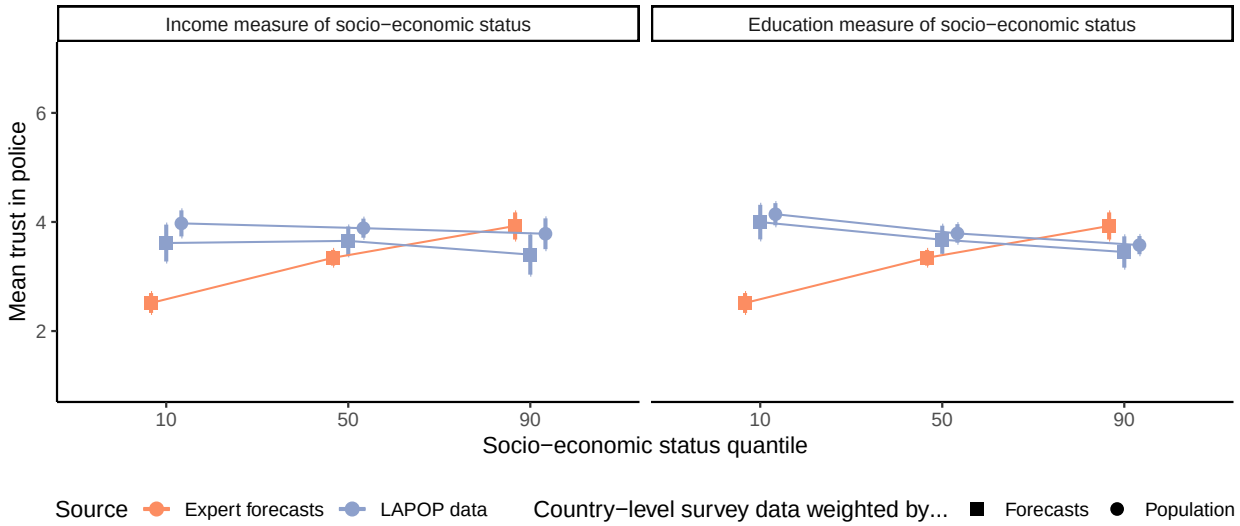

Figure 3: Divergence between average forecasts (in orange) and corresponding survey-based measures (in blue).

socioeconomic status and trust in police. The average expert forecast is monotonically increasing from 2.51 [95% CI: 2.32, 2.69] for citizens in the first decile of income to 3.34 [95% CI: 3.20, 3.49] for citizens of median income to 3.93 [95% CI: 3.68, 4.18] for citizens in the tenth decile of income. Because the forecast is an average over country-level forecasts, we report two measures from the survey data, drawn in blue. First, we weight country-level surveys by the prevalence of each country in the forecasts to ensure that the frequency with which countries are forecasted does not drive the divergence. We also weigh the survey data by each country's population, offering a more interpretable regional average. Both weighting schemes yield similar flat or slightly negative relationships between socioeconomic status and trust in police, starkly contrasting with the forecasts. The right panel of the graph shows that using education rather than self-reported income to measure class in the LAPOP survey data does not change our qualitative finding that the positive relationship between income and crime anticipated by experts—including us—is not borne out in the data.

Two further disaggregations of the forecast data help to clarify experts' expectations. First, Figure 4 disaggregates four types of forecasts. As in Figure 3, the modal prediction suggested a *positive* relationship between socioeconomic status and trust in police. Additionally, 30% of

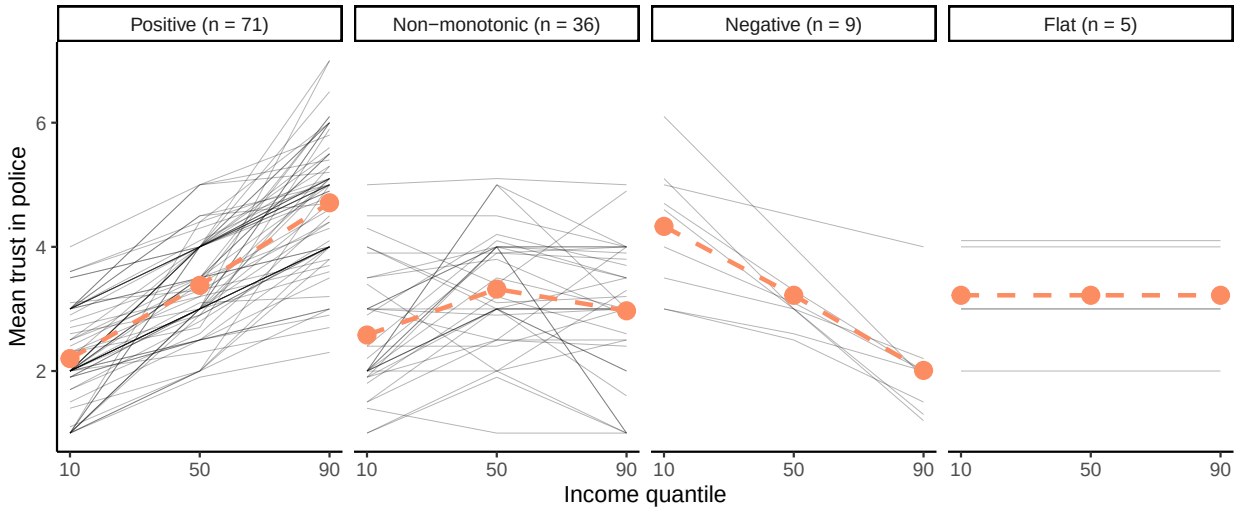

Figure 4: Classification of individual forecasts. Thin lines each represent individual forecasts. The points and dashed lines represent averages for each type of forecast.

forecasts posited a non-monotonic relationship. On balance, these forecasts suggested that a citizen with a median household income should trust the police more than the rich or the poor. Just 7.5% and 4% of forecasts posited a negative or flat relationship, respectively. Second, Figure A13 in the Appendix shows that the prediction of a positive relationship between income and trust in police is not specific to any country: we observe a similar pattern in all countries for which we have ≥ 8 predictions: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico.

These forecasts help us to identify several blindspots in our collective understanding of trust in police in Latin America. First, Figure 3 reveals that, in the aggregate, experts were more accurate in their assessment of average trust in police among the middle class (50th percentile) and rich. The underestimation of trust in police among poor Latin Americans largely drives errors in expert beliefs. This pattern suggests a need for a better understanding of interactions between poor citizens and police in the region. Second, to the extent that interventions like community policing aim to build trust in police as a primary objective (e.g., Blair et al., 2021), expert beliefs would suggest that interventions should be targeted to poor communities to maximize the possibility to increase trust in police. Instead, survey data shows that these interventions are difficult to target on the basis of socioeconomic status and that if such interventions are effective, there is (slightly) more room

to increase trust in police among the rich, not the poor.

5 Trust and experiences with police

To this point, we have established that trust in police is generally weakly and negatively correlated with socioeconomic status in Latin America. Within our cognitive conceptualization of trust, citizen trust in police should evolve through observation of police behavior or security outputs. As such, our results suggest that the rich observe worse policing outcomes in Latin America than the poor. Such a pattern runs contrary to regional experts' expectations and conventional wisdom based on evidence from the US. We now seek to explain this discrepancy between expectations and empirical findings. To that end, we examine additional data on respondent experiences with police and perceptions of security outcomes.

5.1 Security-socioeconomic-status gradient

Our concept of trust in police centers on citizens updating their beliefs about police trustworthiness based on their experience with or observation of policing outcomes. Within this framework, a negative correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police implies wealthier respondents perceive worse policing outcomes than their poorer co-citizens. To test, we identify one experience—police solicitation of bribes (corruption)—and two policing outcomes —crime victimization and perceptions of safety—in the survey data. We examine the rate at which respondents of different socioeconomic classes report observing these signals of poor police performance. While the experiences of crime victimization and feeling "unsafe" do not necessarily require active interaction with police, they at least imply that police failed to prevent crime or inspire a feeling of security.

We measure self-reported crime victimization and experiences with police using survey data. The use of survey data is often preferred to official crime statistics given selective reporting to the police (Skogan, 1976; Cantor and Lynch, 2000), and for comparative research where legal definitions of crimes vary (Van Dijk, 2015).[9] Yet, there are some potential concerns with using such

[9]Beyond individual incentives for reporting, Luna and Soifer (2017) point to the role of expec-

self-reports. First, with respect to the accuracy of self-reported crime victimization, in Figure A16, we show that self-reported victimization correlates positively with the homicide rate using administrative microdata from Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. This correspondence is reassuring because homicide is less likely to go unreported than other crimes (World Health Organization, 2014: p. 20). Second, our crime victimization measures—especially from the cross-sectional surveys—do not permit analysis of the rate or consequences of serial victimization (Bateson, 2012). Thus, following a recommendation from Bateson (2012), we use the panel surveys to examine serial victimization, revealing that the effect of victimization on trust compounds, but that the marginal effect of each subsequent victimization experience decreases (Figure A17). Finally, one might be concerned about how victimization affects citizens' willingness to participate in a survey or modules about crime therein. To this end, we show extremely low missingness of crime-related questions in LAPOP (0.2% in the full sample) and that selection into subsequent waves of a panel survey does not substantially vary as a function of crime victimization at time t (Table A10).

In Figure 5, we plot the country-specific probability that a respondent from each socioeconomic decile reports each of the three binary signals of police trustworthiness, following (2). We use analogous LAPOP survey data from the US as a benchmark. The top three panels bin respondents into deciles using education, while the bottom three panels bin respondents using income.

The first column panels in Figure 5 show that, for most Latin American countries,[10] the probability of self-reported crime victimization increases in socioeconomic status. Conversely, in the case of the US, the probability of reporting crime victimization does not change with class when it is measured with education, and it slightly *decreases* when it is measured with income.[11] Overall, the figure shows that the probability of observing a negative signal of policing quality, be it police corruption, perceived insecurity, or crime victimization, is higher in Latin America than in the US,

tations of response times (a measure of capacity) as a potential constraint on reporting.

[10]The correlation between victimization and class is always positive and statistically distinguishable from zero at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level, except for correlation with income in Panama and Venezuela.

[11]The correlation between crime victimization and class in the US is negative and statistically distinguishable from zero at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level when class is measured with income, and positive but statistically indistinguishable from zero when measured with education.

on average.

Whether the presence of a positive relationship between class and victimization in Latin America is a surprising finding is unclear. Our evidence aligns with findings on urban property crime by Gaviria and Pagés (2002), albeit in a larger sample of urban/rural municipalities and with a broader range of crimes. On the other hand, poorer neighborhoods and municipalities are often distinguished by high rates of violent crime and insecurity. The panel survey from Medellín and administrative crime data for Medellín and Mexico City offer a potential reconciliation of these patterns by disaggregating crime victimization experience by type of crime. Figure A18 shows that self-reported exposure to violent crimes (especially homicide) is more common among the poor, whereas property crimes—which happen with higher frequency—disproportionately target the rich. Figures A20 and A19 show the same pattern when analyzing within-city variation in crime—as reported in administrative data—and income.

Despite the positive relationship between socioeconomic class and self-reported victimization identified in the data, the middle panels of Figure 5 suggest that the probability of feeling unsafe in a respondent's neighborhood generally does not vary in socioeconomic status for Latin American respondents. Conversely, for US respondents, the probability of feeling unsafe is uniformly lower than in any of the Latin American countries and decreases as socioeconomic class increases.

The right panels of Figure 5 report the probability that respondents recall a police officer asking for a bribe in the last year. The positive relationship suggests that the rich in Latin America are asked for bribes more frequently across countries and class measures. From the perspective of rent maximization, these are the citizens from whom police may be able to extract larger sums. Conversely, the probability of reporting bribe solicitation is near zero at each decile for US respondents. This measure, of course, does not rule out police corruption in the US, but it does suggest that individual experiences of bribe solicitation are highly circumscribed in the US.

5.2 Updating on policing outcomes

Latin American respondents report worse policing outcomes, on average, than US respondents. Additionally, survey evidence indicates wealthy Latin American respondents report being asked

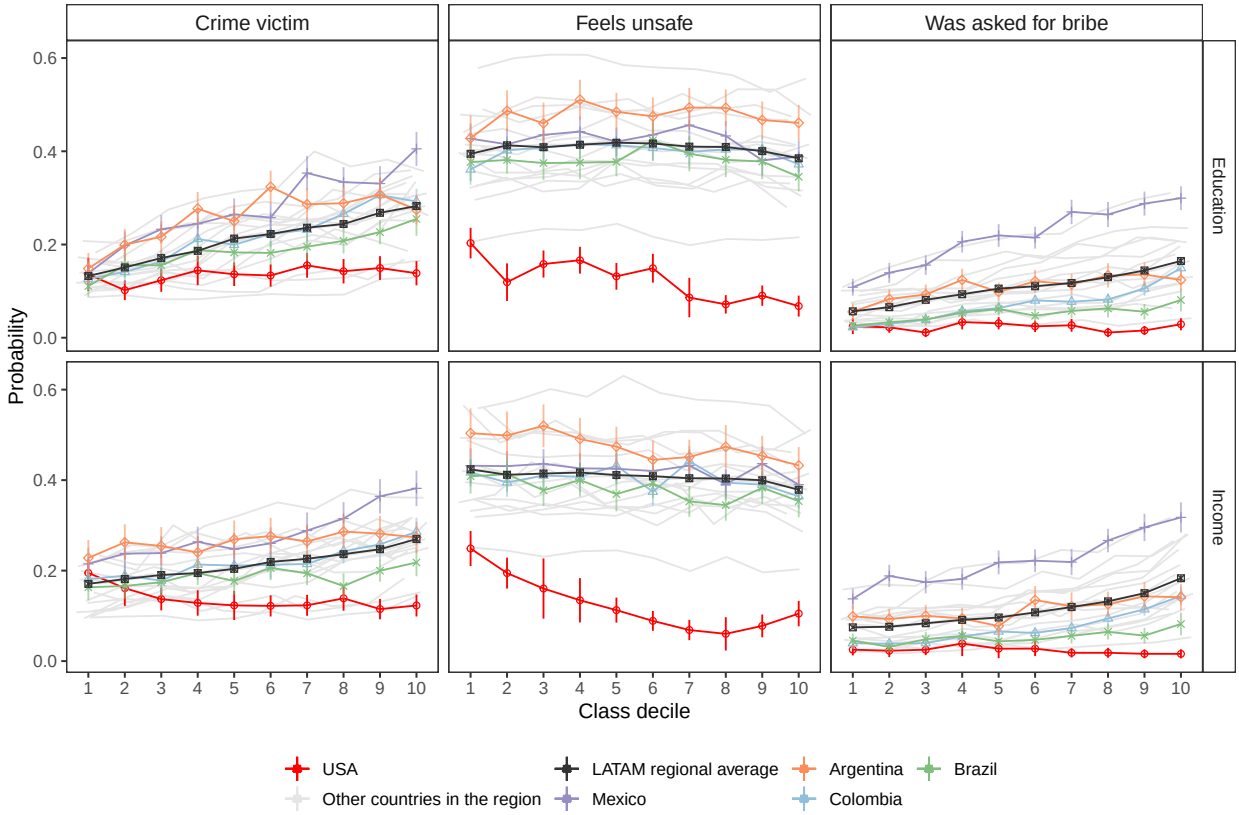

Figure 5: Lines show the estimated country-specific probability that a respondent from each education decile (top row) and income decile (bottom row) reports (from left to right): having been a victim of a crime during the past 12 months, perceiving the neighborhood as unsafe, and a police officer soliciting a bribe.

for bribes and being victims of crime at higher rates than the poor. We now show that exposure to signals of the police's untrustworthiness —police solicitation of bribes, crime victimization, and perceptions of safety— is, in fact, associated with the level of trust reported.

Figure 6 plots the predicted level of trust in the police as a function of our three signals (denoted S_i) of police trustworthiness: (i) crime victimization in the past 12 months (left), (ii) feeling "unsafe" in their neighborhood (center), and (iii) whether a police officer asked for a bribe during the past 12 months (right). In each panel, the black line plots the mean level of trust by decile of socioeconomic status across the full sample. This line is very similar across all three vertical panels: the only (slight) differences come from variation in the presence of questions measuring the aforementioned signals across country-year survey waves. For each measure of socioeconomic status (the horizontal panels), trust decreases slightly and monotonically as income increases. We note that these means can be additively decomposed as follows:

$$E[\text{Trust}_i] = E[S_i = 1]E[\text{Trust}_i|S_i = 1] + E[S_i = 0]E[\text{Trust}_i|S_i = 0] \tag{4}$$

The orange and blue points and lines report our estimates of the conditional expectations in (4). The blue line ($E[\text{Trust}|S_i = 1]$) consistently falls below the orange line ($E[\text{Trust}|S_i = 0]$). This is consistent with our expectations—and the conventional wisdom—that poor security outcomes or treatment by police reduce trust in police. Importantly we see evidence consistent with updating—the difference in the orange and blue lines—for all deciles of socioeconomic status. The idea that poor treatment or outcomes reduce trust is consistent with many existing theoretical and empirical accounts of trust in government or government institutions (Hardin, 2003; Levi and Stoker, 2000). We do not find evidence that poor, middle-class, and rich Latin Americans update according to fundamentally different cognitive processes. This analysis does not, for example, support claims that citizen rationality (in this domain) varies in education or socioeconomic status.

The distance between the black lines and the orange/blue lines reflects the share of respondents that experience a given signal (e.g., $E[S_i = 1]$ from (4)). We see that crime victimization and especially bribe solicitation are *rare* at all levels of socioeconomic status (consistent with Figure

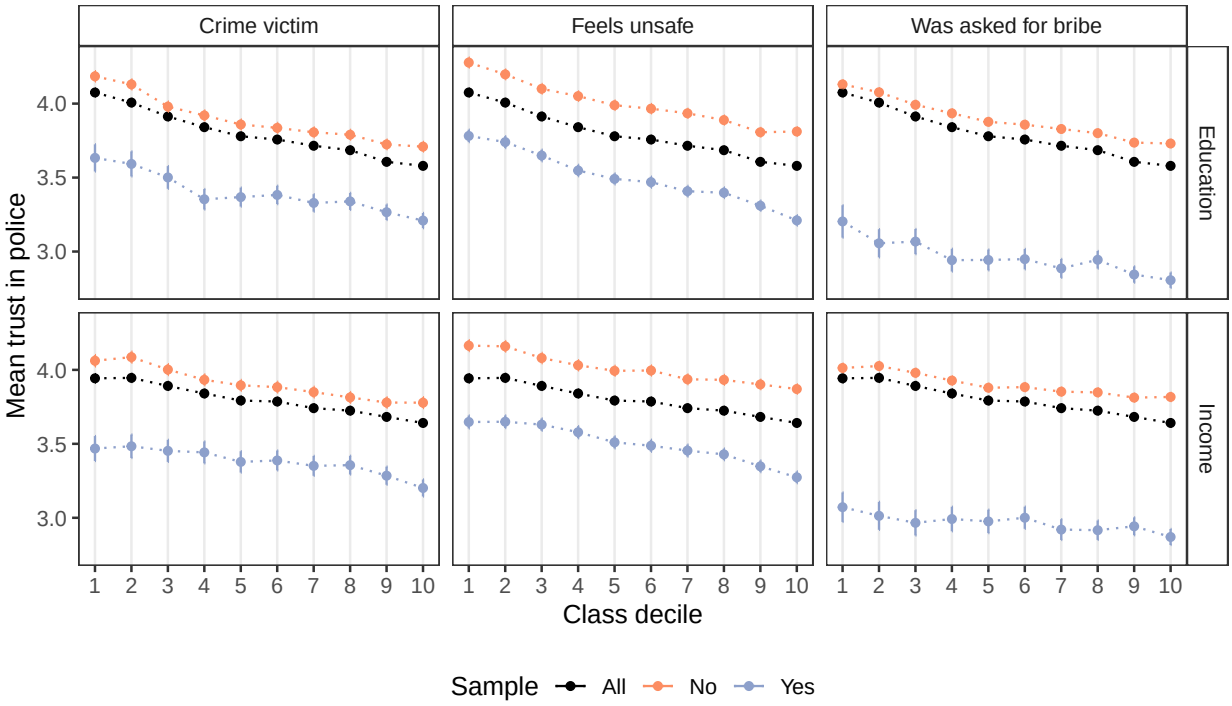

Figure 6: Predicted level of trust in police, by class decile, as a function of the following binary signals: crime victimization in the past 12 months (first panel), feeling unsafe in their neighborhood (second panel), and a police officer asked for a bribe during the past 12 months (third panel). The model was fit on pooled data from all country-waves.

5). This is evident because the black line is much closer to the orange line, the conditional means for citizens who did not observe the signal in the last year. Indeed, in the full sample, only 21.0% and 10.6% of respondents reported crime victimization or bribe solicitation in the last year, respectively. The correlations in Figure 5 suggest that these outcomes of policing are increasing in socioeconomic status, which is evident from the growing distance between the black and orange lines as socioeconomic status increases. For example, moving from the lowest to the highest decile of education corresponds to (reported) increases from 13.5% to 28.1% in crime victimization and from 5.7% to 16.3% in bribe solicitation. While these differences in exposure to poor police behavior do increase the (negative) gradient of socioeconomic status and trust in police by pulling the black line toward the blue line, we note that these differences in isolation do not account for the negative gradient of the orange and blue lines.

5.3 Updating on policing outcomes: panel evidence

Our language in this section has veered closer to causal language. Ideally, we would describe the updating in Figure 6 as the *effect* of different signals of police trustworthiness on trust in police at different income levels. To isolate the effect of such signals on trust in police, exposure to policing outcomes should be (conditionally) orthogonal to individuals' trust in police. While we lack a research design capable of supporting such an inference with the LAPOP data, the panel surveys from Mexico, Medellín, and Chile permit estimation of average treatment effects on the treated (ATTs) for several closely related signals. We employ a two-way fixed-effect estimator and the fixed-effect counterfactual estimator proposed by Liu, Wang, and Xu (2022). We report the ATT that weights respondents (units) equally from the latter. As in Figure 6, these signals are self-reported, though the questions vary slightly (as we report in Table A5).

These analyses account for all time-invariant individual-level characteristics related to exposure to signals about police and heterogeneous levels of trust in the police. Under the assumption that there are no individual-level time-varying confounders, the estimated ATTs capture the effect of poor policing signals on average trust in the police for the subset of individuals exposed to crime. Thus, this design accounts for heterogeneous feelings of insecurity, distaste for corruption,

or aversion to violence, provided they do not systematically change within individuals across periods. Conversely, the estimated ATTs would be biased if, for example, individuals changed their behavior in ways that would lead to exposure to negative policing signals and less trust in police across different survey waves.

In Figure 7, we compare the estimated ATTs to associations (analogous to Figure 6) for the full sample of respondents. We show that all the estimated ATTs are significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level and signed in the same direction as in the cross-sectional analyses from the Mexico, Medellín, Chile, and LAPOP samples: feeling unsafe, crime victimization, and viewing the police as corrupt reduces trust in police. However, the magnitudes of the ATTs relative to the pooled cross-sectional associations are reduced by 49-81%. This suggests that the magnitude of findings in Figure 6 is likely overstated, but that updating based on poor security outcomes or abusive interactions with police leads to lower trust in police. In Figure A21, we show that estimated ATTs are very similar for respondents of different socio-economic statuses.[12]

We assess the plausibility of the assumption of no time-varying individual-level confounders with several placebo outcomes tests (Eggers, Tuñón, and Dafoe, 2024). To do so, we examine whether respondents' self-reported trust in *other* institutions beyond the police responds to criminal victimization. If victimization is indeed a signal of police trustworthiness from which citizens learn and no time-varying individual-level confounders are present, trust in other institutions should not respond to victimization. To test, we use the panel data from Medellín and estimate the association, the TWFE, and fixed effects counterfactual estimator proposed by Liu, Wang, and Xu (2022) between trust in other institutions and victimization. We report the results in Figure A8 in the Appendix. Reassuringly, the results from both the TWFE estimator and the fixed effects counterfactual estimator show that the only statistically significant decrease in trust after victimization is that of trust in police (as reported in Figure 7). Moreover, the decrease that we observe in trust in police is larger in magnitude than any of the other measures of trust. This placebo test does not

[12]We use the Mexican panel data for this test because it has a much larger sample size than the other panels, increasing our ability to detect differential updating by social class (by comparing conditional ATTs).

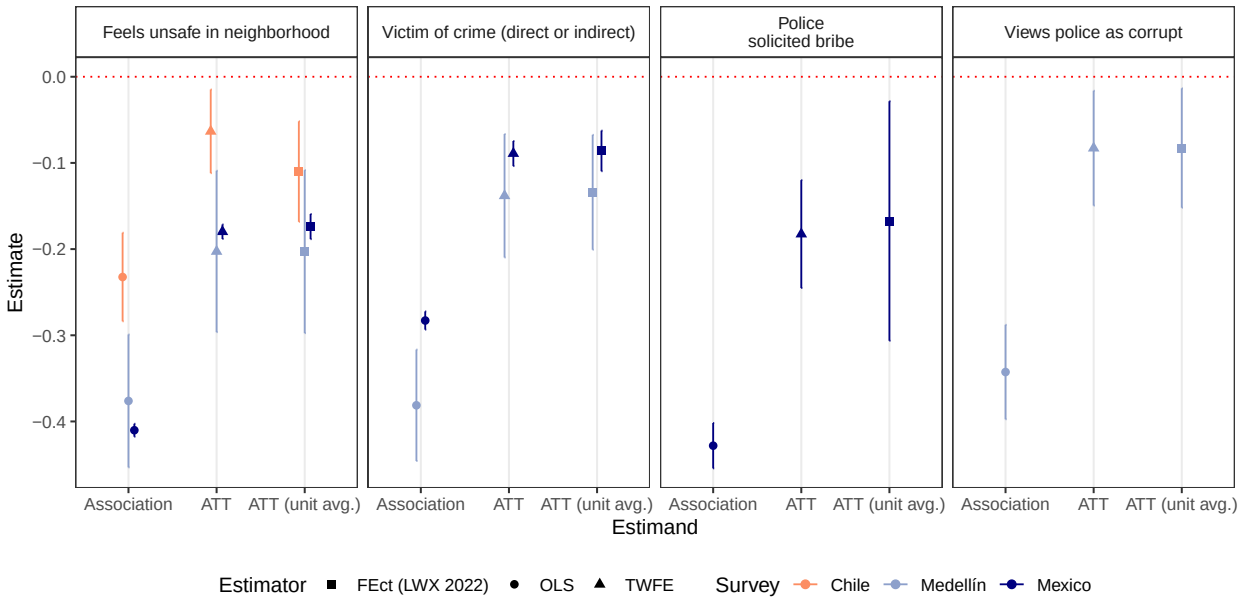

Figure 7: Estimates of pooled associations (across waves) to estimates of the average treatment effect (ATT) on the treated of signals analogous to those in Figure 6. LWX (2022) indicates the fixed effects counterfactual estimator proposed by Liu, Wang, and Xu (2022). 95% confidence intervals are calculated on standard errors clustered at the primary sampling unit.

provide evidence against our assumption of no time-varying individual-level confounders.

These results help clarify the negative correlation between trust and socioeconomic status observed in Latin America, in contrast to the US. Overall, wealthier respondents report experiencing worse policing quality than the region's poor. While the most egregious police abuses and security failures disproportionately affect poor Latin Americans (González, 2020; Magaloni and Rodriguez, 2020), these events are less frequent than more quotidian signals of policing failures.

5.4 Translating security outcomes into signals

Our findings suggest that the surprising weak-to-negative correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police stems, in part, from wealthier respondents' higher rate of reporting signals of bad policing: crime, insecurity, and police corruption. Conventional wisdom—as expressed by forecasters—did not anticipate that the rich would express higher levels of insecurity/victimization than the poor. We argue that these expectations can be reconciled with our findings by considering how policing outputs are translated into informational signals about police trustworthiness.

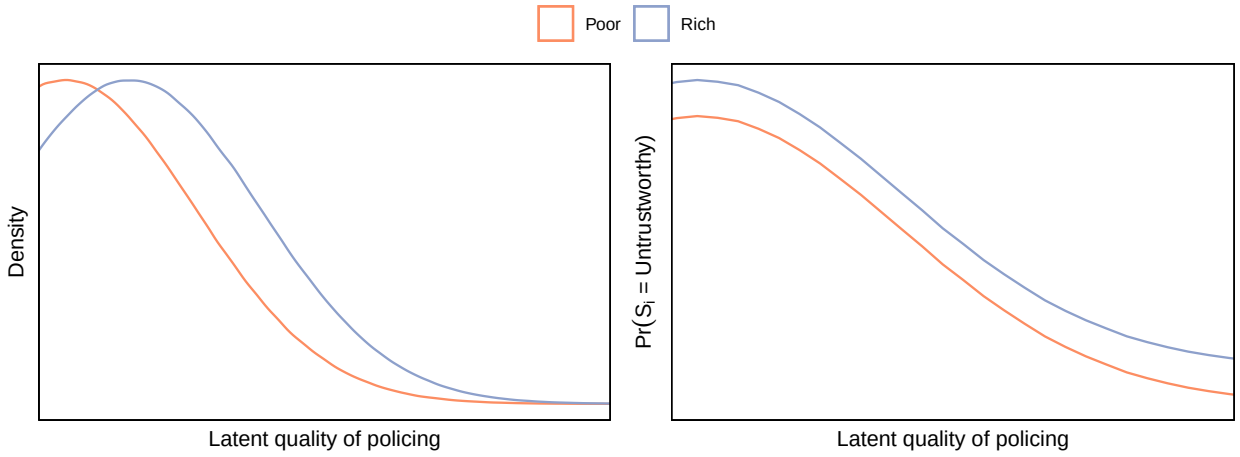

Figure 8: Illustration of how different latent levels of policing might translate into observed signals.

We contend that the underlying quality of policing is distinct from the signals that citizens observe, use, and ultimately report on public opinion surveys. Figure 8 considers how a latent (unobserved) quality of policing may translate into signals. In the left panel, we consider that the quality of policing may vary for citizens of different socioeconomic classes. The densities are hypothetical but reflect conventional wisdom that the quality of policing is better for rich citizens than poor citizens. In this case, we would expect that differences in police quality that favor the rich *increase* the correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police.

Yet, this conventional wisdom is only one part of the story. We argue that citizens of different socioeconomic statuses may translate the quality of policing into signals of police trustworthiness differently. Specifically, we argue that the rich are likely to apply a more stringent standard to policing. This means that for a given level of latent police quality, the rich are more likely to interpret a negative (or untrustworthy) signal. We provide a visualization of this argument in the right panel of Figure 8. The functional forms are purely illustrative. The core piece of our argument is that for a latent police quality q, $\Pr(S_i = \text{Untrustworthy} \mid q)$ is weakly higher for rich than poor citizens. This conceptualization could accommodate a stochastic mapping of police quality onto the binary signal (as in Figure 8) or a deterministic threshold (in q) in which the threshold for observing an untrustworthy signal is greater for the poor than for the rich. In either case, the translation of police quality into signals of police trustworthiness should *decrease* the correlation

between socioeconomic status and trust in police, potentially even making this correlation negative.

Given that both the difference in the distribution of policing quality and the difference in the probability of observing a poor signal of police performance, exemplified in Figure 8, are likely present in our survey data, decomposing the relative contributions of each on the overall class-trust gradient is impossible if we cannot directly observe policing quality. A body of existing research establishes the prevalence of crime underreporting in administrative data, implying that policing quality is not directly observable (e.g., Carr and Doleac, 2016; Jaitman and Anauati, 2020). Therefore, we proceed by offering indirect evidence in support of the right panel of Figure 8.

First, recall the disaggregation of offenses from Medellín in Figure A18 that suggests that rich respondents report higher levels of property crimes (e.g., theft), whereas poor respondents report higher levels of violent crimes (e.g., homicide). Additionally, administrative data on homicide rates—the crime that is least likely to go unreported—from Medellín and Mexico City suggest that violent crime is decreasing in neighborhood income (see Figures A19 and A20). Yet, our binary measure of *any* crime victimization in the last year suggests similar levels of updating despite differences in the profile and severity of crimes that target these populations. Further, respondents across socioeconomic strata express similar perceptions of the security situation, as shown in Figure 5. Thus, despite higher rates of (lethal) violence in poorer neighborhoods or communities, citizens express similar perceptions of safety in all neighborhoods. Both observations are consistent with rich citizens being more likely to observe poor signals of police trustworthiness holding fixed the underlying quality of policing.

Second, we consider measures of variation in trust in police by social class in Figure 9. This Figure shows that, across both proxies of socioeconomic status, the standard deviation of trust in police is *decreasing* in socioeconomic status. This pattern implies more variation in assessments of trust in police among poor than rich individuals. A similar pattern is evident in the US, though the standard deviation of trust in police is lower across the board than in most Latin American countries. This decreasing variance is consistent with a pattern of updating in which the rich

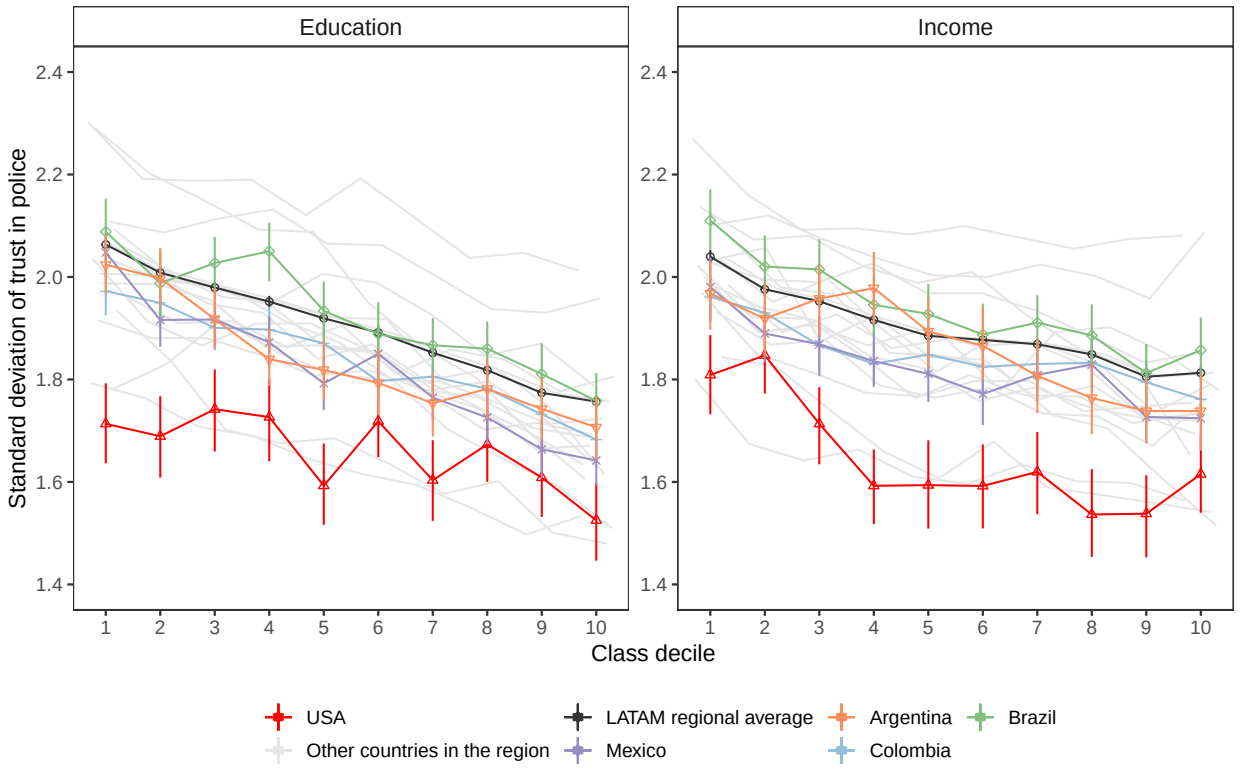

Figure 9: Figure shows the estimated standard deviation of trust in police by class decile for the country-specific and Latin America pooled samples and its the 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals.

translate bad experiences with the police into poor signals of police trustworthiness with greater frequency than the poor.

One alternative interpretation of Figure 9, distinct from our argument about variation in the probability of translating experience or observation into a signal of police quality, is that the rich have more frequent contact with the police than the poor and thus can observe signals about their trustworthiness more frequently. However, in Figure A23 and A24 in the Appendix, we show suggestive evidence that the frequency of interaction with police does not appreciably vary with social class. In data from Medellín—in which all respondents are urban–reported contact rates with patrol officers do not vary in class (*estrato*). LAPOP offers a less direct test of the frequency of contact through estimated response time. We see limited differences between poor and rich respondents, which vary substantially by country. As a result, our results in Figure 9 are unlikely

to be generated by variation in the frequency of exposure to the police alone.

Importantly, Figure 9 suggests that, as in Latin America, the rich in the US similarly translate experience into signals of police (non)-trustworthiness with higher probability. Why would we observe differences in the gradient of trust in police in social class between the US and Latin America? If this behavioral mechanism predisposes the rich to negatively update more frequently than the poor, why is trust in police increasing in socioeconomic status in the US?

Per Figure 8, there exist two countervailing forces that translate experiences of police quality into signals of police trustworthiness. First, oft-documented disparities suggest that racial minorities and poor citizens receive poorer quality policing. In line with conventional wisdom, these disparities should produce a positive correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police. It is possible that class-based differences in the quality of policing are greater in the US than in Latin America, though we cannot test this directly. Second, we believe that it is conceivable that differences in the quality of police translate into signals about police trustworthiness differently for poor and rich US residents, in line with the right panel of Figure 8. As in Latin America, this mechanism should decrease the correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police.

In comparing the rates of observed signals, Figure 5 suggests that policing outcomes are generally *better* in the US: crime victimization rates are lower for almost all citizens, more citizens feel secure in their neighborhoods, and bribe solicitation is nearly non-existent. If the quality of policing is generally higher in the US than in Latin America, fewer negative signals are perceived for citizens of all socioeconomic classes, attenuating the influence of the mechanism in the right panel of Figure 8, and supporting a stronger (positive) correlation between class and trust. To the extent that better signals (lower crime, less petty corruption) are more common, we should also see lower variance in trust in the US context, as in Figure 9.

Is the US exceptional for its positive correlation between class and trust in police, despite wealthier citizens' more stringent policing standards, or does this pattern generalize to similar contexts? We use the case of Canada to test for the possibility US exceptionalism. Figure A5 in the Appendix shows the results from analyses conducted with the Canadian LAPOP sample.

Compared to the US and Latin America, Canadian respondents feel safest and, similarly to US respondents, have a near-zero probability of reporting crime victimization and being asked for a bribe. Unsurprisingly, trust in police is higher in Canada across all class deciles than in other countries in the sample. Consistent with our mechanism, however, the standard deviation of trust in police is lower than in the US and Latin America and *decreasing* in socioeconomic status. The overall result of the two countervailing forces is a positive trust in police-SES gradient in Canada as in the United States.[13]

6 Alternative explanations

In this section, we consider whether alternative explanations premised on the measurement of trust in police and its alternative conceptualizations could also account for the empirical patterns observed in the data. We consider three classes of alternative explanations: measurement concerns, institutional trust as a trait, and departures from Bayesian updating on police trustworthiness

6.1 Artifacts of measurement

One possible cause of the divergence between experts' beliefs and what LAPOP survey data shows could be how class and trust are measured. Missingness may be correlated with socioeconomic status and trust in police.

We conduct a bounding exercise in Appendix A15 to assess the maximum extent to which missingness could bias our conclusions. To generate worst-case bounds, note that the correlation is bounded between -1 and 1. Since both trust in police and our measures of socioeconomic status are coded as Z-scores in (1), we can calculate these worst-case bounds for any respondent who reports at least one of the two measures. For this subset of missing observations (99.8% of all missing responses), we impute the observed Z-score for the missing Z-score (such that the imputed observation lies on the 45° line) to generate the worst-case upper bound. We then impute the negative of the observed Z-score (such that the imputed observation lies on the -45° line) to

[13]While the correlation between education and class is positive, only the correlation between self-reported income and trust in the police is statistically significant from zero at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level.

generate the worst-case lower bound. We estimate the correlation with all observed and imputed observations to generate worst-case bounds for the correlations reported in Figure 1. We estimate a worst-case bound using the education measure of [-0.11, -0.05], suggesting that missingness can have only a minimal effect on our conclusions. The worst-case bounds for the income measure of social class are [-0.22, 0.13]. Given the different degrees of missingness, the width of these bounds is unsurprising. Nevertheless, it is useful to note that this worst-case upper bound on trust in the Latin American case is approximately equal to the estimated correlation between social class and trust in the United States (reported above), showing how different these empirical patterns are in practice.

Alternatively, one may be worried about the semantic content of respondents' opinions. While LAPOP does not offer any form of validation outside of each cross-sectional survey, we again draw upon findings from the panel surveys, which all use very similar question wordings (see Table A5). In a field experiment associated with the Medellín panel, Hanson, Kronick, and Slough (2024) find that survey-measured baseline trust in police predicts subsequent engagement with police. Specifically, they show that respondents who report the top category of trust in the police (out of four categories) in a baseline survey are more than twice as likely to attend community-police meetings in beats assigned to treatment (18.4% vs. 8.4% of respondents). If survey measures of trust in the police were entirely random noise, we would not expect this alignment between reported trust and observed behavior. Further, trust in police in subsequent survey waves is highly (and positively) autocorrelated: 0.44 [95% CI: 0.42, 0.46] in Chilean panel data, 0.48 [95% CI: 0.44, 0.51] in Medellín, and 0.42 [95% CI: 0.41, 0.43] in Mexico. This offers further evidence that reported trust is not entirely noise.

6.2 Institutional trust as a trait

We have shown that in Latin America, trust in the police does not vary in class in the way most experts predicted. However, the alternative concepts of trust we described above may imply different predictions for the correlation between socioeconomic status and trust in police. If trust or propensity for trust were a trait rather than a relational expectation of police behavior, our findings

could be explained by a weakly negative correlation between this predisposition and class. We note that a negative correlation between trust predispositions and socioeconomic status would cut against notions that higher trust or social capital promotes economic advancement (e.g., Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 1993).

To examine the possibility that our results are driven by stable individual differences in LAPOP respondents' *trust propensities*, we estimate the intra-class correlation between each respondent's trust in multiple institutions: the army, political parties, the sitting president, the supreme court, the National Congress, and the police.[14] The intra-class correlation gives the ratio of between-respondent variance to the total variance in trust in these institutions. If the ICC were close to 1, it would suggest limited variance in an individual's assessment of multiple institutions, suggesting that institutional trust functions as a stable trait or predisposition. However, we do not observe a high ICC. Across all subjects in the LAPOP surveys, we estimate an ICC of .05 (95% CI: [.02,.23]). Disaggregating by country in Figure A10, we show similarly small estimates in all countries. It is, therefore, unlikely that a stable individual-level predisposition to trust that correlates with socioeconomic status can explain away our results.

6.3 Beliefs vs. Preferences

We have argued that trust should be characterized as a belief, but skeptical readers may argue that it is, instead, a manifestation of a preference about policing. Moreover, psychology and political psychology literature argues for the plausibility of an interaction between (prior) beliefs and preferences in the updating process (Kunda, 1987; Taber and Lodge, 2006; Little, Schnakenberg, and Turner, 2022). Specifically, the evolution of trust could be subject to motivated reasoning or directional motives, whereby trust becomes a function of an individual's prior preferences regarding policing (Ibid.). If this were the case, a respondent who prefers a policy that necessitates active police involvement may be motivated to hold more positive views of the police, thereby generating higher levels of trust in police, all else equal.

[14]Figure A9 in the Appendix shows the raw institution-specific correlations for the Latin American pooled sample and benchmarks it with the US.

To gauge if respondents' beliefs about police trustworthiness may be shaped by their preferences over policing practices or policy, we characterize the relationship between socioeconomic status, self-described support for tough-on-crime or *mano dura* policing, and trust in police. Two expectations are worth clarifying. First, a motivated-reasoning or inference account of updating on police trustworthiness holds that pro-*mano dura* individuals have higher trust in police. Second, given the generally negative (if weak) correlations between socioeconomic status and trust in police reported in Figure 1, we would expect that the poor hold more favorable views of *mano dura* policies. The figure counters both expectations.

First, the left panel in Figure A25 in the Appendix shows a close-to-zero and *positive* correlation between income and support for tough-on-crime policing across all countries except Argentina and Uruguay. This finding is in line with recent research showing there is a positive relationship between (i) crime victimization and support for *mano dura* (Visconti, 2020) and (ii) income and urban property crime victimization (Gaviria and Pagés, 2002). The right panel in Figure A25 in the Appendix shows the predicted level of trust in police by class decile as a function of respondents' self-reported support for *mano dura*. The black line plots the expected level of trust in the police for respondents in each decile, and the blue line plots the conditional expectation for respondents in that decile who support *mano dura*. In contrast, the orange line plots the conditional expectation for respondents in that decile who are *unsupportive* of *mano dura*. As we can see, the expected level of trust for individuals supportive of *mano dura* is lower than for individuals unsupportive of the measure across all income levels. Additionally, trust for both groups decreases at a similar rate. The results reveal the opposite empirical pattern we would expect to find if trust was largely driven by individuals' preferences, discounting the possibility of a motivated-reasoning explanation of our results.

7 Conclusion

Relationships and interactions between citizens and bureaucratic service providers help to shape access to and quality of services (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). Our findings about citizen

trust in police—an important case of these relationships—suggests that these relationships may be more context-dependent than is generally acknowledged. Specifically, conventional wisdom from the US-centric literature and Latin America experts alike suggest that racially and socioeconomically marginalized populations have lower trust in police than their advantaged counterparts. This apparent conventional wisdom has been extended to other contexts by police agencies that design interventions to increase trust (Blair et al., 2021) and, as our forecasting exercise shows, expert beliefs about trust in police. We show that descriptively, a different pattern arises in Latin America, as a whole, and effectively all countries therein. Specifically, we find that trust in police is slightly decreasing in socioeconomic status: on average, the rich trust the police less than the poor.

Our finding of a negative trust-class gradient is important for considerations of the political economy of security provision in Latin America, the world's most violent region. Poor assessments of police trustworthiness may motivate the rich to invest in private security (Jayadav and Bowles, 2006; Wilke, 2022). With this substitute, the rich —who form a disproportionate share of the tax base (Bergolo, Londoño-Vélez, and Tortarolo, 2023)—may be less likely to support funding police, further inhibiting police performance. Moreover, strategies to increase trust in police by increasing service quality may be least effective among these citizens precisely because they are more likely to observe negative signals at any level of police quality. These implications of our findings merit further study in the Latin American context.

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