

Trust in political institutions and support for authoritarianism in Latin American students: Does civic knowledge make a difference?

Daniel Miranda, Juan Carlos Castillo, Catalina Miranda & José Daniel Conejeros.

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Abstract

Trust in political institutions represents a central component of democratic systems. When citizens lack confidence in state bodies as the government and the parliament, the legitimacy of democracy is dangerously challenged. In the case of Latin America we observe a critical scenario, with a steady decrease of institutional trust in the last decade, accompanied by alarming levels of support for authoritarian regimes. Most of the evidence in this regards refers to adult population, leaving sidelined the young generations who certainly have a stake in the future of democracy in the region. Focusing on the role of the acquisition of civic knowledge at school as a protecting factor of democracy, this research analyzes the role of civic knowledge to understand trust in civic institutions and authoritarian attitudes in eighth-grade students. The data corresponds to the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2009 and 2016, in which seven Latin American Countries have participated. The results indicates a puzzling role of civic knowledge, as it diminishes trust in institutions but at the same time reduces authoritarian beliefs, in a similar way in the Latin American countries across time. The consequences for democracy and citizenship education are addressed in the conclusion.

Introduction

Institutional trust is a central aspect for the functioning of democracies as well as their legitimacy (Lipset, 1959; Uslaner, 2018; Zmerli & Meer, 2017). Latin America has traditionally shown one of the lowest levels of trust worldwide (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006), being commonly associated to the history of authoritarian governments and high levels of corruption (Bargsted, Somma, & Castillo, 2017). Such scenario put at risk the legitimacy of democracy in Latin America, particularly at times of economic crises as the one currently faced as a consequence of the coronavirus pandemic.

One of the aspects to take into account when evaluating both trust in institutions and authoritarianism is the role of political knowledge. In an ideal sense, civic-political knowledge is considered as *the mother* of trust (Galston, 2001, 2007), based on the simple assumption that it is certainly difficult to trust in something that you don't know. In international studies that evaluate civic-political knowledge, Latin American countries tend to obtain lower levels of achievement than developed countries (Schulz, Ainley, Cox, & Friedman, 2018). Additionally, civic-political knowledge has proven to play a role on different areas of citizenship, such as institutional trust, participation, tolerance, authoritarian beliefs, among others (Castillo, Miranda, Bonhomme, Cox, & Bascopé, 2014; Miranda, Castillo, & Cumsille, 2018; Sandoval-Hernandez, Miranda, Treviño, & Schmelkes, 2019). However, it is still not clear how political knowledge at school age could affect democratic attitudes in a region characterized by weak democratic foundations: Is a political knowledge at school age a predictor of more political trust and less authoritarianism in contexts where political institutions are weak and delegitimized as in Latin America? In the following we develop the main arguments and previous evidence on political trust and

authoritarianism, as well as their link with political knowledge.

Institutional trust

Institutional trust has a vast research agenda in the social sciences (see Zmerli & Meer (2017)), being generally understood as an evaluation that is made of civic and political institutions (van der Meer & Hakhverdian, 2016). This evaluation would be based on the performance of these institutions (Offe, 1999; Segovia, Haye, González, Manzi, & Carvacho, 2008) in a given context (Hardin, 2001). Thus, trust in political institutions such as parliament or political parties can be understood as the evaluation that citizens make of the functioning that they have in a given context.

As the context in which institutional trust development occurs is relevant for the acquisition of related attitudes, it is important to take into account the particularities of the democratic development in Latin America. The history of democratic institutions in the region has suffered a series of contradictions, marked by an alternation between authoritarianism, democracy and semi-democracies (Bargsted et al., 2017). Several countries had military dictatorships in the 1970s, with a large heterogeneity in the process of democratic recovery. Without going any further, in the last decade there have been serious democratic crises in Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile, just to mention the most prominent ones. The economic crises and corruption scandals throughout Latin America have certainly affected this process, observing low and declining levels of trust in different institutions, particularly the government and political parties (Latinobarometro, 2018).

Besides the political history, institutional trust is affected by a series of contextual and individual characteristics. At a contextual level, aspects such as economic performance, wealth distribution and/or political change have shown evidence of affecting trust levels (Citrin & Stoker, 2018; Martini & Quaranta, 2020). Regarding the individual level, a number of factors have been taken into account in several studies, such as genetics, personality, socio-economic characteristics, awareness of corruptibility (Carrasco, Banerjee, Treviño, & Villalobos, 2019) and/or the perceived effectiveness of the institution (Lauglo, 2013). Among all these, the educational has proven to be one of the most consistent predictors of political trust, as the more education the citizens have, the greater the abilities to evaluate the functioning of institutions (Lipset, 1960; van der Meer & Hakhverdian, 2016). Based on this, our first hypothesis is that students with higher levels of civic knowledge would exhibit larger support for political institutions.

Authoritarianism

The concept of authoritarianism, widely used in social psychology, basically consists of an ideological orientation to support strong authority and punish normative deviation (Altemeyer, 1996). Three central dimensions of authoritarianism have been proposed (Duckitt, 2015): authoritarian submission, which describes the degree of submission to the established authority; authoritarian aggression, which is understood as an aggressive attitude against groups or people sanctioned by authority (perception); and conventionalism, which describes the degree of adherence to conventions, traditions and social norms (Altemeyer, 1996; Funke, 2005).

A high proportion of Latin American citizens present some support for authoritarianism. A typical question that captures this trend says: which of the following phrases do you agree with the most? a) democracy is preferable to any other form of government; b) in some circumstances an authoritarian government is preferable than a democratic one, or c) people like me do not care more about a democratic government than an authoritarian one. Both non-democratic options (b and c) add up 43% of people in Latin America do not decisively support democracy as the best form of Government (Latinobarometro,

2018). On the same avenue, studies in school-age population have also shown evidence of supporting authoritarian practices (Schulz et al., 2018). Above 60% of young students in Latin America would rate totally or some agreement with justifying dictatorship if its brought order, safety and or economic benefits(Sandoval-Hernandez et al., 2019). Therefore, it is possible to point out that some support for authoritarian practices has become part of the political culture in Latin America (Almond & Verba, 1989).

As authoritarianism is seen as a major threat to democracy (Dewey, 1989), countries have made various efforts to expand democratic ideals through citizen training from the school system (Cox & Castillo, 2015). In this sense, the assumption is that higher levels of political knowledge, improved through better citizenship education, should lead to less availability of authoritarian ideas (Schulz et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the impact of citizenship education on lessening authoritarianism is still an under-researched area.

The role of Civic Knowledge

Civic knowledge can be defined as the capacity (proficiency) of knowledge about various domains such as: civic-social systems, civic principles, participation procedures and civic identities (Schulz et al., 2018). This definition has great similarities with two concepts widely used in the political literature: *political knowledge*, referring to the information that citizens handle about the political system, and *political sophistication*, a more complex approach to expertise on political issues (Rapeli, 2013). Beyond conceptual specificities, they all recognize the role that this type of knowledge plays in a better understanding of various relevant attitudes and behaviors in a democratic framework (Rapeli, 2013).

Regarding the link between civic knowledge and political attitudes such as institutional trust and authoritarianism, previous literature generally states that those with higher levels of knowledge will have a greater attachment to public life (Galston, 2001, 2007). The literature systematically shows that people with higher levels of civic knowledge tend to engage politically differently than those with lower levels of knowledge (Rapeli, 2013). For instance, they develop higher levels of political tolerance (Miranda et al., 2018), they present higher levels of political participation (Castillo et al., 2014; Castillo, Miranda, Bonhomme, Cox, & Bascopé, 2015), have lower levels of authoritarianism (Sandoval-Hernandez et al., 2019). Thus, it is expected that higher levels of civic knowledge are associated with greater institutional trust (H1) and lower levels of authoritarianism (H2). However, comparative studies in the juvenile population show mixed evidence for H1. From the CIVED 1999, ICCS 2019 and ICCS 2016 study, it is possible to observe that in developed countries with low corruption rates, the association is positive, while in countries with less development and low high corruption, the association could be negative (Sandoval-Hernandez et al., 2019; Torney-Purta, Richardson, & Barber, 2004). Therefore, although we follow a more intuitive hypothesis regarding the role of knowledge on trust, this can be probably be affected by some of the historical and contextual factors mentioned above.

Methods

Data

The data analyzed in this research corresponds to the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study. This study is carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of educational achievement (IEA) and has been applied three times: CIVED 1999; ICCS 2009 and ICCS 2016. Its purpose is to investigate how educational systems prepare young people to assume their roles as citizens. The ICCS results have contributed to the debate about delivering civic and citizenship education in

schools around the world. For this particular study we use data from ICCS 2009 and 2016 for seven Latin American countries: Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Guatemala, Paraguay and Peru. The first four countries participated in the two waves, whereas Guatemala & Paraguay only in 2009 and Peru only in 2016.

The ICCS 2009-2016 Latin America dataset contemplates a nationally representative sample of 29,896 eighth grade students for 2009 and 25,319 for 2016. The selection of the students is made through a stratified random sampling in two stages. In the first stage a minimum of 150 schools per country was selected and at least one course per school was chosen randomly, including as participants all the students of that course (Schulz, Ainley, & Fraillon, 2011). The sample sizes of students and schools for each country-year are summarized below:

Table 1. Distribution students ICCS per country/year

Country	Year	School	Students	Woman (%)	Age (mean)
Chile	2009	177	5173	0.51	14.18
Chile	2016	178	5081	0.49	14.17
Colombia	2009	196	6200	0.54	14.38
Colombia	2016	150	5609	0.52	14.59
Dominican Republic	2009	145	4569	0.55	14.86
Dominican Republic	2016	141	3937	0.51	14.19
Mexico	2009	215	6565	0.52	14.08
Mexico	2016	213	5526	0.50	14.03
Guatemala	2009	145	3998	0.49	15.52
Paraguay	2009	149	3391	0.52	14.82
Peru	2016	206	5166	0.48	14.03

The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) includes a test of civic knowledge that assesses students' knowledge and citizen reasoning. At the same time, it also includes a questionnaire that measures students' perceptions, attitudes and background on issues related to citizenship, participation in school, school climate, among other variables. Finally, it consider a series of instruments to capture information from teachers, schools and educational systems (Schulz et al., 2011).

b. Variables

Dependent Variables

The first dependent variable of this study is political trust, an index built upon four indicators from the ICCS questionnaire. Responses rated their trust level under the following categories: "*completely*", "*quite*", "*a little*", "*not at all*". The following table describes each ICCS indicator for 2009 and 2016:

Table 2. Trust in political institutions

How much do you trust each of the following groups, institutions or sources of information?			
Variable	Levels	ICCS09 Code	ICCS16 Code
National Government	1. Completely	IS2P27A	IS3G26A
National Parliament	2. Quite a lot	IS2P27F	IS3G26F
Political parties	3. A little	IS2P27E	IS3G26E
Courts of justice	4. Not at all	IS2P27C	IS3G26C

The second dependent variable is support for authoritarianism. This scale is constructed from three indicators that identify the extent to which students support undemocratic practices, such as the concentration of power and justification of dictatorships for economic and order reasons. Students rated their level of agreement as “*strongly agree*”, “*agree*”, “*disagree*”, “*strongly disagree*” for each of these questions.

Table 3. Support for authoritarian practices

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the government and its their power?			
g. Concentration of power in one person guarantees order	1. Strongly disagree	LS2P03A	LS3G02A
	2. Disagree		
a. Dictatorships are justified when they bring order and safety.	3. Agree	LS2P03D	LS3G02D
	4. Strongly agree		
b. Dictatorships are justified when they bring economic benefits		LS2P03E	LS3G02E

Both political trust and authoritarianism indexes were estimated using confirmatory factor analyses, which shows adequate fit indexes ($\chi^2 = 2099.19, p < 0.001$; $CFI = 0.977$; $TLI = 0.962$; $RMSEA = 0.057$). Once estimated, each of the latent measures were rescaled to mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10 for the sake of interpretation.

Independent Variables

The main independent variable in this study was the civic knowledge score achieved in the international ICCS test. The civic knowledge test consists of a set of 79 items that are applied organized in seven different formats, in which each student answers a booklet containing three subgroups of questions. To obtain the level of civic knowledge, an Item Response Theory (IRT) model is used to estimate five plausible values as a score. This variable presents an international average of 500 points and a standard deviation of 100. The scores for each of the countries in 2009 and 2016 are summarized below:

Table 4. Independent Variable: Civic Knowledge Score

Country	ICCS 2009	ICCS 2016	Diff.
Chile	483 (3.5)	482 (3.1)	-1 (5.6)
Colombia	462 (2.9)	482 (3.4)	20 (5.5) ▲
Dominican Republic	380 (2.4)	381 (3.0)	1 (5.0)
Mexico	452 (2.8)	467 (2.5)	15 (4.9) ▲
Guatemala	435 (3.8)	-	-
Paraguay	424 (3.4)	-	-
Peru	-	438 (3.5)	-

Notes: Statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) ▲▼

() Standard errors appear in parentheses.

The rest of the independent variables fulfill the objective of controlling the statistical association between support for authoritarianism, trust in political institutions and civic knowledge. In this sense, a *proxy* is used to assess the student’s socio-economic and cultural background based on the highest educational level reached by the father or mother as well as by the number of books at home. Additionally, we included the student’s gender and the level of political discussion that the student conducts with friends and family outside the classroom.

Analytical Strategy

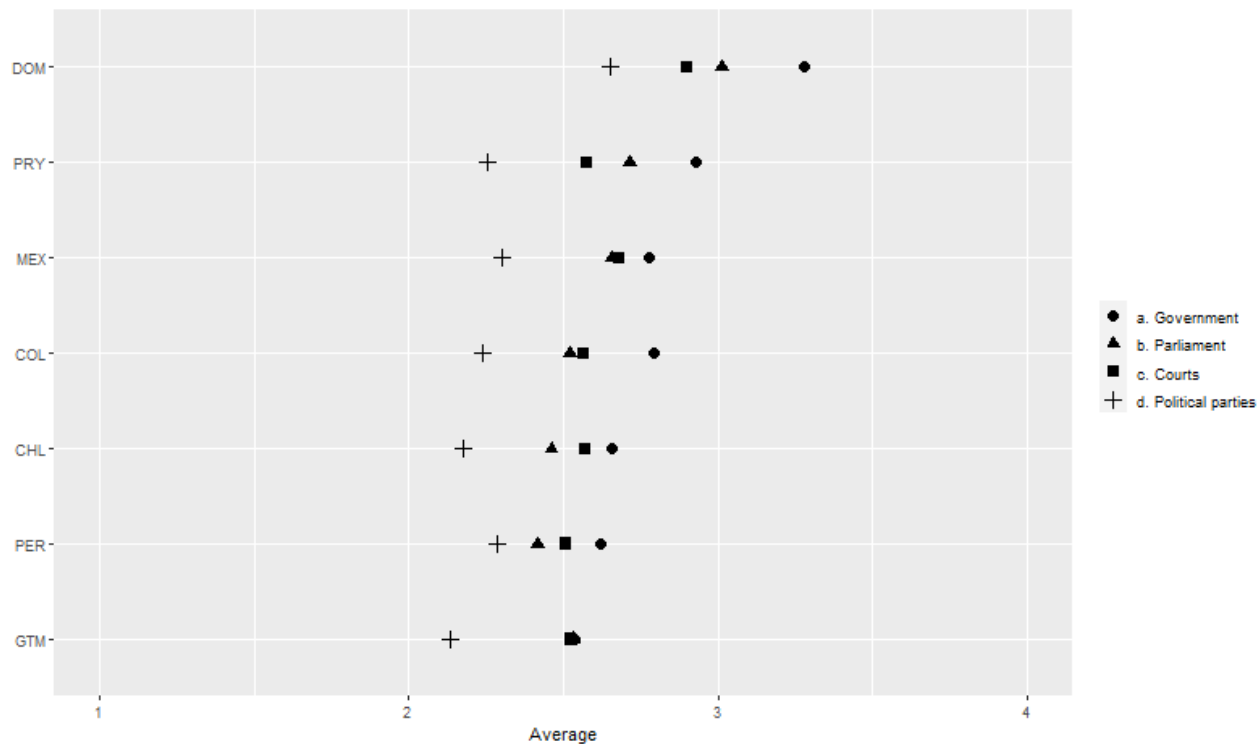
We begin the analyses exploring the differences among countries in 2009 and 2016 in both dependent variables (institutional trust and authoritarianism). Next, the model estimation is performed on a multilevel framework in order to account for the variance at the school level for both institutional trust and authoritarianism. First we estimate a null model (without predictors) which provides a variance decomposition at individual and school levels. Second, we estimate a model adding the main predictor, civic knowledge. For a better understanding of regression coefficients we divide the scale by 100. The next model includes the control variables for testing the stability of civic knowledge effect beyond socioeconomic individual variables. Finally, the fourth model includes the fixed effects of country and time in order to test the stability of civic knowledge between countries across time.

Results

Descriptive results

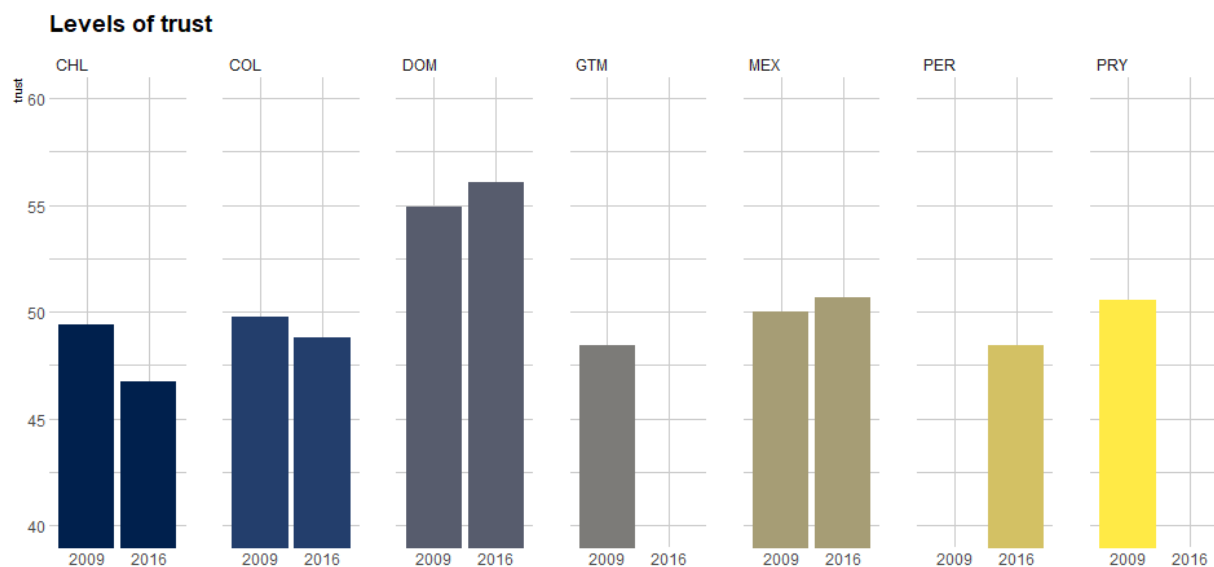
Figure 1 shows an item by item comparison of the political trust items between countries. First, it can be observed that in all the countries studied political parties receive the lowest trust levels whereas the government obtains the highest. Secondly, considering the general trend between countries it appears that Dominican Republic and Paraguay are the countries with highest average trust, whereas Peru and Guatemala show the lowest levels. Thirdly, we also observe some difference in the variability of trust in different institutions within countries, which tends to covary with the average trust levels: the highest the average, the more the variability. Finally, it is noteworthy that young people tend to show higher levels of trust in all the institutions evaluated when compared to adult population surveys (Bargsted et al., 2017). For instance, the 2018 Latinobarometer reported that only 21% of the respondents trust in the Parliament and 13% in the political parties, all of them below or way below than the results from ICCS.

Figure 1. Institutional Trust in Latin America by country



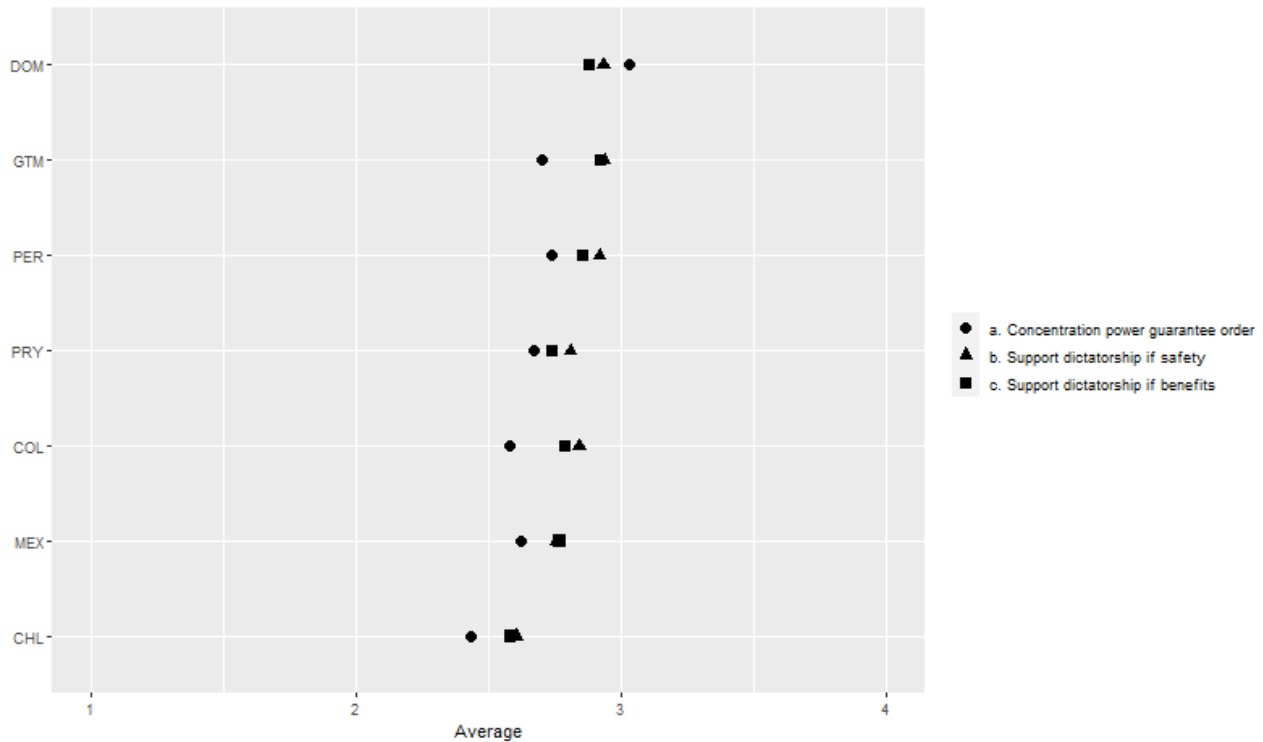
Regarding to average trust level and temporal changes (or stability) between 2009 and 2016 Dominican Republic and Paraguay obtain the highest level of trust (above the scaled average = 50). As far as time changes is concerned, Mexico slightly increases its trust levels whereas Colombia and particularly Chile show a decrease over time.

Figure 2. Scale of Institutional Trust in Latin América by country/year



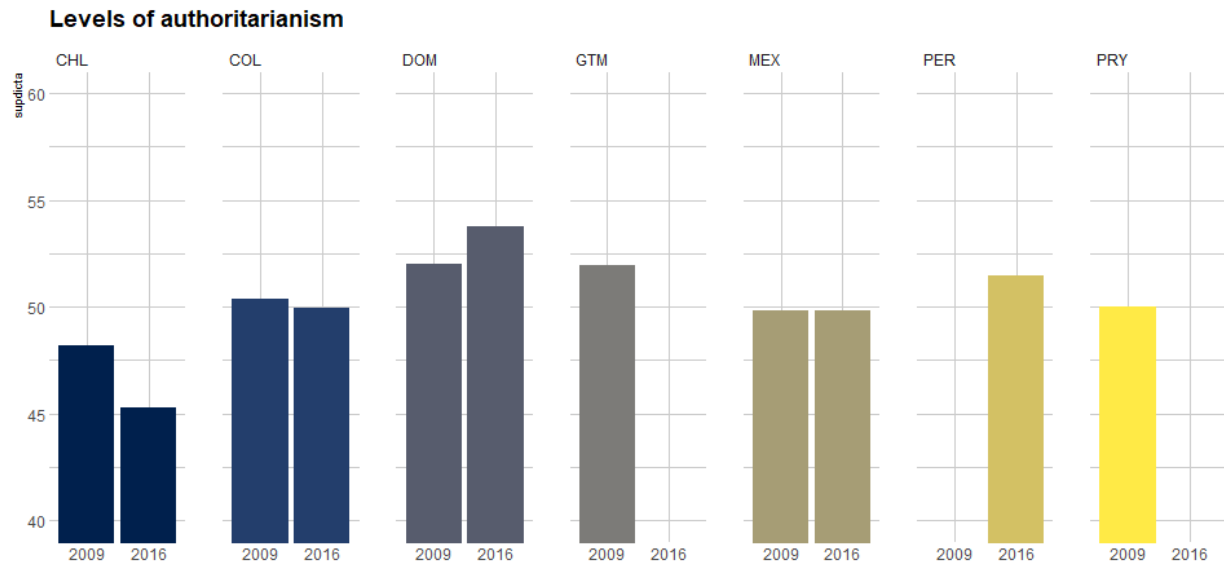
Moving on to our second variable of interest, Figure 3 shows an item by item comparison of support for authoritarian practices between countries. Interestingly, the average levels for the three evaluated authoritarian practices are above the midpoint of the scale. In other words, there is high support for the concentration of power and dictatorships if this brings order, economic benefits and security. This aspect has been widely discussed as an alarm about the persistence of authoritarian beliefs in Latin America (Sandoval-Hernandez et al., 2019; Schulz et al., 2018). The Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Peru show the strongest tendency towards authoritarianism, while Colombia, Mexico and Chile show the weakest among this group of countries. Regarding the dispersion between the three evaluated practices, the closeness between them is somewhat surprising. Only Guatemala and Colombia show some dispersion, but this do not surpass even a half point of the scale.

Figure 3. Support Authoritarianism in Latin América by country



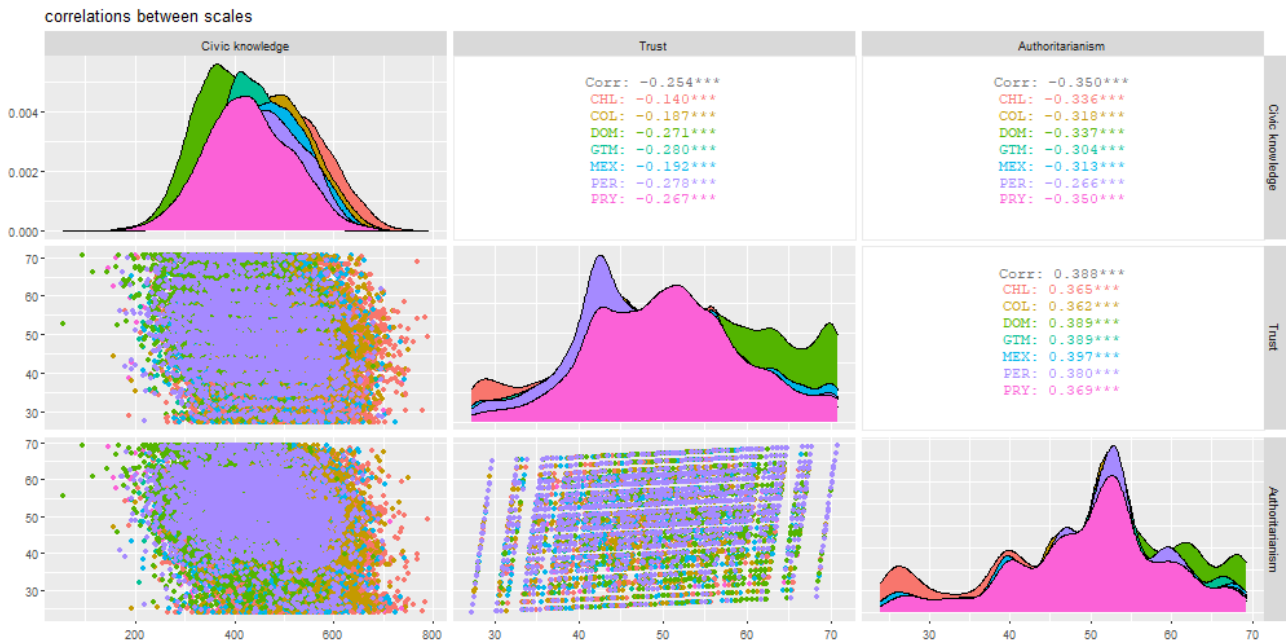
Regarding to average level and temporal change (or stability) of authoritarianism between 2009 and 2016, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Peru and Paraguay obtain the higher level of support for authoritarian practices (above the scaled average = 50), Mexico and Colombia are observed slightly above the average and Chile present the lowest level of authoritarianism (under the scaled average = 50). On the other hand, about the differences between 2009 and 2016, Dominican Republic and Mexico increase their levels whereas Chile shows the strongest decrease.

Figure 4. Scale of Support Authoritarianism in Latin América by country/year



Regarding the role that civic knowledge plays in supporting authoritarian practices and trust levels, we observe that at higher levels of civic knowledge the levels of support for authoritarian practices decreases (average $r=-0.350$), whereas trust levels also decreases (average $r=-0.254$). Additionally, it is possible to observe that those who support authoritarian practices tend to trust more civic-political institutions (average $r=0.388$), somewhat counterintuitive in light of the theoretical assumptions presented above.

Figure 5. Trust in civic institutions, Support for authoritarianism and Civic knowledge



Regression models

The previous descriptive results depict a puzzling role of civic knowledge regarding trust in institutions and authoritarianism. In order to advance in the understanding of these associations, we estimated a series of multilevel regression models. We present first the results for institutional trust as dependent variable and then for authoritarianism.

Table 6 have institutional trust as dependent variable. Model 0 is a null model (without predictors) allowing to estimate the proportion of the variance of institutional trust associated with the school level, which is in this case is 12%. This proportion is slightly high considering previous evidence about attitudinal outcomes in educational studies. In Model 1 we observe that higher levels of civic knowledge are associated to lower levels of institutional trust. This means that, students who perform poorly on the knowledge test (for instance 300 points) obtain 54.24 points in average in political trust, whereas those with high performance (for instance 700 points) obtain 43.88 points, which is below the scale average. Model 2 enters a series of statistical controls. The result indicates that having more books at home and being a girl decreases institutional trust, while talking about social and political issues with family and friends would increase it. Finally, Model 3 enters the fixed effects of the country and year of the study (coded as dummy variables) to control for differences between countries and between year of study. The result shows that the observed effects remain rather similar controlled by country and year.

Table 7 presents the results for authoritarianism, following the same logic presented above in Table 6 for institutional trust. In this case, the null model (Model 0) show us that 11% of variance is associated with the school level, meaning that a small part of the variance is linked to school characteristics. Model 1, enters civic knowledge as the main predictor. The result indicates that at higher levels of civic knowledge, lower levels of support for authoritarian practices are observed. This translates into that young people who perform poorly on the knowledge test (for instance 300 points) obtain 56.05 points on the scale of support in authoritarian practices which is a half of standard deviation above the scale average. In contrast, young people who obtain a high performance in the knowledge test (For instance 700 points) obtain in average 40.97 points on authoritarianism which this is closer to one standard deviation below the scale average. Model 2 enters a series of statistical controls. The result indicates that living in homes with more educated parents, having more books at home and being a girl decrease the support for authoritarian practices. Furthermore, it indicates that the effect of civic knowledge remains stable even controlling for this set of variables. Finally, Model 3 enters the fixed effects of the country and year of the study (coded as dummy variables) to control for differences between countries and between year of study.

Table 6: Regression Models: Trust in civic institutions on Civic Knowledge in Latin América

<i>Predictors</i>	M0: Null		M1: Trust		M2: Trust		M3: Trust	
	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	50.26	<0.001	62.01	<0.001	56.31	<0.001	54.65	<0.001
civic_know100			-2.59	<0.001	-2.54	<0.001	-2.36	<0.001
parental_education					0.11	0.001	0.05	0.124
books_at_home					-0.17	<0.001	-0.13	0.002
gender					-1.24	<0.001	-1.31	<0.001
political_discussion					0.12	<0.001	0.12	<0.001
time [2016]							-0.42	0.008
Country [Colombia]							0.79	<0.001
Country [Dominicana]							4.72	<0.001
Country [Guatemala]							-1.72	<0.001
Country [Mexico]							1.69	<0.001
Country [Peru]							0.99	0.002
Country [Paraguay]							-1.04	<0.001
Random Effects								
σ^2	88.34		85.67		83.97		83.95	
τ_{00}	12.16 _{idsch}		8.25 _{idsch}		7.97 _{idsch}		4.88 _{idsch}	
ICC	0.12		0.09		0.09		0.05	
N	1911 _{idsch}		1911 _{idsch}		1911 _{idsch}		1911 _{idsch}	
Observations	48861		48861		47757		47757	
Marginal R ² / Conditional R ²	0.000 / 0.121		0.053 / 0.136		0.070 / 0.151		0.108 / 0.157	

Table 7: Regression Models: Support Authoritarianism on Civic Knowledge in Latin América

<i>Predictors</i>	M0: Null		M1: Authoritarianism		M2: Authoritarianism		M3: Authoritarianism	
	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	50.21	<0.001	67.36	<0.001	65.74	<0.001	63.82	<0.001
civic_know100			-3.77	<0.001	-3.72	<0.001	-3.63	<0.001
parental_education					-0.13	<0.001	-0.13	<0.001
books_at_home					-0.20	<0.001	-0.18	<0.001
gender					-0.19	0.029	-0.21	0.018
political_discussion					0.04	<0.001	0.04	<0.001
time [2016]							-0.46	0.002
Country [Colombia]							2.89	<0.001
Country [Dominicana]							2.25	<0.001
Country [Guatemala]							2.58	<0.001
Country [Mexico]							2.00	<0.001
Country [Peru]							1.12	<0.001
Country [Paraguay]							2.88	<0.001
Random Effects								
σ^2	88.76		82.67		82.51		82.53	
τ_{00}	11.45 idsch		5.22 idsch		4.89 idsch		3.78 idsch	
ICC	0.11		0.06		0.06		0.04	
N	1911 idsch		1911 idsch		1911 idsch		1911 idsch	
Observations	48861		48861		47757		47757	
Marginal R ² / Conditional R ²	0.000 / 0.114		0.112 / 0.165		0.118 / 0.168		0.134 / 0.172	

Discussion and conclusion

The present chapter was aimed at evaluating the effect of civic knowledge on two central aspects for democratic legitimacy in Latin American students: institutional trust and authoritarian attitudes. Regarding institutional trust, there are two main results to highlight. First, students show higher average institutional trust levels than the observed in the adult population. This raises the question of whether these generations are more trusting than today's adults and/or if trust levels decrease when becoming adults. Secondly, certain consistencies are observed with the adult population, as for instance that certain institutions as political parties are the worst evaluated. Thirdly, Chile and Colombia show significant decreases in various institutions, while Mexico and the Dominican Republic remain and even increase trust levels over time. Therefore, trust levels are far from being stable in the region and seem to follow a different pattern than the observed in the adult population.

When considering the different authoritarian practices evaluated, most students tend to support some of them consistently. On the one hand, statements associated with the exercise of authority receive greater support from young people. This shows that authoritarian beliefs are rooted above all in understanding ways of understanding authority. The level of stability of authoritarian attitudes is striking. With the exception of Chile, which shows significant decreases in most of the countries observed, young people maintain and even increase levels of authoritarianism, which again points in the direction of a deeply authoritarian culture in Latin America.

Regarding the central question of the chapter, it is possible to affirm that having higher levels of civic knowledge has a paradoxical effect. Young students who better comprehend the conceptual aspects of the political system tend to support in lesser extent the authoritarian practices of governments, since they seem to understand better that such practices are inconsistent with democratic life. However, those same young people better prepared in civic knowledge trust less in the institutions that compose the political system. Thus, greater civic knowledge improves one source of democratic legitimacy (less authoritarianism) but at the same time erodes another (less trust in institutions).

A striking result is that young people with higher levels of authoritarianism tend to evaluate institutions more positively. This counterintuitive result requires to be observed in greater depth. On the one hand, as Altemeyer anticipates, the assessment of authority tends to show a correlation with those institutions that also represent authority. Support for authoritarian practices could easily be linked to the left-right continuum. In this association, people on the right tend to have higher levels of authoritarianism and people on the left less. Therefore, it is possible to think that the political position is playing a role in the evaluation of the institutions. These possible relationships are not cleared here, so the question remains open about the impact that authoritarian attitudes would have at the time of institutional evaluation in contexts of high and low knowledge.

There are a series of implications of the results presented here for civic education in Latin America. It would be naive to expect that more civic knowledge would automatically have a positive impact in democratic attitudes. More civic knowledge would lead to more skepticism and to a critical citizenship, affecting the confidence in political institutions in contexts where they are characterized by low efficiency and/or corruption. In this sense, low trust is not always a synonym of weak democratic attitudes, but could be actually the opposite. Therefore, it would be wrong to evaluate the impact of civic knowledge by the levels of institutional trust.

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