

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

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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. To this regard, 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 two most relevant results indicates a contradictory role of civic knowledge, decrease trust in institutions and decrease authoritarian beliefs. These patterns of associations are pretty similar across time and countries, showing a particularity of the region. The consequences for democracy and citizenship education are addressed in the conclusion.

Keywords: *Institutional Trust, Authoritarianism, Civic Knowledge, Latin American Students.*

Introduction

The specialized literature states that institutional trust is a central aspect of both the functioning of democracies and their legitimacy (Lipset, 1959; Uslander, 2018; Zmerli & Meer, 2017). This is particularly relevant in the Latin American region, which shows one of the lowest levels of confidence worldwide (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006). Part of the explanations for this low confidence is that institutions in Latin America have developed between the presence of authoritarian governments and attempts at democratic consolidation, as well as high rates of corruption (Bargsted, Somma, & Castillo, 2017).

One of the central aspects to take into account when evaluating both trust in institutions is the role that political knowledge can play as an antecedent. In an ideal sense, civic-political knowledge is considered as *the mother* of trust (Galston, 2001, 2007). Given that a significant part of the knowledge regarding political issues is intentionally transmitted at the school level, it is especially relevant to know to what extent the knowledge acquired at a young age is associated or not with trust in institutions. In international studies that evaluate this aspect, the countries of the Americas tend to obtain lower levels of knowledge than developed countries (Schulz, Ainley, Cox, & Friedman, 2018). Additionally, the role that civic-political knowledge plays on a series of aspects such as: institutional trust, different types of participation, tolerance, authoritarian beliefs among others has been observed (Castillo, Miranda, Bonhomme, Cox, & Bascopé, 2014; Miranda, Castillo, & Cumsille, 2018; Sandoval-Hernandez, Miranda, Treviño, & Schmelkes, 2019). However, it is still pending to deepen on the heterogeneity with which

this factor can influence confidence or if it can condition other results, as well as to what extent these associations are already possible to investigate (and eventually modify) at the school stage. Thus, the question arises about the role that civic knowledge acquired in school can play in order to understand not only the levels of trust that young people place in institutions, but also in supporting authoritarian beliefs in Latin America.

Institutional trust

Institutional trust has a vast research agenda in the social sciences (see Zmerli & Meer (2017)), and is generally understood as an evaluation that is made of a civic-political institution (van der Meer & Hakhverdian, 2016). For Offe (1999) this evaluation is based on the expectation about the operation of this (Offe, 1999; Segovia, Haye, González, Manzi, & Carvacho, 2008). Additionally, Hardin (2001) proposes that said evaluation takes place in a particular context. 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.

Institutional confidence levels can vary according to a series of contextual and individual characteristics. In the first group, aspects such as economic performance, wealth distribution or political change are considered (Citrin & Stoker, 2018; Martini & Quaranta, 2020). In the case of the individual level, various variables are considered such as genetic, personality, the perceived effectiveness of political and social institutions (Torney-Purta, Richardson, & Barber, 2004), the awareness of corruptibility (Carrasco, Banerjee, Treviño, & Villalobos, 2019) and/or the perceived effectiveness of the institution (Lauglo, 2013). Also, it has been linked to socio-economic characteristics. Here the educational level stands out, from which it is proposed that the more education the citizens have, the more information, they support more democratic values and they acquire greater abilities to evaluate the functioning of institutions (Lipset, 1960; van der Meer & Hakhverdian, 2016).

Given that the context in which institutional trust development occurs is relevant for the formation of these attitudes, it is important to highlight the particularities of institutional development in Latin America. In the countries of the region, the development of democratic institutions has suffered a series of contradictions, marked by an alternation between authoritarianism, democracy and semi-democracies (Bargsted et al., 2017). This translates into a historical and progressive delegitimization of the institutions, consistent with the low levels of trust observed in the region (Latinobarometro, 2018). Despite the fact that today most of the countries can be considered democratic, in the last decade there have been a series of events that erode political confidence. On the one hand, the region is characterized by interrupted democracies and political instability throughout the 20th century and so far in the 20th century, with the permanent threat of authoritarianism. Without going any further, in the last decade there have been important democratic crises such as in Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia or Chile, just to mention the most obvious ones. In these countries, the closing of the media, the closing of the parliament, questioning of the electoral processes, violation of Human Rights, among others, have been observed.

Authoritarianism

Past and current dictatorships in Latin America inherit recognition from the region for having a certain tendency towards authoritarianism. It is consistently observed that a high proportion of citizens consider that “in some circumstances an authoritarian government is preferable than a democratic one” (15%) or that “people like one do not care about a democratic government than an authoritarian one” (28%). Both undemocratic options add that 43% of people in Latin America do not decisively support democracy as the best form of Government (Latinobarometro, 2018). In a youth population, a study by

(Schulz et al., 2018) examines in two time periods (ICCS 2009 and ICCS 2016) the support of 8th grade students to governments with authoritarian practices in five Latin American countries, showing that although the majority of young people reject authoritarian practices, a significant proportion are willing to support them (Schulz et al., 2018). In this sense, the level of support for authoritarian practices or this type of government can be considered part of the political culture in Latin America (Almond & Verba, 1989).

Adherence to authoritarian practices is easily connected to right-wing authoritarianism. This concept, widely used in social psychology, basically consists of an ideological orientation to support strong authority and punish normative deviation (Altemeyer, 1981). After several versions (See Duckitt, 2015) three central dimensions are proposed: 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).

From his first studies, authoritarianism is seen as a major threat to democracy (Dewey, 1989), which can be accentuated in a region like Latin America. In this sense, countries have made various efforts to expand democratic ideals through citizen training from the school system (Cox & Castillo, 2015). In this sense, better citizen education should lead to less availability of authoritarian ideas (Schulz et al., 2018).

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, partition 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 better understanding various relevant attitudes and behaviors in the democratic framework (Rapeli, 2013).

Regarding the link with civic-political institutions, previous literature states that those with higher levels of knowledge will have a greater attachment to public life (Galston, 2001, 2007). This would imply that, in general, at higher levels of civic knowledge, higher levels of institutional trust. 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 example, 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 levels of civic knowledge are associated with greater institutional confidence (H1) and lower levels of self-righteousness (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 is negative (Sandoval-Hernandez et al., 2019; Torney-Purta et al., 2004). In the case of Latin American countries, the prevailing interpretation is that young people with high knowledge distrust or are more skeptical, developing in a sense of criticism of institutions.

Methods:

a. Data

The data analyzed in this research corresponds to the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) for 6 countries in Latin America in its 2009 version and 5 countries for 2016. This study is carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of educational achievement (IEA) and has been applied at three points in time: 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.

The ICCS study contemplates a nationally representative sample of 29,896 eighth grade students (average age of 13 years) in Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Guatemala. While for 2016 there are 25,319 students from Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Peru and Paraguay. The selection of the students is made through a stratified random sampling in two stages. In the first instance, 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) is based on an international test of civic knowledge that assesses students' knowledge, capacity for analysis, and civic 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, consider a series of instruments to capture information from teachers, schools and educational systems (Schulz et al., 2011).

b. Variables

Dependent Variables

In this study, trust is used as a dependent variable on the one hand, evaluated by twelve indicators that consider civic institutions of a political nature, the media and interpersonal trust. Responses rated their confidence 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. Dependt Variable: Institutional trust in students

Students Institutional Trust			
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
Local Government	2. Quite a lot	IS2P27B	IS3G26B
Courts of justice	3. A little	IS2P27C	IS3G26C
The police	4. Not at all	IS2P27D	IS3G26D
Political parties		IS2P27E	IS3G26E
National Parliament		IS2P27F	IS3G26F
Media (television, newspapers, radio)		IS2P27G	IS3G26G
The Armed Forces		IS2P27H	IS3G26I
Schools		IS2P27I	IS3G26J
The United Nations		IS2P27J	IS3G26K
People in general		IS2P27K	IS3G26L
Social media (Twitter, blogs, YouTube)			IS3G26H

On the other hand, support for authoritarianism is considered. This scale is constructed from the use of two questions available in the questionnaire with a total of 9 indicators to identify to what extent the students supported undemocratic practices and two that measure the justification of dictatorships for economic benefits and order and security). Students rated their level of agreement as "*strongly agree*", "*agree*", "*disagree*", "*strongly disagree*" for each of these questions.

Table 3. Dependt Variable: Support for authoritarianism in students (continue)

Students Support for authoritarianism			
Authoritarian government practices: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the government and its leaders/their power?			
Variables	Levels	ICCS09	ICCS16
a. It is better for government leaders to make decisions without consulting anybody	1. Strongly disagree	LS2P02A	LS3G01A
b. People in government must enforce their authority even if it means violating the rights of some citizens	2. Disagree	LS2P02B	LS3G01B
c. People in government lose part of their authority when they admit their mistakes	3. Agree	LS2P02C	LS3G01C
d. People whose opinions are different than those of the government must be considered its enemies	4. Strongly agree	LS2P02D	LS3G01D
e. The most important opinion of a country should be that of the president		LS2P02E	LS3G01E
f. It is fair that the government does not comply with the law when it thinks it is not necessary		LS2P02F	LS3G01F
g. Concentration of power in one person guarantees order		LS2P03A	LS3G02A
h. The government should close communication media that are critical		LS2P03B	LS3G02B
i. If the president does not agree with Congress, he/she should dissolve it		LS2P03C	LS3G02C
Justify the Dictatorship: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the government and its their power?			
a. Dictatorships are justified when they bring order and safety.	1. Strongly disagree	LS2P03D	LS3G02D
	2. Disagree		
b. Dictatorships are justified when they bring economic benefits	3. Agree	LS2P03E	LS3G02E
	4. Strongly agree		

Independent Variables

The main independent variable is the 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 estimate the level of civic knowledge based on this design, 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 origin and cultural capital. For the first dimension, a standardized measure is used that captures the highest educational level reached by the father or mother; for the second dimension, the number of books in the home is used. Added to this is an indicator that identifies the student's gender and an indicator of the level of political discussion that the student conducts with friends and family outside the classroom.

c. Analytical Strategy

At a descriptive level, the statistical differences for each of the indicators of institutional trust between 2009 and 2016 are evaluated. Then two indicators are used that summarize the information on trust in political institutions and support for authoritarian practices (both constructed through a factor analysis. confirmatory). Finally, OLS regression models are estimated at the aggregate level to assess the association between civic knowledge and the indicators described, using the statistical controls mentioned in the previous section.

Results

This section describes the main results of the study. First, the descriptive changes between 2009 and 2016 are presented at the general level for institutional confidence and support for authoritarianism for each country in the study. Secondly, the associations between the variables of interest are presented through graphic elements and OLS regression models at the aggregate level for the Latin American context.

a. Descriptive trends across time of institutional trust

As observed in Table 5, in the countries evaluated in 2009 and 2016, some relevant results regarding confidence stand out. First, young people tend to show higher levels of trust in all the institutions evaluated. This is notoriously higher than the confidence levels observed in the adult population. For example, in the 2018 Latinobarometer report it is indicated that the different institutions evaluated receive lower levels of confidence than that observed in 14-year-old young students. 48% trust a lot or something in the armed forces, 35% in the police, 21% in Congress and 13% in political parties.

Second, as in the adult population, political institutions, particularly political parties, are those that receive the lowest levels of trust (Note: The Dominican Republic has much higher levels of trust than other countries, although following the same trends among institutions To show the majority pattern, this country is excluded from the examples presented: in 2009 between 26% (Guatemala) and 35% (Colombia and Mexico) trust political parties, while in 2016 between 28% (Colombia) and 33% (Chile and Peru) do so. In contrast, the institutions that receive the highest levels of trust are the Armed Forces, Schools, the Media and the United Nations. For example, in 2009 the Armed Forces received between 81% (Colombia) and 61% (Paraguay) trust, while in 2016 between 78% (Colombia) and 64% (Peru). Schools have somewhat higher levels of trust. In 2009 they receive between 88 % (Guatemala) and 72% (Mexico) confidence, while in 2016 between 85% (Colombia) and 71% (Chile).

Third, average levels of interpersonal trust are observed. In 2009, young people declared that they trust people between 47% (Guatemala and Mexico) and 57% (Paraguay), while in 2016 between 43% (Colombia) and 52% (Mexico). Although Latin America is recognized as a region of the world that presents a lot of interpersonal mistrust in the adult population (Latinobarometro, 2018), it is striking that in the 8th grade school population this mistrust is not so extreme.

Finally, regarding the change or stability of confidence between 2009 and 2016, there is some diversity between countries. On the one hand, the Dominican Republic and Mexico tend to remain stable or even increase confidence levels for most of the institutions evaluated. It is noteworthy that in Mexico trust in the Armed Forces and the courts of law have increased by 9% and 12% respectively. On the other hand, Chile and Colombia show a general downward trend in confidence in most of the institutions evaluated. In Chile, trust in the central government, local governments, the courts of justice, the police, the parliament and trust in people drop significantly. while in Colombia trust in the central government, the political parties and trust in people fall significantly.

b. Descriptive trends across time of support for authoritarian practices

Table 5. Institutional Trust in Latin América by country/year

	Chile		Colombia		Dominican Republic		Mexico		Peru	Guatemala	Paraguay
	2009	2016	2009	2016	2009	2016	2009	2016	2016	2009	2009
National Government	0.65	0.50 ▼	0.62	0.55 ▼	0.74	0.78 ▼	0.58	0.57	0.49	0.45	0.66
Local Government	0.63	0.53 ▼	0.60	0.56	0.70	0.70	0.55	0.57	0.55	0.55	0.66
Courts of justice	0.56	0.50 ▼	0.50	0.48	0.63	0.63	0.49	0.61 ▲	0.46	0.48	0.49
The police	0.71	0.64 ▼	0.55	0.49	0.56	0.56	0.43	0.49	0.50	0.33	0.45
Political parties	0.34	0.33	0.35	0.28 ▼	0.51	0.50	0.35	0.37	0.33	0.26	0.32
National Parliament	0.54	0.42 ▼	0.49	0.46	0.67	0.73 ▲	0.54	0.56	0.42	0.49	0.59
Media	0.74	0.62 ▼	0.72	0.69	0.76	0.78	0.57	0.56	0.62	0.70	0.74
The Armed Forces	0.81	0.74	0.80	0.78	0.68	0.74	0.62	0.71 ▲	0.64	0.63	0.61
Schools	0.80	0.71	0.87	0.85	0.88	0.91	0.72	0.73	0.78	0.88	0.88
The United Nations	0.65	0.60	0.62	0.63	0.68	0.73	0.66	0.71	0.67	0.66	0.70
People in general	0.52	0.48 ▼	0.49	0.43 ▼	0.61	0.62	0.47	0.52	0.47	0.47	0.57
Social media		0.54		0.49		0.61		0.48	0.45		
Average Country	0.63	0.55 ▼	0.60	0.56 ▼	0.68	0.69 ≈	0.54	0.57 ▲	0.53	0.54	0.61

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

Table 6 summarizes the levels of support for authoritarian practices in the 7 participating countries in 2009 and 2016. Three aspects stand out. First, considering the eleven items as a representation of authoritarian practices that the governments of Latin America carry out or have carried out, it can be seen that those aspects receive less support (one third or less) by young people are linked to interruption or violation of rights and freedom of expression. These are: “It is better for government leaders to make decisions without consulting anybody”, “People in government must enforce their authority even if it means violating the rights of some citizens”, “People whose opinions are different than those of the government must be considered its enemies” and “the government should close communications media that are critical “. In the latter, the change that occurs between 2009 and 2016 in Mexico and Colombia is striking, from 32% to 71% of support and from 16% to 31%, respectively. Second, it is observed that those authoritarian practices that received the most support (more than a third) by young people are: “People in government lose part of their authority when they admit their mistakes”, “The most important opinion of a country should be that of the president”, “Concentration of power in one person guarantees order “,” Dictatorships are justified when they bring order and safety “and” Dictatorships are justified when they bring economic benefits “. These practices stand out for being linked to the ways of exercising authority. Particularly striking is the high support that items related to dictatorships receive if they bring economic, social and order benefits. This aspect has been widely discussed as an alarm about the persistence of authoritarian beliefs in Latin America (Schulz et al., 2018, pp. @sandoval–hernandez2019). Finally, between 2009 and 2016 there is some stability in support for this type of practice with a couple of exceptions. On the one hand, the increase in support observed in Colombia and Mexico on the option of closing the critical media, already mentioned. On the other hand, the falls observed in Chile for five authoritarian practices.

Table 6. Support Authoritarianism in Latin América by country/year

	Chile		Colombia		Dominican Republic		Mexico		Peru	Guatemala	Paraguay
	2009	2016	2009	2016	2009	2016	2009	2016	2016	2009	2009
It is better for government leaders to make decisions without consulting anybody	0.16	0.14	0.12	0.13	0.34	0.31	0.24	0.26	0.20	0.18	0.21
People in government must enforce their authority even if it means violating the rights of some citizens	0.25	0.23	0.23	0.22	0.42	0.37	0.26	0.30	0.31	0.25	0.24
People in government lose part of their authority when they admit their mistakes	0.43	0.35	0.46	0.46	0.60	0.64	0.48	0.53	0.52	0.51	0.48
People whose opinions are different than those of the government must be considered its enemies	0.16	0.15	0.11	0.12	0.31	0.29	0.21	0.25	0.18	0.14	0.17
The most important opinion of a country should be that of the president	0.55	0.38 ▼	0.50	0.50	0.62	0.69	0.45	0.41	0.56	0.48	0.57
It is fair that the government does not comply with the law when it thinks it is not necessary	0.30	0.21 ▼	0.24	0.21	0.43	0.38	0.29	0.29	0.28	0.28	0.29
Concentration of power in one person guarantees order	0.52	0.44 ▼	0.51	0.54	0.68	0.74	0.56	0.56	0.63	0.60	0.58
The government should close communication media that are critical	0.21	0.22	0.16	0.37	0.36	0.26	0.32	0.71	0.29	0.18	0.18
If the president does not agree with Congress, he/she should dissolve it.	0.32	0.35	0.29	0.31	0.46	0.49	0.37	0.39	0.43	0.45	0.41
Dictatorships are justified when they bring order and safety.	0.65	0.57 ▼	0.74	0.73	0.70	0.73	0.69	0.67	0.77	0.78	0.69
Dictatorships are justified when they bring economic benefits	0.64	0.52 ▼	0.70	0.68	0.66	0.70	0.66	0.66	0.72	0.75	0.65
Average Country	0.38	0.32 ▼	0.37	0.37 ≈	0.51	0.52 ≈	0.41	0.42 ≈	0.45	0.42	0.41

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

c. Association of institutional trust, support authoritarianism and civic knowledge

Regarding the role that civic knowledge plays in supporting authoritarian practices and confidence levels, descriptively it can be observed that at higher levels of civic knowledge the levels of support for authoritarian practices decrease; but confidence levels also decrease (See figures 1 and 2). Young people who better understand the conceptual aspects of the political system tend to undermine 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 make up the political system. Additionally, it is possible to observe that those who support authoritarian practices to a greater extent, tend to trust more civic-political institutions than those who less authoritarian support (see figure 1), which is somewhat counterintuitive in light of the theoretical assumptions presented above.

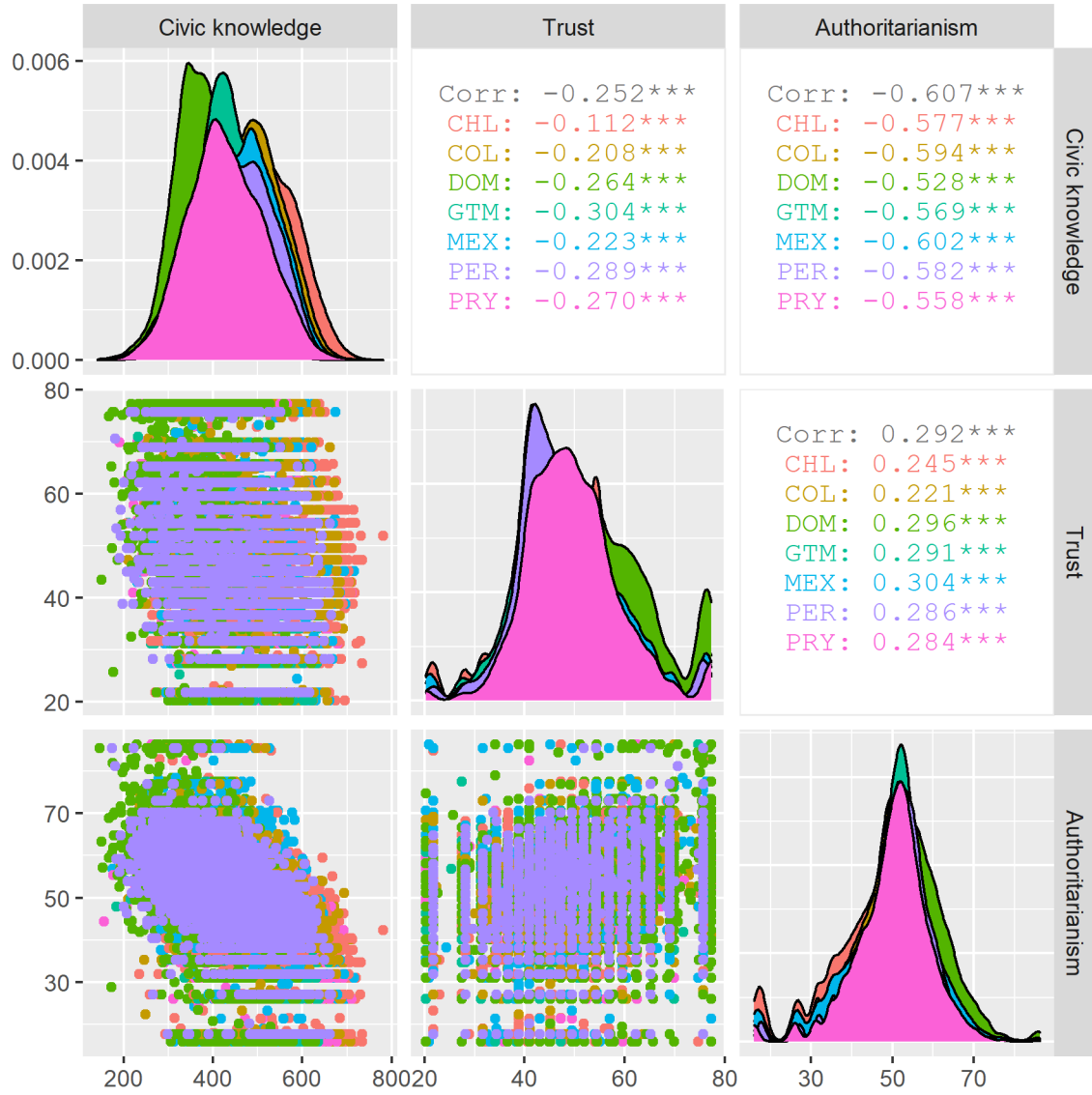


Figure 1: Trust in civic institutions, Support for authoritarianism and Civic knowledge

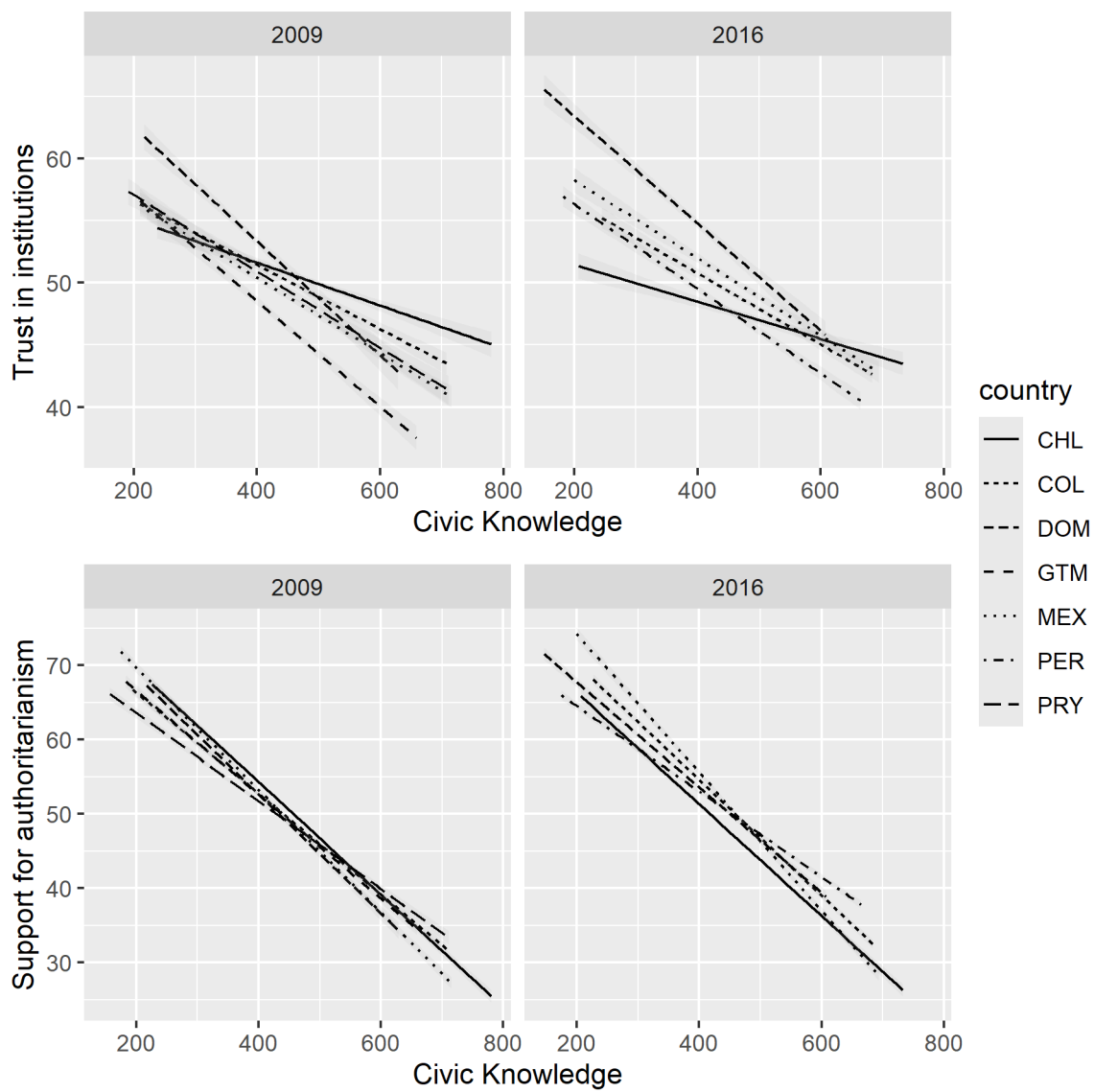


Figure 2: Trust in civic institutions and Civic Knowledge in students

This general result shows two facets of civic knowledge and poses the challenge of understanding this relationship. To advance this understanding, a series of regression models were estimated, which are presented below. Table 6 presents the estimated models with support for authoritarian practices as a dependent variable. The first three models present the index of trust in civic institutions as a dependent variable. Model 1 enters civic knowledge as the main predictor. The result indicates that at higher levels of knowledge, lower levels of institutional confidence are observed. This means that young people who perform poorly on the knowledge test obtain 53.79 points on the confidence in institutions scale (slightly above the scale average). In contrast, young people who obtain a high performance in the knowledge test (out of 562 points) obtain 46.23 points on the scale of confidence in institutions (this is slightly 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 decrease institutional confidence, while talking about social and political issues with family and friends would increase confidence. 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 very similar, controlled by that set of variables and independent of the country or year of study observed.

The following three models present the scale of support for authoritarian practices as a dependent variable. Model 4 enters civic knowledge as the main predictor. The result indicates that at higher levels of knowledge, lower levels of support for authoritarian practices will be observed. This translates into that young people who perform poorly on the knowledge test (below 311 points), which implies a low knowledge of the political institutions and legal mechanisms involved, obtain 60.86 points on the scale of support in authoritarian practices (this is more than one standard deviation above the scale average). In contrast, young people who obtain a high performance in the knowledge test (out of 562 points), which implies a greater ability to relate the processes of organization and political and social influence together with the legal and institutional mechanisms to control them, obtain 40.99 points on the support scale for authoritarian practices (this is one standard deviation below the scale average). Model 5 enters a series of statistical controls. The result indicates that having to live 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 very similar, even controlling for this set of variables. Finally, model 6 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 civic knowledge tends to decrease support for authoritarian government practices, regardless of the country or the year of study observed.

Table 6: Regression Models: Trust in civic institutions, Support Authoritarianism and Civic Knowledge in Latin América

	Trust 1	Trust 2	Trust 3	Authori 1	Authori 2	Authori 3
(Intercept)	63.10*** (0.26)	57.64*** (0.35)	57.29*** (0.40)	85.49*** (0.21)	85.93*** (0.30)	85.44*** (0.34)
Civic knowledge	-0.03*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)	-0.08*** (0.00)	-0.08*** (0.00)	-0.08*** (0.00)
Parent's education		0.02 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)		-0.06* (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)
Books at home		-0.32*** (0.04)	-0.27*** (0.04)		-0.28*** (0.04)	-0.23*** (0.04)
Girl (vs boy)		-1.06*** (0.09)	-1.09*** (0.09)		-1.37*** (0.08)	-1.32*** (0.08)
Political discussion		0.12*** (0.00)	0.12*** (0.00)		0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
2016 (vs 2009)			0.40*** (0.10)			1.04*** (0.08)
Colombia			-0.26 (0.20)			0.79*** (0.17)
Dominican Republic			2.72*** (0.30)			-0.42 (0.25)
Guatemala			-3.60*** (0.38)			0.10 (0.32)
Mexico			-0.06 (0.18)			0.55*** (0.15)
Paraguay			-0.35 (0.47)			-0.50 (0.39)
Peru			-2.67*** (0.25)			0.06 (0.21)
R ²	0.05	0.07	0.08	0.36	0.36	0.36
Adj. R ²	0.05	0.07	0.08	0.36	0.36	0.36
Num. obs.	51954	50420	50420	54769	52148	52148
RMSE	117.01	116.37	115.84	99.05	99.25	99.04

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Discussion and conclusion

The present chapter set out, on the one hand, to evaluate the effect that civic knowledge has on two central aspects for democratic legitimacy, authoritarianism and the evaluation of civic-political institutions. At first, the levels of trust and authoritarianism for the different countries participating in the study were described. Then a series of regression models were estimated that allow us to draw some conclusions regarding the proposed objectives.

Regarding institutional trust, some relevant results appear to comment. First, higher levels of confidence are generally observed than in the adult population. This raises the question of whether these generations are more trusting than today's adults? Or if something happens during the course of adulthood that reduces trust? Second, certain consistencies are observed with the adult population. This is mainly that political institutions are the worst evaluated. In this sense, it is possible to ask whether some

of the confidence of young people is rooted in the confidence levels of adult caregivers. Or to put it another way, to what extent is there an intergenerational socialization of institutional trust? And third, it is observed that Chile and Colombia show significant decreases in various institutions, while Mexico and the Dominican Republic remain and even increase in very few institutions. This raises the question of what could be the macro factors that can account for the temporal changes in the countries?

When considering the different authoritarian practices evaluated, most students tend to reject and/or support some of them consistently. On the one hand, statements associated with interruptions or violations of rights and freedom of expression by the authority receive the lowest support independent of year or participating country. On the contrary, statements regarding 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 self-imperialism, which again points in the direction of a deeply authoritarian culture in Latin America, on average.

Regarding the central question of the chapter, what is the role of civic knowledge to explain the levels of institutional trust and the levels of authoritarianism in young people in Latin America? Following the observed results, it is possible to affirm that having higher levels of civic knowledge has a paradoxical effect. On the one hand, and contrary to the political assumption, it negatively impacts confidence levels. Knowing more makes young people more critical. Apparently, the irregular, interrupted and even failed institutional development character should be considered when thinking about the hypotheses. On the other hand, aligned with expectations, greater knowledge leads to lower levels of authoritarianism. Civic knowledge can function as a kind of inoculation under the influence of anti-democratic ideas such as authoritarian practices presented to students participating in the ICCS 2009 and 2016 study. Viewed in this way, civic knowledge decreases the availability of authoritarian ideas, but promotes or it makes possible the distrust in the institutions. In this sense, the typical demand of school systems for greater citizen training (broadly understood by greater delivery of knowledge) would not be able to solve all the ills. The problem is more complex and its solution too. So how would citizen training improve civic engagement? How would the school system take care of citizen training in contexts of irregular/failed institutional development?

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. Additionally, civic knowledge plays a relevant role on the consistency between attitudes and political behavior (Zaller, 1992). In other words, this knowledge can condition the strength of the relationship between political attitudes and behavior. Along the same lines, previous evidence shows that people with higher levels of knowledge show a greater association between authoritarianism and conservatism (Federico, Fisher, & Deason, 2011), and even the relationship between authoritarianism and attitudes towards income redistribution is reversed (Jedinger & Burger, 2019). On the other hand, 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 also playing a role in their evaluation of the institutions. These possible relationships are not cleared here, so the question remains about the behavior that authoritarian attitudes would have at the time of institutional evaluation in contexts of high and low knowledge.

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