CHAPTER 8

Trust in Political Institutions and Support for Authoritarianism
Latin American Students – Does Civic Knowledge Make a Difference?

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Introduction

Institutional trust is a central aspect of the functioning of democracies as well as of their legitimacy (Lipset, 1959; Uslaner, 2018; Zmerli and van der Meer, 2017). Latin America has traditionally shown one of the lowest levels of trust worldwide (Catterberg and Moreno, 2006), most commonly associated with its history of authoritarian governments (Bargsted, Somma and Castillo, 2017). Several Latin American countries experienced military dictatorships during the 1970s and 1980s, usually characterised by human rights violations and political corruption. Although, nowadays, most of these countries have democratic systems, the cultural legacy of authoritarianism persists (Hite and Cesarini, 2004), as reflected in political practices that follow particular interests instead of collective demands. Such a scenario puts at risk the legitimacy of democracy in Latin America, particularly at times of economic crisis, such as the one faced due to the Covid-19 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 the 'mother' of trust (Galston, 2001, 2007), based on the simple assumption that it is undoubtedly difficult to trust in something that one does not know. In international studies evaluating civic-political knowledge, Latin American countries tend to obtain lower levels of achievement than more economically developed countries (Schulz et al., 2018), although most countries in Latin America count on civic education programmes monitored by international organisations like UNESCO (Cox, 2010). This raises concerns in the Latin American context as civic-political knowledge has proven to play a role in different areas of citizenship, including institutional trust, participation, tolerance and authoritarian beliefs (Castillo et al., 2014; Miranda,

Castillo and Cumsille, 2018; Sandoval-Hernandez et al., 2019). However, it is still not clear how political knowledge at school age could affect democratic attitudes in a region characterised by weak democratic foundations: is political knowledge at school age a predictor of greater political trust and less authoritarianism in contexts where political institutions are weak and delegitimised as in Latin America? In this chapter, we develop the main arguments in light of previous evidence on political trust and authoritarianism, as well as their link with political knowledge.

Institutional Trust

Institutional trust commands a vast research agenda in the social sciences (see Zmerli and Meer, 2017) and is generally understood as an evaluation of civic and political institutions (van der Meer and Hakhverdian, 2016). Such an evaluation is based on the performance of these institutions (Offe, 1999; Segovia et al., 2008) in a given context (Hardin, 2001). Thus, trust in political institutions such as a parliament or political parties can be understood as the evaluation that citizens make of the functioning of these in a particular scenario.

Although trust in the institution is observed as a contextualised issue, there is evidence that indicates political distrust as a global problem. Schyns and Koop (2009) show that, in six countries (Denmark, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Poland and Slovenia) from distinct regions across Europe, there is political distrust, despite their different contexts. In France and Germany, there is a general distrust and disconnect between citizens and the political elite (Dageförde and Schindler, 2018). Also, in the United States of America, there are high public levels of political distrust and scepticism in governments (Gershtenson and Plane, 2015).

Political distrust is clearly a global problem, but, as the context in which the development of institutional trust occurs is relevant for the acquisition of related attitudes, it is important to take into account the particularities of the evolution of democracy in Latin America. The history of democratic institutions in the region has suffered from a series of contradictions, marked by an alternation between authoritarianism, democracy and semi-democracy (Bargsted et al., 2017).

The seven countries covered in this chapter all had military dictatorships between the 1930s–1970s, with large heterogeneity in the process of democratic recovery (Kirsten, 2020). The social and political context among these countries varies significantly and, for each one, it illuminates the relevance of studying the development of political trust and

authoritarian attitudes. All of these, to some extent, have presented periods of political conflict and dictatorship in past decades and, in some cases, up to the present. For instance, Guatemala only achieved peace in 1995 after thirty years of armed conflict and several periods of dictatorship. The Dominican Republic alternated between dictatorships and political instabilities between the 1930s and the mid-1990s. Paraguay is recognised for having had the longest dictatorship in the region, between 1954 and 1989. For its part, Peru, between the years 1968 and 1990, coexisted with dictatorships and armed conflicts with terrorism, the most visible being the '*Sendero Luminoso'* terrorist group. The case of Chile does not escape this pattern. Between the years 1973 and 1989, a civil-military dictatorship was established whose echoes are heard to this day. Colombia did not go through the dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, but it has had to live with decades of conflict arising from the presence of guerrillas and drug trafficking. Of this group of countries, Mexico is a potential exception. Since the Mexican Revolution, a democratic election system was established, although with almost no renewal of the governing coalitions until the 2000s. However, it does not escape the general difficulties of the region, such as high levels of inequality or the presence of corruption at different levels.

All these countries have entered a period of consolidation of their democracies during the 1990s and 2000s, significantly improving indicators of civil liberties or representativeness of governments (de Viteri Vázquez and Bjørnskov, 2020), although far from the levels obtained by consolidated democracies. Despite institutional development efforts, these and other countries in the region indicated consistently high levels of institutional corruption over fifty years, with the exception of Chile, which showed some improvements after 1989 (de Viteri Vázquez and Bjørnskov, 2020). This phenomenon can be seen in the recurring political scandals linked to institutional corruption. Economic crises and corruption throughout Latin America have certainly complicated these political scenarios, bearing witness to low and declining levels of trust in institutions, particularly in the government and political parties (Latinobarometro, 2018). Finally – and without going into considerable detail – recent institutional crises in the last decade (2010–20) have produced serious threats to democracy in Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia and Chile – just to mention the most prominent. In these contexts, young people have developed their beliefs, attitudes and knowledge about democracy and its principles. Given these contexts, the importance of studying these topics in the region is further underlined.

Besides political history, institutional trust is affected by a series of contextual and individual characteristics. At a contextual level, aspects of society such as economic performance, wealth distribution and/or political change have shown evidence of affecting levels of trust (Citrin and Stoker, 2018; Martini and Quaranta, 2020). At 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 et al., 2019) and/or the perceived effectiveness of institutions (Lauglo, 2013). Among all these, education has proven to be one of the most consistent predictors of political trust, as the more educated citizens are the greater their abilities to evaluate the functioning of institutions (Lipset, 1960; van der Meer and Hakhverdian, 2016). Based on these antecedents, our first hypothesis is that students with higher levels of civic knowledge will exhibit greater support for political institutions.

Authoritarianism

The concept of authoritarianism, widely used in social psychology, 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 those perceived to be in authority; and conventionalism, which describes the degree of adherence to conventions, traditions and social norms (Altemeyer, 1996; Funke, 2005). Citizens carry out authoritarian practices when they support traditional values endorsed by the authorities and show aggression towards minority groups (Ching et al., 2020). Sochos (2019) also indicates that individuals express authoritarian attitudes before an experience or threat to their collective identity and or bonds with social groups.

A high proportion of Latin American citizens present some support for authoritarianism. A typical approach that captures this trend is derived from an agreement with the following phrases: (a) democracy is preferable to any other form of government; (b) in some circumstances, an authoritarian government is preferable to 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) are supported by up 43 per cent of people in Latin America, who do not decisively support democracy as the best form of government (Latinobarometro, 2018). Along the same

lines, studies of school-age populations have also shown evidence of supporting authoritarian practices (Schulz et al., 2018). More than 60 per cent of young students in Latin America would rate their complete or limited agreement with justifying dictatorship if it brought order, safety and/or economic benefits (Sandoval-Hernandez et al., 2019). Therefore, it is suggested that some support for authoritarian practices has become part of the political culture in Latin America (Almond and 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 within the school system (Cox and Castillo, 2015). In this sense, the assumption is that higher levels of political knowledge, improved through better citizenship education, should lead to less prevalence 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 for, and 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 information that citizens handle about the political system, and political sophistication, a more complex approach to expertise on political issues. Beyond conceptual specificities, each recognises the role that civic knowledge plays in a better understanding of various relevant attitudes and behaviours within 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, 2015) and 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 of populations of fourteen-year-old students show mixed evidence for H1. From the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Study 1999 (Schulz and Sibberns, 2004), International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2019 (Schulz, Ainley and Fraillon, 2011) and ICCS 2016 (Köhler et al., 2018), it is possible to observe that, in developed countries with low corruption rates, the association between civic knowledge and institutional trust is positive, while, in countries with less development and high corruption, higher levels of civic knowledge are associated with lower institutional trust (Sandoval-Hernandez et al., 2019; Torney-Purta, Richardson and Barber, 2004). Therefore, although we follow a more intuitive hypothesis regarding the role of knowledge in trust, this is probably affected by some of the historical and contextual factors mentioned above.

Methods

Data Collection

The data analysed in this research correspond to the ICCS. This study is carried out by the IEA and has been conducted 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 and Paraguay took part only in 2009 and Peru only in 2016.

The ICCS 2009–2016 Latin America dataset encompasses a nationally representative sample of eighth-grade students who, on average, are approximately thirteen to fourteen years old, reaching a total of 29,896 observations in 2009 and 25,319 in 2016. Students were selected through stratified random sampling in two stages. In the first stage, a minimum of 150 schools per country was selected, and at least one class per school was chosen at random, including as participants all the students of that class (Schulz, Ainley, and Fraillon, 2011). In Latin America, a class refers to a group of students from a specific grade or academic level that attend most classes together. The sample sizes of students and schools for each country and year are summarised below (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.1. *Samples of students participating in the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study per country, per 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 ICCS comprises a test of civic knowledge assessing students' civic knowledge and citizen reasoning. Knowledge refers to information learned and used by students to make sense of their civic worlds, while citizen reasoning is how students use said civic and citizen information to reach conclusions in a real context. At the same time, it also includes a questionnaire measuring students' perceptions, attitudes and background on issues related to citizenship, participation in school and school climate, among other variables. Finally, it considers a series of instruments to capture relevant information on teacher perceptions of citizenship education in their school: the organisation and culture in their school and classrooms and their teaching backgrounds. In addition, information is provided by principals regarding the characteristics of the school, the culture and the school climate, and the provision of civic and citizenship education curricula (Schulz et al., 2011).

Variables

Dependent Variables

The first dependent variable of this study is political trust, an index built upon four indicators from the ICCS questionnaire. Based on the question *'How much do you trust each of the following groups, institutions or sources of information?'* Students rated their level of trust using the following responses: *'completely', 'somewhat', 'a little', 'not at all'* for the following institutions: (1) National Government, (2) National Parliament, (3) political parties and (4) courts of justice.

The second dependent variable is support for authoritarianism. Starting with the question '*How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the government and its power?'* A scale of three indicators is constructed that serves to identify the extent to which students support undemocratic practices: (1) 'Concentration of power in one person guarantees order', (2) 'Dictatorships are justified when they bring order and safety' and (3) 'Dictatorships are justified when they bring economic benefits'. Students rated their level of agreement as *'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'* for each of these statements.

Both political trust and authoritarianism indices were estimated using confirmatory factor analyses, which show adequate fit ($\chi 2 = 2099.19$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.977; TLI = 0.962; RMSEA = 0.057). Once estimated, each of the latent measures was rescaled to a mean of fifty and a standard deviation of ten for ease of interpretation.

Independent Variables

The main independent variable in this study was the civic knowledge score achieved in the ICCS. The civic knowledge test consists of a set of seventy-nine items applied and organised into seven different booklets with four content domains: civic society and systems, civic principles, civic participation and civic identities. Each of these domains is made up of a set of sub-domains incorporating aspects and key concepts[1]. Students responded in a booklet containing three kinds of questions: multiple-choice, true/false and open-ended response.

To obtain the level of civic knowledge, an Item Response Theory (IRT) model was used to estimate five plausible values as a score. This kind of model makes it possible to use all the information available from the students' tests and questionnaires to obtain precise estimates when it comes to measuring cognitive abilities that cannot be directly observed. The average score of civic knowledge in the ICCS test for 2009 was 500 points with a standard deviation of 100 and an empirical range of 380 to 576 points for the thirty-eight countries evaluated, while the average score

[1] 'Society and civic systems' consist of knowledge about the roles, rights, responsibilities and opportunities of citizens; state institutions that are in charge of governance and enforce laws; and the civil institutions that mediate the relationship between citizens and state institutions. 'Civic principles' correspond to knowledge in the sub-domains of equity, freedom and social cohesion. 'Civic participation' is relative to knowledge about decision-making at the governmental and voting level; the ability to debate and develop proposals; and community participation. 'Civic identities' evaluate civic self-image as an individual experience in each of their civic communities and the sense of connection to those communities.

Table 8.2. *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.

of the countries for the ICCS test 2016 was 517 with a standard deviation of 101 points and a range between 381 and 586. Also, performance levels are presented in ICCS that seek to provide a substantive description of the scores obtained. There are four levels (A–D) that are structured hierarchically so that, at a higher level of performance, it is understood that students have more complex knowledge and citizenship skills.[2] The scores for each Latin American country participating in ICCS in 2009 and 2016 are summarised in Table 8.2. In general, the results of the knowledge test for each Latin American country are below the international average.

The rest of the independent variables fulfil the objective of controlling the statistical association between support for authoritarianism, trust in political institutions and civic knowledge. In this sense, a proxy variable is used to assess the student's socio-economic and cultural background based on the highest educational level reached by his/her father or

[2] Scores at 'Low level D' are considered those below 311 points, reflecting a lack of knowledge and skills measured in ICCS. In 'Level D (311–394 points), students recognise explicit examples that represent the basic characteristics of a democracy, for example, they can identify the relationship between the secret ballot and the freedom of the voters. In 'Level C' (395–478), the students show familiarity with the ideas of equity, social cohesion and freedom as principles of democracy and relate them to everyday-life situations. For example, they relate freedom of the press to the accuracy of the information provided by the media. In 'Level B' (479–562 points), students demonstrate familiarity with the general concept of representative democracy as a political system and can, for example, identify that informed voters are capable of making better decisions when voting in an election. In that sense, they recognise the ways in which laws and institutions can be used to protect and promote the principles and values of a society. Finally, at 'Level A' (higher than 563 points), students are able to relate the processes of political and social organisation and influence and the legal and institutional mechanisms designed to control them; for example, students would be able to identify the possible strategic objectives of an ethical consumption programme or evaluate a policy according to ideas of equality and inclusion.

Table 8.3. *Descriptive statistics for control variables as a function of country and year.*

	Education		Books		Pol. discussion		Gender	
Country 2009	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Chile	2.41	1.08	1.76	1.14	49.53	9.92	.51	.50
Colombia	2.16	1.53	1.44	1.09	50.87	10.04	.54	.50
Dominican Republic	2.08	1.25	1.05	1.08	51.91	10.29	.55	.50
Mexico	1.31	1.52	1.26	1.10	53.16	9.97	.49	.50
Guatemala	1.91	1.43	1.43	1.13	47.62	9.64	.52	.50
Paraguay	1.76	1.47	1.10	1.11	51.60	9.81	.52	.50
Country 2016								
Chile	2.61	1.10	1.49	1.14	49.72	9.45	.49	.50
Colombia	2.30	1.42	1.05	1.02	50.59	9.24	.52	.50
Dominican Republic	2.24	1.25	.91	.97	52.39	10.20	.51	.50
Mexico	1.99	1.39	1.08	1.08	48.87	9.08	.50	.50
Guatemala	2.43	1.31	1.40	1.04	53.68	8.95	.48	.50

Note: M and *SD* represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

mother[3] as well as by the number of books at home.[4] Additionally, we included the student's gender[5] and the level of political discussion the student conducts with friends and family outside the classroom.[6]

Analytical Strategy

We began the analyses exploring the differences within countries over time (2009–2016) in both dependent variables (institutional trust and authoritarianism). Next, the model estimation was performed on a multi-level framework in order to account for the variance at the school level for both institutional trust and authoritarianism. First, we estimated a null model (without predictors) that provided a variance decomposition at the individual and school levels, to identify the proportion of variance of the dependent variables explained by the characteristics of the school. Second, we estimated a model adding the main predictor, civic knowledge,

[3] Students rated the level of parents' education using: 0 = *did not complete eighth grade*, 1= *completed eighth grade*, 2 = *high school*, 3 = *vocational or technical career* and 4 = *career at university or postgraduate*.

[4] Students rated the number of books at home using: 0 = *none or very few (0–10 books)*, 1 = *enough to fill one shelf (11–25 books)*, 2 = *enough to fill one bookcase* (26–100 books), 3 = *enough to fill two bookcases (101–200 books)* and 4 = *enough to fill three or more bookcases (more than 200 books).*

[5] 0 = *Boy* and 1 = *Girl*

[6] IRT WLE scores with mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10 within each participating country

to assess its association with institutional trust and authoritarianism. For a better understanding of regression coefficients, we divided the scale by 100, so that 300 points would be represented by '3' and 700 points would be represented by '7'. The next model included the control variables for testing the stability of civic knowledge effect beyond individual socio-economic variables. Finally, the fourth model included the fixed effects of country and time in order to test the stability of civic knowledge between countries across time.

Results

Descriptive Results

Figure 8.1 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. Second, considering the general trend between countries, it appears that the Dominican Republic and Paraguay are the countries with the highest average trust, whereas Peru and Guatemala show the lowest levels. Although it is difficult to make a connection between this pattern of results and the countries' political events, it is striking that the three countries with the lowest levels of trust had major corruption scandals during 2015 (ICCS-2016 assessment period). In Guatemala, President Otto Peréz Molina resigned in connection with corruption scandals; in Peru, President Ollanta Humala had to face several accusations and was eventually linked to one of the largest corruption scandals in the region, the 'Odebrecht' case. Furthermore, Chile, although considered the country with the 'best' corruption indices in the region, saw widely reported revelations during 2014 and 2015 about illegal financing of politics known as 'Pentagate'.

Third, we also observe some difference in the variability of trust in different institutions within countries, which tends to co-vary with the average trust levels: the higher 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). The 2018 Latinobarometer, which is applied to an adult representative sample in several countries in Latin America, reported that only 21 per cent of the adult respondents trust in their parliament and 13 per cent trust in the political parties: both below or considerably lower than the results from ICCS.

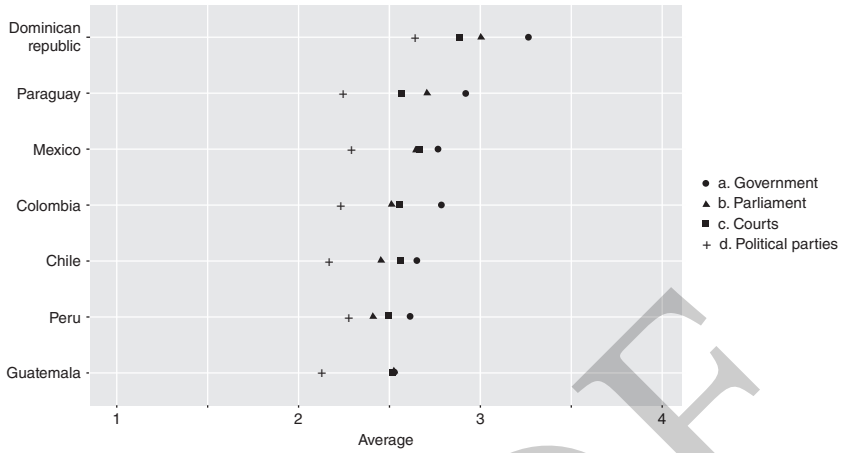

Figure 8.1 Institutional trust in Latin America by country.

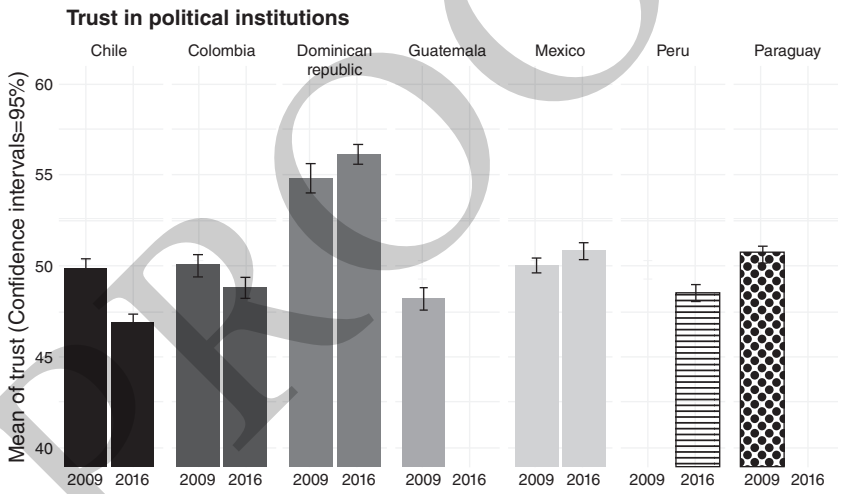

Figure 8.2 The scale of institutional trust in Latin America by country/year.

With regard to institutional trust (see Figure 8.2), the Dominican Republic and Paraguay recorded the highest levels of trust (above the scaled average of fifty considering confidence intervals). As far as changes over time are concerned, Mexico slightly increased its trust levels whereas Colombia and particularly Chile showed a decrease, which coincides with

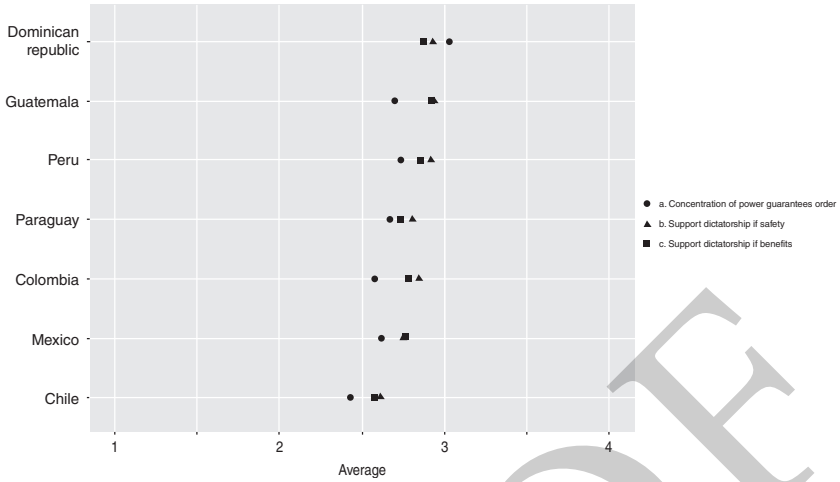

Figure 8.3 Support for authoritarianism in Latin America by country.

the decline in institutional trust observed in the last decade in Chile, not only in political institutions, but also in those in charge of public order (Morales Quiroga, 2020).

Moving on to our second variable of interest, Figure 8.3 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 support for the concentration of power and dictatorships if this brings order, economic benefits and security. This aspect has been widely discussed as a warning about the persistence of authoritarian beliefs in Latin America (Sandoval-Hernandez et al., 2019; Schulz et al., 2018). The samples from 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 clustering of averages between the three evaluated statements, the closeness is somewhat surprising: although the three items evaluate aspects clearly linked to authoritarianism, it is quite different to support the concentration of power than to support a dictatorship in an explicit way, therefore a clearer differentiation between each would be expected. Only Guatemala and Colombia show some dispersion of the mean scores, but this is no greater than a half-point on the scale.

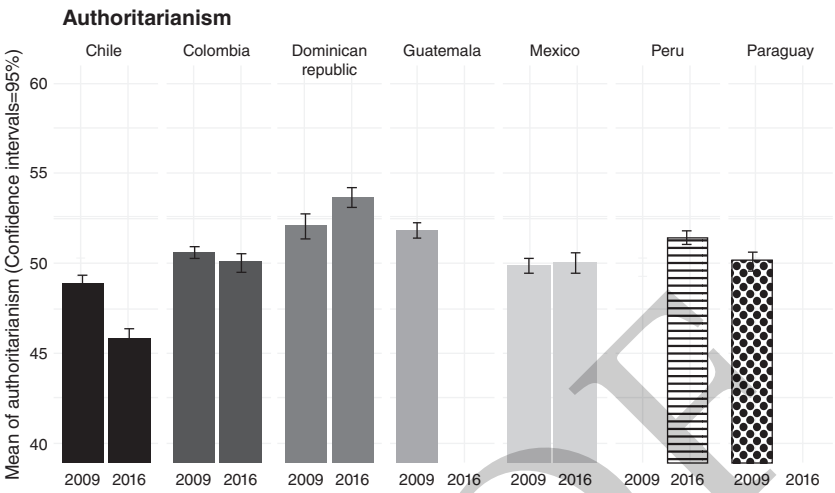

Figure 8.4 The scale of support for authoritarianism in Latin America by country/year.

With regard to changes (or stability) over time in levels of authoritarianism between 2009 and 2016 (see Figure 8.4), the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Peru and Paraguay display higher levels of support for authoritarian practices (above the scaled average = fifty considering confidence intervals); Mexico and Colombia are observed close to the average and Chile presents the lowest level of authoritarianism (below the scaled average = fifty). Considering differences between 2009 and 2016, the Dominican Republic and Mexico show increased levels whereas Chile shows the largest decrease.

Regarding the role that civic knowledge plays in supporting authoritarian practices and levels of trust (see Table 8.4), we observe that, at higher levels of civic knowledge, levels of support for authoritarian practices decrease (average r = –0.350), as do levels of trust (average r = –0.254). Additionally, it is possible to observe that higher support for authoritarianism is positively correlated with trust in civic-political institutions (average r = 0.388), which is somewhat counter-intuitive in light of the theoretical assumptions presented above.

Regression Models

The previous descriptive results depict the puzzling role of civic knowledge regarding trust in institutions and authoritarianism. In order to advance

Table 8.4. *Correlations between trust in civic institutions, support for authoritarianism and civic knowledge.*

	Civic knowledge with institutional trust	Civic knowledge with authoritarianism	Institutional trust with authoritarianism
Chile	-.140 ***	-.336 ***	.365 ***
Colombia	-.187 ***	-.318 ***	.362 ***
Dominican Republic	-.271 ***	-.337 ***	.389 ***
Guatemala	-.280 ***	-.304 ***	.389 ***
Mexico	-.192 ***	-.313 ***	.397 ***
Peru	-.278 ***	-.266 ***	.380 ***
Paraguay	-.267 ***	-.350 ***	.369 ***
Full sample	-.254 ***	-.350 ***	.388 ***

understanding of these associations, we estimated a series of multi-level regression models. In turn, we present below the results for institutional trust as the dependent variable (see Table 8.6) and then for authoritarianism.

In Table 8.5, Model 0 is a null model (without predictors) allowing estimation of the proportion of the variance of institutional trust associated with school level, which in this case is 12 per cent. This proportion is a little high, considering previous evidence on attitudinal outcomes in educational studies. In Model 1, we observe that higher levels of civic knowledge are associated with lower levels of institutional trust. This means that students who perform less well on the knowledge test (e.g. 300 points) obtain 54.24 points on average in political trust (α:*62.01* + (β:*-2.59*3*)), whereas those with high performance (e.g. 700 points) obtain 43.88 points (α:*62.01* + (β:*-2.59*7*)), 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 increases 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 the year of study. The result shows that the observed effects remain similar when controlled by country and year.

Table 8.6 presents the results for authoritarianism, following the same logic presented in Table 8.5 for institutional trust. In this case, the null model (Model 0) shows that over 11 per cent of the variance in authoritarianism is associated with school level, meaning that a small part of the variance could be linked to school characteristics. Model 1 enters civic knowledge as the main predictor. The result indicates that, at higher levels of civic knowledge, lower

Table 8.5. *Regression models: the association between trust in civic institutions and civic knowledge in Latin America.*

	M0: Null		M1: Trust		M2: Trust		M3: Trust	
Predictors	*Estimates*	*p*	*Estimates*	*p*	*Estimates*	*p*	*Estimates*	*p*
(Intercept)	50.26	**<.001**	62.01	**<.001**	56.31	**<.001**	54.65	**<.001**
civic_know100			-2.59	**<.001**	-2.54	**<.001**	-2.36	**<.001**
parental_education					.11	**.001**	.05	.124
books_at_home					-.17	**<.001**	-.13	**.002**
gender					-1.24	**<.001**	-1.31	**<.001**
political_discussion					.12	**<.001**	.12	**<.001**
time [2016]							-.42	**.008**
Country [Colombia]							.79	**<.001**
Country [Dominicana]							4.72	**<.001**
Country [Guatemala]							-1.72	**<.001**
Country [Mexico]							1.69	**<.001**
Country [Peru]							.99	**.002**
Country [Paraguay]							-1.04	**<.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	.12		.09		.09		.05	
N	1911_{idsch}		1911_{idsch}		1911_{idsch}		1911_{idsch}	
Observations	48861		48861		47757		47757	
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	.000 / .121		.053 / .136		.070 / .151		.108 / .157	

Note: σ^2: within variance component; τ_{00}: between variance component; ICC: intraclass correlation; N: number of schools; Observations: number of students; Marginal R^2: explained variance by fixed parameters; Conditional R^2: explained variance by fixed and random parameters.

Table 8.6. *Regression models: the association between support for authoritarianism and civic knowledge in Latin America.*

	M0: Null		M1: Authoritarianism		M2: Authoritarianism		M3: Authoritarianism	
Predictors	*Estimates*	*p*	*Estimates*	*p*	*Estimates*	*p*	*Estimates*	*p*
(Intercept)	50.21	**<.001**	67.36	**<.001**	65.74	**<.001**	63.82	**<.001**
civic_know100			-3.77	**<.001**	-3.72	**<.001**	-3.63	**<.001**
parental_education					-.13	**<.001**	-.13	**<.001**
books_at_home					-.20	**<.001**	-.18	**<.001**
gender					-.19	**.029**	-.29	**.018**
political_discussion					.04	**<.001**	.04	**<.001**
time [2016]							-.46	**.002**
Country [Colombia]							2.89	**<.001**
Country [Dominicana]							2.25	**<.001**
Country [Guatemala]							2.58	**<.001**
Country [Mexico]							2.00	**<.001**
Country [Peru]							1.12	**<.001**
Country [Paraguay]							2.88	**<.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	.11		.06		.06		.04	
N	1911_{idsch}		1911_{idsch}		1911_{idsch}		1911_{idsch}	
Observations	48861		48861		47757		47757	
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	.000 / .114		.112 / .165		.118/ .168		.134 / .172	

Note: σ^2: within variance component; τ_{00}: between variance component; ICC: Intraclass correlation; N: number of schools; Observations: number of students; Marginal R^2: explained variance by fixed parameters; Conditional R^2: explained variance by fixed and random parameters.

levels of support for authoritarian practices are observed. This translates into the finding that young people who perform poorly on the knowledge test (e.g. 300 points) obtain 56.05 points on the scale of support for authoritarian practices (α:*67.36* + (β:*-3.77*3*)), which is half of one standard deviation above the scale average. In contrast, young people who obtain a high performance in the knowledge test (e.g. 700 points) obtain on average 40.97 points on authoritarianism (α:*67.36* + (β:*-3.77*7*)), which is closer to one standard deviation below the scale average. Once again, Model 2 enters a series of statistical controls. The result indicates that living in homes with parents with higher levels of educational attainment, having more books at home and being a girl decrease support for authoritarian practices. Furthermore, it indicates that the effect of civic knowledge remains stable even after controlling for this set of variables. Finally, as before, 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 the year of study.

Discussion and Conclusions

The present chapter was aimed at evaluating the effect of civic knowledge on two central aspects of democratic legitimacy in Latin American school 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 are observed in the adult population, raising the question of whether this younger generation is more trusting than their adult counterparts and/or whether trust levels decrease when becoming adults. Second, certain consistencies are observed in both the young and adult populations; for example, that certain institutions (such as political parties) are the worst evaluated. Third, Chile and Colombia show significant decreases in trust in civic institutions, while findings for Mexico and the Dominican Republic remain stable and even increase in levels of trust over time. Therefore, across the region, trust levels are far from being stable and appear to follow a different pattern from that observed in the adult population. These age group differences could be due to multiple factors, such as experiences with institutions, generational differences or exposure to political crises in the region. However, assessing these possibilities is the subject of future research.

When considering the different authoritarian practices evaluated, most students tended to support some of them consistently, with a striking level of stability. Except for Chile, which shows significant decreases, in most of the countries observed, young people maintained and even increased levels

of support for authoritarianism over time, which again points in the direction of a deeply authoritarian culture across 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. On the one hand, school-age students with higher levels of civic knowledge show less support for the authoritarian practices of governments, since they seem to understand better that such practices are inconsistent with democratic life. However, on the other hand, those same students who are better versed in civic knowledge show less trust in the institutions that comprise 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).

There is a series of implications for civic education in Latin America from the results presented here. It would be naive to expect that increased civic knowledge would automatically have a positive impact on democratic attitudes. Enhanced civic knowledge could lead to more scepticism and a more critical perspective on citizenship, affecting confidence in political institutions in contexts where they are characterised by low efficiency and/or corruption. In this sense, low trust is not always a synonym for weak democratic attitudes, but could be actually the opposite. Furthermore, it is worth asking how what is observed here has played a role in the Covid-19 pandemic, where levels of public information and trust and the role of authority are at the centre of the management of the crisis. Therefore, it would be wrong to simply evaluate the impact of civic knowledge by the levels of trust in political institutions.

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