Trust in Police in Latin America
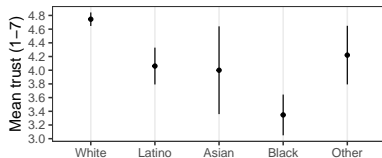
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Motivation

Long-documented differences in trust in police by race and class in US.
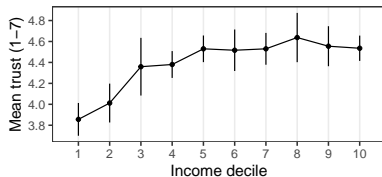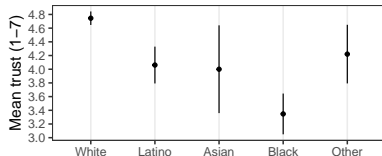

Race/ethnicity
LAPOP 2017

Income
(LAPOP 2010–2017)
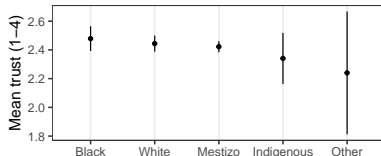
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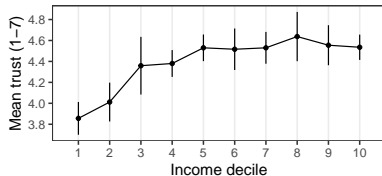
Long-documented differences in trust in police by race and class in US.

In a field experiment in Medellín, Colombia from 2018-2019:
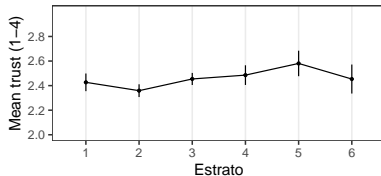
Why you might care

Medellín $\rightarrow$ Colombia $\rightarrow$ Latin America and the Caribbean

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Why should we care about trust in police in Latin America?
- Most violent region $\rightarrow$ welfare losses, importance in public opinion.
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Role of citizens in co-production of security outcomes.
- Police rely on citizens for information, cooperation to do their jobs.
- Interventions like community policing: build trust to promote security currently/recently undertaken in the region (e.g., Blair et al., 2021)

Applying the conventional wisdom

In the US…

- Communities of color, low income communities exposed to:
  - → More police abuse, bias (on average)
  - → Worse security outcomes (on average)
- Experiences lower these citizens' belief that police agents will take an action that produces a beneficial outcome (for the citizen).

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In Latin America, reasonable to expect a similar logic because:
- Low income communities exposed to:
  - $\rightarrow$ More police abuse, bias (on average)
  - $\rightarrow$ Worse security outcomes (on average)
- Presumably a similar learning mechanism at work.

Concept of trust

Many concepts of trust in government (Levi and Stoker, 2000; Citrin and Stoker, 2018).

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Trust is:
- Cognitive: A *belief* used to form an expectation about the outcome (positive or negative) expected action of another party (Hardin, 2003; Bhattacharaya et al., 1998)
  - $\rightarrow$ Here, other party is the police.
- Relational: Focused on *interaction* between respondent and another party, the police.

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Definition has implications for process through which trust evolves.

Trust in Police in Latin America

Social class and trust in police

Data: Surveys that measure social class and trust in police.
- Primary: LAPOP surveys (147 unique surveys in 20 countries)
- Secondary: Panel surveys from Medellín experiment (2 waves) and Estudio Longitudinal Social de Chile (5 waves)

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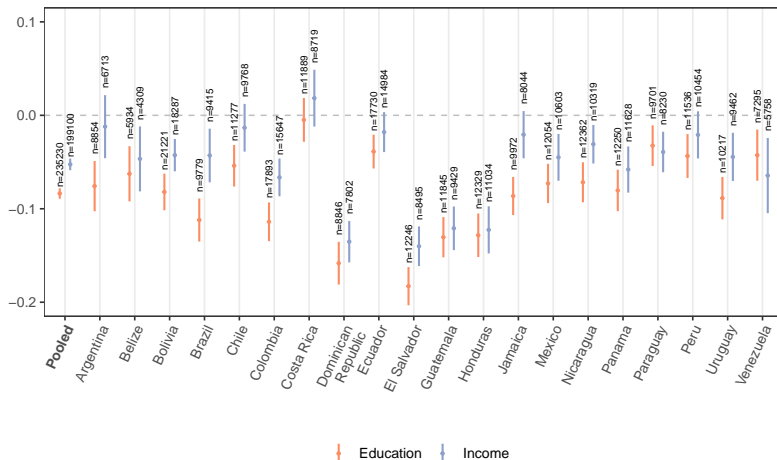
Quantity of interest: Correlation between class and trust in police.
- OLS regression of trust Z-score on class Z-score.
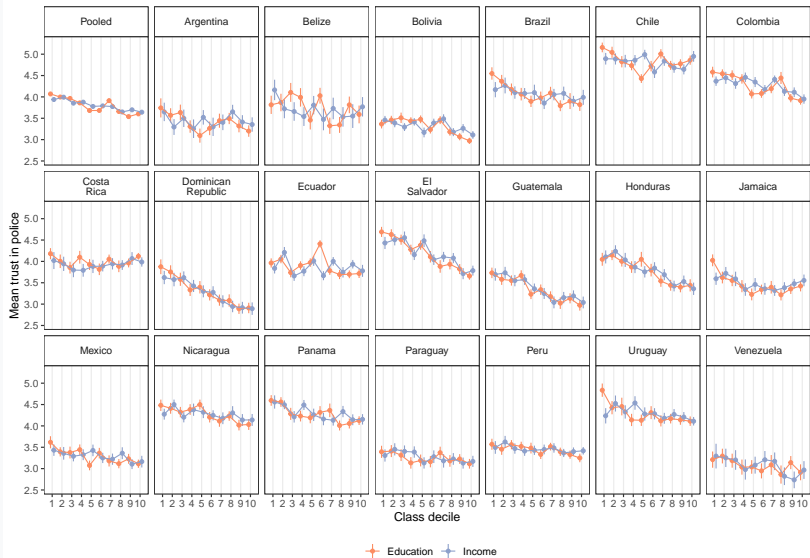- Standard errors clustered at each country's primary sampling unit.

A weak, negative correlation

(Pooled) correlations are: -0.053 (income) and -.084 (education)

- No significant, positive correlations in *any* country.

Education   Income

An artifact of linearity?

Mean trust in police vs. Class decile, by country. Legend: Education, Income. Panels: Pooled, Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela.

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Within these alternate data sources, correlations look similar for income, education, and alternative measures.

Forecasting Trust in Police in Latin America

The forecasting task

We were surprised by these results. Were we uniquely bad at understanding trust in police?

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The forecasting task

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Elicited quantities: Average trust on LAPOP question at 10th, 50th, 90th percentiles in a select country.

- Respondent chooses country (up to 2).
- Provide information on income distribution, question that was asked.

Aggregate forecasts

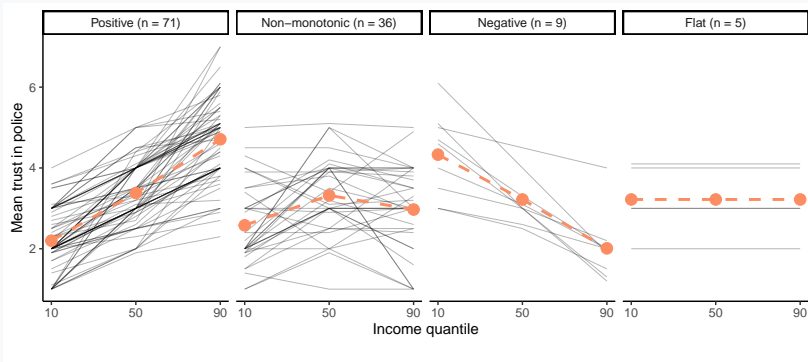Average forecasts consistent with *positive* correlation.

○ Largest discrepancy: understating trust in police at 10th percentile.
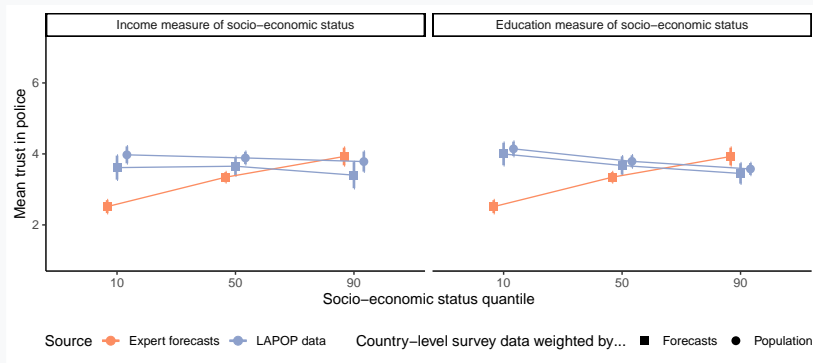
Disaggregating forecasts

Modal forecast suggests *positive* correlation (64% of forecasts)
- Just 7% of forecasts predict a *negative* correlation

Possible Explanations

Measurement problems?

Missingness of survey data?
- Rates of missingness: trust (2%), education (1%), and income (12%)
  - → Qualitatively similar correlations between socioeconomic status measures
- Possible to construct best- and worst-case bounds on correlation:
  - → Education: [-0.10, -0.07]
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Do respondents understand the trust question?
- In Medellín, baseline trust predicts attendance at community policing meetings.
- In LAPOP data, correlation between class and trust in other institutional actors responds predictably to election of right wing president.

Trust as a trait?

We characterize trust as a belief, but others view trust as a trait or predisposition (Colquitt et al., 2007; Tsfati and Ariely, 2014)

- Unclear how being more or less trusting should correlate with socioeconomic status.
- ICC across institutional trust measures: cluster = respondent
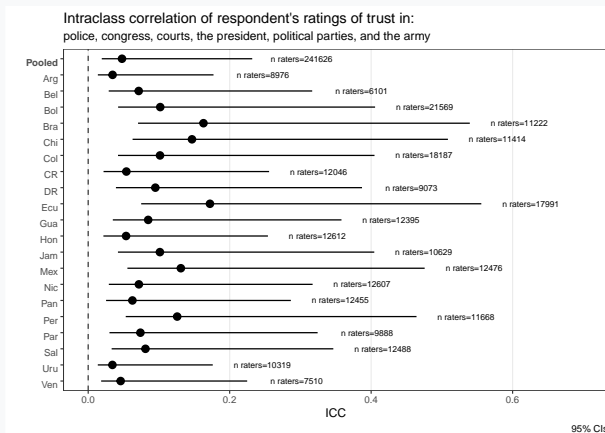
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Intraclass correlation of respondent's ratings of trust in:
police, congress, courts, the president, political parties, and the army

95% CIs

Learning from policing/security outcomes

Basic idea about evolution of trust:
- All individuals have some prior belief about police trustworthiness
- Observe policing or security outcome (a signal)
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Three possible signals in LAPOP data (note these are self-reported):
- Crime victimization indicator (in last year)
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Do voters exhibit changes in trust consistent with updating?

Does "updating" vary in socioeconomic status?

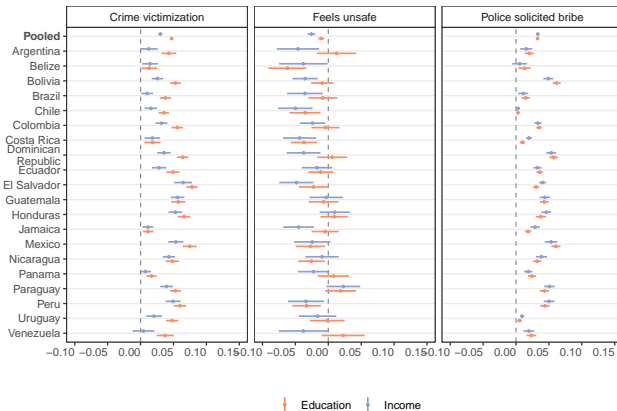Differences in trust consistent with updating on a "bad" signal.

- Degree of updating remarkably consistent across measures of socioeconomic status.
- *Less* updating among poor than suggested by Bayes' rule.
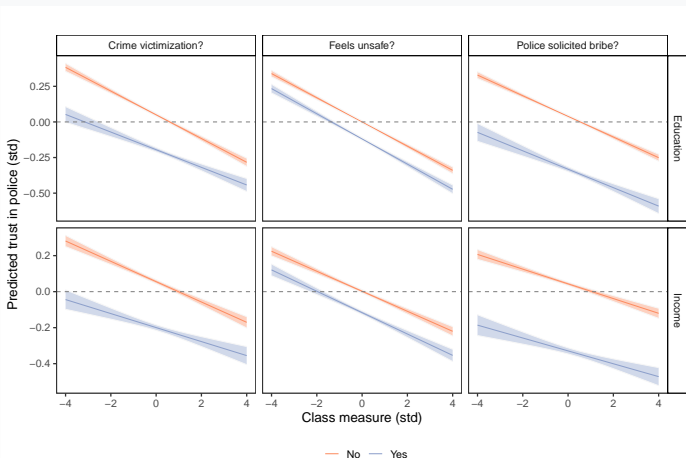
Who reports observing a "bad" signal?

Rich respondents report *more* crime victimization and bribe solicitation.

Feelings of safety are mixed.

Organizing Learning

How does trust evolve?

Goal: Use slightly richer model of the evolution of trust in police to better understand or rationalize surprising findings.

Naïve model from conventional wisdom:
- The poor see more "bad signals" (poor outcomes) because security/policing outcomes are poorer.

Richer model allows for variation in:
- Prior levels of trust (at $t-1$)
- Probability that a signal is observed
- Content of signal ("good" vs. "bad")
- Threshhold for how outcomes constitute "good" or "bad" signal.

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Characterizing trust descriptively can lead to better targeting of policing interventions.

Better pinning down *why* is important to comparative study of police-civilian relations.

Thank You!

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Preferences for *mano dura* and beliefs

Relationship between preferences and beliefs is *ex-ante* unclear:

- Beliefs (trust) shape preferences about police role.
- Preferences about policing shape how updating occurs (e.g., motivated reasoning).