# Crime Victimization and Public Support for Democracy: Evidence from Latin America

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## Abstract

Numerous reports suggest that the recent increase in crime poses a profound threat to the stability of newly established electoral democracies in Latin America. This study uses AmericasBarometer survey data from 10 countries to test hypotheses concerning the relationship between crime victimization and two different measures of public support for democracy, satisfaction with the way democracy works (SWD), and preference for democracy as a form of government (PFD). Using hierarchical logistic modeling, we find that people who have been crime victims during the previous year are significantly more likely to express lower levels of SWD but that PFD is not sensitive to crime victimization, net of several individual and country-level control variables. Thus, individuals who experienced crime directly may hold governments responsible for their vulnerability to crime, yet their victimization does not erode endorsing democracy as a preferred form of government. The findings argue strongly in favor of treating public support for democracy as a multifaceted phenomenon and testing for the effects of crime victimization on different measures of support for democracy. The reported results have methodological and substantive implications for the study of the political effects of crime, particularly with respect to Latin American countries.

The increase in crime and violence that began in Latin America in the mid-1980s, and which has afflicted nearly every country in the region since then, is reflected in the rising number of homicides recorded per 100,000

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persons. By 2002, the homicide rate in Latin America reached 23.2, four times greater than in the United States, and higher, even, than that observed in the war-torn countries of West and Central Africa (Waiselfisz, 2008). This grim statistic has bestowed on Latin America the sad distinction of being one of the most violent regions in the world.

A consequential feature of the crime surge in Latin America is that it closely followed on the heels of the transition to democracy that swept across the region in the 1980s. After decades of authoritarian rule, the military in country after country relinquished control to elected politicians. Today, elected governments rule in every Latin American country except Cuba. The "third wave" of democratic transitions (Diamond, 1999; Huntington, 1991) gave rise to a new concern about the nature and durability of democracies in the post-transition period. Of the 74 countries worldwide that changed from non-democratic systems to electoral democracies since the mid-1970s, 65% were classified as "uncivil democracies" (Holston, 1998, p. 3). These "uncivil democracies" are characterized by increased violence, decline in civil protections, and criminalization of the poor (Holston, 1998). The unqualified enthusiasm that initially greeted the transition to democracy gave way to a more sober appreciation of the problems associated with the "second transition," which O'Donnell (1994, p. 56) described as the movement from a democratically elected government to a truly democratic regime.

Scholars who previously focused on the transition from authoritarianism turned their attention to the problem of "democratic consolidation," the concept of choice in a new wave of research that recognized the urgency of institutional reform, as well as the need to foster a culture of citizenship compatible with liberal democratic governance (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Munck, 2001; Schedler, 1998, 2001). The popularity of the concept of consolidation came at the cost of clarity, as analysts progressively broadened the list of descriptors to encompass an unwieldy host of considerations, such as the neutralization of anti-system actors, the reduction of income inequality, or the establishment of civilian supremacy over the military (Schedler, 1998). Despite the lack of consensus, it is generally understood that democratic consolidation exists when contending social classes and political groups come to accept the formal rules and informal understandings that characterize democratic governance. In the often-cited shorthand definition by Linz and Stepan (1996, pp. 15–16), the conditions of consolidation are obtained when all political actors consider democracy "the only game in town."

In Latin America, the crime upsurge is viewed as a major threat to the maintenance and deepening of electoral democracy through mechanisms that are varied and complex. In Guatemala, for example, people's preference for radical change was found to be higher among the victims of crime who registered lower levels of support for democratic institutions (Seligson & Azpuru,

2001). The public's perception of the legitimacy of the state is relevant to the stability of new democracies in Latin America inasmuch as mass support for the political system is thought to "generate micro-level behaviors and attitudes that strengthen democratic regimes" (Booth & Seligson, 2009, p. 2). Likewise, fear of crime prompts the public to favor repressive measures, regardless of their negative consequences for the respect for civil rights and adherence to due process (Prillaman, 2003; Sanchez, 2006). The corrosive effects of crime and insecurity on confidence in the judiciary and respect for the rule of law is evident in Latin America and the Caribbean, where more than 40% of the population endorsed the notion that police should disregard the law in order to prosecute criminals (Cruz, 2008a). The percentage that approved of extra-legal solutions was even higher among individuals who had been victimized or who harbored feelings of vulnerability. The demand for "quick-fix" solutions has played into the political process in countries such as Bolivia, Venezuela, Guatemala, Peru, and Colombia, where elected "neo-populist" leaders use decree and plebiscitary powers to circumvent the legislature, the courts, and other institutions that might otherwise check their authority (Carlin, 2006; Weyland, 1996). Such tactics often lead to a "spiral of corruption and violence" (Pérez, 2003/2004, p. 628) that weakens the already fragile foundations of law and due process (Bailey & Flores-Macías, 2007; Tulchin & Golding, 2003, p. 4). The erosion of civil liberties in response to crime turns new democracies into "hollow shells" that shield illiberal practices (Malone, 2010, p. 2). Citizen concern for crime and violence is particularly high in Latin America, where the media are no longer curbed by censorship. News reports in which crime takes center stage promote an exaggerated sense of personal vulnerability (Dammert & Malone, 2003; Malone, 2010; Navarro & Pérez Perdomo, 1991; Zubillaga & Cisneros, 2001), which encourages people to turn to private solutions. Thus, the rich hire bodyguards and build gated communities, whereas the poor engage in various forms of vigilante justice, including the lynching of suspected perpetrators of crime (Godoy, 2006; Caldeira, 2000; Rotker, 2002).

Crime's corrosive effects on people's expressed support for democracy as a system of government is of special concern, given that the legitimacy of the state is thought to be an important feature of political culture. Public support for democracy is a defining characteristic of a consolidated democratic system (Diamond, 1999; Linz & Stepan, 1996), as well as a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for democratic institutions to emerge (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, 2006). Mass support for democracy is deemed essential to the maintenance and resilience of political systems, as a popular commitment to the principles of democracy is what enables democratic regimes to withstand and overcome moments of crisis when they arise (Schedler, 2001). Alternatively, a low level of support for democracy sets the stage for political instability. Whereas the

public rarely engages in the overthrow of democracies (Bermeo, 2003), the climate of political attitudes held by the masses often determines the "degrees of freedom within which elites can act" (Seligson & Booth, 2009, p. 2). Using a 3-item index of legitimacy in their study of eight Latin American countries, Seligson and Booth (2009) found that Hondurans were the most dissatisfied citizens in 2004, and that the index of dissatisfaction rose nearly five times higher by 2008. A year later, President Manuel Zelaya was ousted from power in the first military coup in Central America since the end of the Cold War.

The idea that crime weakens public support for democracy has become something of a leitmotif in studies of the political consequences of crime and violence in Latin America. Notwithstanding notable exceptions (e.g., Cruz, 2000, 2008a, 2008b; Malone, 2010; Pérez, 2003/2004; Seligson & Azpuru, 2001), this idea rests on a thin empirical base, evidenced by the lack of connection between two bodies of literature. When crime is the subject under discussion (e.g., Prillaman, 2003; Rotker, 2002; Sanchez, 2006), studies are inclined to assert but not empirically demonstrate that an increase in criminal behavior undermines support for democracy. By the same token, when support for democracy is the main topic of interest (e.g., Lagos, 1997, 2001, 2003; The Economist, 2004), the significance of crime is introduced as an explanatory variable, but the relationship is rarely subjected to rigorous test. Further, most studies in the field focus on the effects of democracy on the justice system or on criminal violence itself, rather than on the effects of crime on the values and preferences that sustain and potentially deepen democracy.

More fundamental than the poorly documented linkage between crime and political attitudes is the failure to recognize important conceptual distinctions between different measures of political culture. As a consequence of this limitation, unqualified assertions that the crime surge erodes the attitudinal foundations of democratic governance are insensitive to the possibility that crime victimization may have dissimilar effects on qualitatively different kinds of political dispositions. This observation suggests the need to develop the theoretical significance of the different ways in which the concept of public support for democracy has been operationalized.

## Support for Democracy

Support for democracy is a concept that is commonly measured by responses to two questionnaire items. One asks respondents to assess the degree to which they are "satisfied with the way democracy works" in their country. The other asks respondents if they agree with the statement that "democracy is preferable to any other kind of government." A review of the conceptual differences between "satisfaction with democracy" (hereafter SWD) and "preference for

democracy" (hereafter PFD) provides the basis for developing a theoretical approach to the testing of the relationship between crime and support for democracy in Latin America.

## Satisfaction with Democracy

SWD has been a staple item in survey research for the last 20 years. Its popularity has persisted despite the lack of consensus as to its meaning (Canache, Mondak, & Seligson 2001). Some scholars (Schmidt, 1983; Dalton, 1999), pointing to the operative phrase "how democracy works in your country," contend that SWD is mainly an indicator of support for incumbent authorities. Others (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Klingemann, 1999), noting that no reference is made to political leaders or political parties, conclude that SWD is an indicator of "system support," a concept that refers to satisfaction with a nation's system of government (e.g., political institutions or constitutional structure), irrespective of views regarding incumbent political authorities (Canache et al., 2001). A third interpretation (Clarke, Dutt, & Kornberg 1993) remains agnostic with respect to specifics, arguing instead that SWD provides a satisfactory summary indicator that encompasses both support for incumbent authorities and system support.

The debate regarding the competing interpretations of SWD can be traced to earlier work by David Easton (1965, 1975), who distinguished between diffuse and specific support for political systems. Confronting the difficulties of classifying attitudes as purely diffuse or exclusively evaluative, more recent analysts conclude, along with Clarke, Dutt, and Kornberg (1993), that "those attitudes typically include both an affective and an evaluation dimension" (Anderson and Guillory, 1997, p. 70). Because the debate concerning the precise meaning of the measure of SWD seems to turn on rather arcane considerations, it runs the risk of overlooking a more general point: Whether one adopts a narrow interpretation or a more encompassing one, responses to the SWD questionnaire item appear to tap into political attitudes that are contingent in nature, be it with respect to the effectiveness of incumbent authorities (Dalton, 1999), the legitimacy of system properties (Lockerbie, 1993), or satisfaction with economic performance (Lagos, 2003).

## Preference for Democracy

In contrast to answers to the SWD question, when respondents are asked to indicate whether they believe that democracy is "preferable to any other kind of government," the meaning of the response is of a different order. Moreover, the PFD item prompts respondents to consider the desirability of democracy in the abstract. As a result, answers to the question presumably

reflect attitudes that are less contingent on transitory circumstances. Potential ambiguity is further reduced by the inclusion of a second response option: "In certain situations, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one." In this sense, PFD is unlike SWD, as the latter omits reference to any basis of comparison and leaves respondents "on their own" (Canache et al., 2001, p. 511). Thus, the PFD question appears to tap into attitudes and preferences that are abstract rather than contingent and enduring rather than transitory features of civic culture.

## Crime Victimization and Support for Democracy: Theoretical Expectations

The observed differences between the two measures provide the conceptual basis for refining the general proposition that crime undermines public support for democracy. In contrast to the prevailing literature on the topic, which views support for democracy as an undifferentiated concept, we contend that the negative effect of crime victimization on democratic political culture varies according to the measure of political attitudes that is used. This reasoning is based on the conceptual differences between SWD and PFD, the two most commonly used indicators of support for democracy.

Because SWD is largely contingent on people's assessment of regime performance and other system properties, the measure is likely to vary in accordance with people's assessment of the degree to which the state effectively responds to the things that matter most to them. The latter includes the ability of the state to protect them from criminal behavior that poses a danger to themselves, their families, and their property. The degree of satisfaction with the way democracy works is, therefore, likely to be mutable and sensitive to the individual's personal experience with crime. Individuals who have been a victim of crime, we contend, are more inclined to question the regime's ability to formulate and to implement successful policies, something which Linz (1978, pp. 18–23) referred to as the efficacy and effectiveness of government.

In contrast to SWD, PFD represents an abstract endorsement of a particular form of political organization. A widely held preference for democracy is thought to have an important effect on politics, in general, and on democratic institutions, in particular, even though the measure is subject to limitations. For example, an expressed preference for democracy may, to some extent, be a rote response to a survey question, especially today, when "anti-democratic discourses have lost their legitimacy as well as their appeal" (Schedler 1996, p. 304). As a core element of political culture, preference for democracy as a system of government is considered a comparatively enduring attitudinal disposition (Inglehart, 2001). Therefore, PFD can be

thought of as a political value that people are likely to maintain despite the shortcomings and failures they may attribute to a particular regime. It follows that preference for democracy will be less sensitive to personal experience with crime.

The conceptual differences between SWD and PFD provide the basis for advancing two hypotheses concerning the relationship between crime and democratic political culture in Latin America: (a) Other things being equal, individuals who are victims of a crime will be less likely to be satisfied with the ways democracy works in their country (SWD). However, (b) people's preference for democracy as a form of government (PFD), which is considered a more stable feature of political culture, will not vary according to victimization status. Tests of these hypotheses, based on AmericasBarometer data from 2006 provided by the Latin American Public Opinion Project, will include control variables at the individual and country levels of analysis.

## Data and Measures

The AmericasBarometer surveys conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) during the year 2006 provide individual–level data for this study. A data set comprising 12 participating countries has originally been acquired from LAPOP, but the responses collected in Jamaica have been excluded from the analysis for obvious dissimilarities in the cultural–historical context with the other macro-units. Also excluded were the Brazilian respondents, as the question tapping fear of crime has been omitted from the survey instrument for this country. As such, this study's pooled dataset consists of 19,049 individuals with ages between 18 and 93 years from the following 10 Latin American countries: Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Despite minor cross–country variation, the sample design of the 2006 survey carried by the LAPOP is probabilistic, with a margin of error varying between ±1.7% (Bolivia) and ±3.6% (Peru) at the 95% confidence level. We lack information to calculate response rates according to the American Association for Public Opinion Research guidelines (AAPOR, 2009), given that they have not been implemented by LAPOP prior to the year 2008. We use the individual–level dataset to construct measures for the two dependent variables (SWD and PFD), the main independent predictor (crime victimization), and the individual–level controls. Appendix A presents the original question wording and response choices for all the attitudinal measures used in this study.

## Dependent Variables: SWD and PFD

To facilitate the interpretation, both dependent variables were converted into dichotomies. For SWD, respondents who were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the way democracy works in their country received a value of one (otherwise, zero), after the exclusion of the missing cases. For PFD, respondents who selected the option "Democracy is preferable to any other type of government" received a value of one, and those who chose one of the other two choices got a value of zero.

The mean values of SWD and PFD for each country in the sample are graphically displayed in Figure 1. The figure shows that PFD values are consistently higher compared to SWD, and that both indicators vary substantially across countries. The highest mean values for SWD and PFD, respectively, are in Uruguay (0.80) and Costa Rica (0.88), and the corresponding lowest values are in Guatemala (0.41) and Bolivia (0.66). The overall cross-country mean for PFD (0.76) is higher than that for SWD (0.55), which suggests a gap between the preferred form of governing and satisfaction with actual democratic performance. In countries such as Uruguay and Bolivia, the difference between the two measures is narrower, whereas in Peru and Guatemala the difference is wider.

FIGURE 1

*Mean values of satisfaction with democracy (SWD) and preference for democracy (PFD) in 10 Latin American countries.*
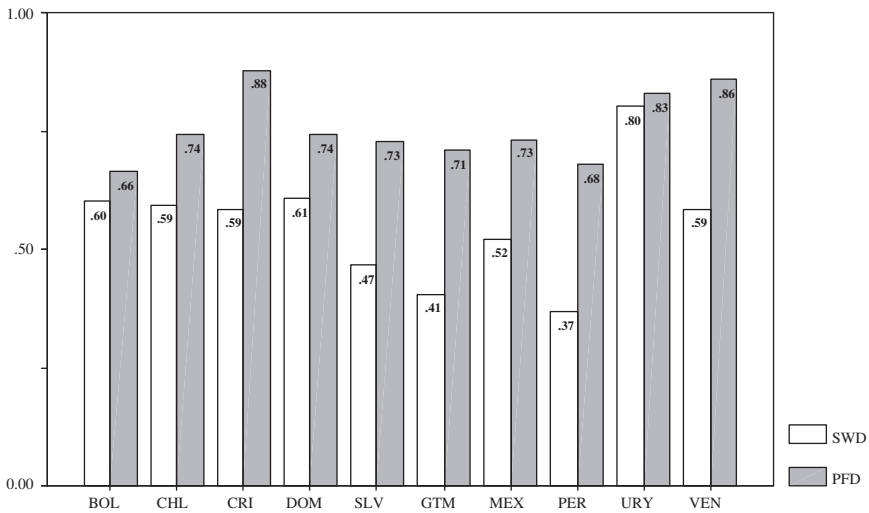


*Note*: BOL = Bolivia; CHL = Chile; CRI = Costa Rica; DOM = Dominican Republic; SLV = El Salvador; GTM = Guatemala; MEX = Mexico; PER = Peru; URY = Uruguay; VEN = Venezuela.
*Source*: The AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), www.LapopSurveys.org

## Main Independent Variable: Crime Victimization

Crime victims are individuals who declared that they were the victim of a crime sometime during the year prior to the survey. Answers in the negative to this question were recoded as zero and those in the affirmative as one. Table 1 displays the proportion of people who were a victim of crime in each of the 10 Latin American countries. Venezuela has the highest percentage of crime victims, followed by the Dominican Republic. At the opposite end of the continuum are the countries of Bolivia and El Salvador.

## Control Variables

Two measures represent the main control variables at the individual level: fear of crime and trust in the judiciary. With respect to the first, studies in the United States (Warr & Stafford, 1983; Covington & Taylor, 1991; Ferraro, 1995) and in Latin America (Zubillaga & Cisneros, 2001; Duce & Pérez Perdomo, 2003) have found that fear of crime is a social construction that often bears little relationship to the objective risk of becoming a victim. Hence, individuals who have been victims of a crime do not necessarily live in fear, just as individuals who live in fear were not necessarily victimized. These observations suggest that fear of crime, which is measured by the respondent's perception of the likelihood of falling victim to a crime in his or her neighborhood, may have a negative effect on both SWD and PFD, irrespective of crime victim status. The response choices representing this question were recoded into two categories: "safe," with a value of one, and "unsafe," with a value of zero.

Table 1
*Distribution of Affirmative Responses to Crime Victimization by Country*

| Country | Sample size (N) | Crime victimization | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | *n* | % |
| Bolivia | 3,013 | 445 | 14.8 |
| Chile | 1,517 | 350 | 23.1 |
| Costa Rica | 1,500 | 247 | 16.5 |
| Dominican Republic | 1,519 | 447 | 29.4 |
| El Salvador | 1,729 | 269 | 15.6 |
| Guatemala | 1,498 | 283 | 18.9 |
| Mexico | 1,560 | 312 | 20.0 |
| Peru | 1,500 | 391 | 26.1 |
| Uruguay | 1,200 | 259 | 21.6 |
| Venezuela | 1,510 | 756 | 50.1 |

*Source:* The AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), www.LapopSurveys.org.

Trust in judiciary is another control variable that may mediate the effect of victimization on political attitudes. Individuals who are victims of a crime may not necessarily lose confidence in their government, if they believe that there is a high probability that perpetrators of criminal acts will be apprehended and prosecuted. The response scale for the corresponding item was reversed, such that zero meant "no trust" and three meant "a lot" of trust. The intermediate values were recoded as one, for "some," and as two, for "little," while the missing values were excluded from the analysis.

Controls are also introduced for the socio-demographic characteristics and two assessments of economic condition. Age, sex, and level of educational attainment represent the three socio-demographic characteristics used in this study. Age has been scaled back to the zero metric for interpretative purposes (e.g., an age of 18 years corresponds to a value of 0), sex has been dichotomized (males recoded as 1 and females as 0), and the level of education was expressed in the form of three dummy variables created from the original questionnaire item that records a respondent's years of schooling ("elementary or lower," "beyond elementary," and "beyond high school"). On the assumption that respondents' perceptions of economic conditions may influence both SWD and PFD, two additional individual-level control variables were included. The first refers to the respondent's assessment of their family's economic situation. The second captures the respondent's assessment of their country's economic situation.

At the country level, two variables provide controls for contextual characteristics. The first is the "homicide rate" (per 100,000 people), a variable reflecting the prevalence of violent crime in the country, which was compiled from data reported by the United Nations Organization for the year 2006. The second variable, labeled "rule of law," is analogous to the individual-level measure of "trust in the judiciary." The source for this measure is the Freedom House, an institution which carries out annual evaluations of the "state of freedom" in all the countries and territories across the globe. Each country or territory is assigned a rating on a scale from 1 to 7 for political rights and an analogous rating for civil liberties, both of which are composed of various subcategories. In this study, we rely on the scores given to "rule of law," a subcategory of civil rights which is based on responses to four main questions: (a) Is there an independent judiciary?; (b) Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters?; (c) Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture?; and (d) Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population, and are perpetrators of crime and violence brought to justice? In this study, the values of this index vary from five in Guatemala and Venezuela to 15 in Chile and Uruguay. The "rule of law" variable is introduced in the analysis on the assumption that citizens who live in countries where the rule of law

prevails are likely to register higher scores on SWD and PFD, independent of crime victimization.

## Analytical Models

We tested the effect of crime victimization on SWD and PFD using multilevel logistic modeling (Goldstein, 2003; Guo & Zhao, 2000; Hox, 2002; Kreft & De Leeuw, 1998; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Snijders & Bosker, 1999). The first model enters victimization separately, in order to assess its independent effect on SWD and PFD, as shown in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. Besides crime victimization, Model 2 also controls for fear of crime and trust in the judiciary. The next model enters the remaining individual-level control variables, the socio-demographic measures and perceptions of family's and country's economic situations. Finally, Models 4 and 5 add the two macro-level measures, "homicide rate" and "rule of law," the effects of which are estimated net of the variables at the individual level. To ease the interpretation of the coefficients, the macro-level variables have been grand-mean centered (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002, pp. 34–35; Hox, 2002, pp. 54–57).

The equation corresponding to the individual-level of analysis is specified using the logit link function:

$$p_{ij} = \Pr(Y_{ij} = 1), \tag{1}$$

$$\log[p_{ij}/(1 - p_{ij})] = \beta_{0j} + \sum_{q=1}^{9} \beta_{qj}{}^{*}X_{qij} + r_{ij}, \tag{2}$$

where $Y_{ij}$ is the response of an individual $i$ ($i = 1, 2, \ldots, n_j$) in the $j$th ($j = 1, 2, \ldots, 10$) country on the outcome variables, $X_{qij}$ ($q = 1, 2, \ldots, 9$) is an individual-level variable $q$ for case $i$ in unit $j$, betas are level-1 coefficients ($\beta_{0j}$ the intercept and $\beta_{qj}$ is a vector of slopes), and $r_{ij}$ is a level-1 residual.

The level 2 equation can be formally written as:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}{}^{*}W_{01j} + \gamma_{02}{}^{*}W_{02j} + u_{0j}, \tag{3}$$

where $\beta_{0j}$ is the intercept estimated in equation (2), $W_{01j}$ and $W_{02j}$ are the country-level variables, $\gamma_{00}$ is a level-2 intercept, $\gamma_{01}$ and $\gamma_{02}$ are vectors of slopes for each of the two macro-level predictors, and $u_{0j}$ is a level-2 random effect.

*Findings.* Tables 2 and 3, report the results of the multilevel logit models that test for the probabilistic effect of crime victimization on SWD and PFD, respectively. The results for Model 1 indicate that crime victimization has a negative significant effect ($p \leq .001$) on SWD, but not on PFD, a finding which is consistent with the first hypothesis. Relative to crime victims,

Table 2
*Statistics from the Multilevel Logistic Models Predicting Satisfaction with Democracy (SWD) in 10 Latin American Countries*

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | | Model 5 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Log-odds | Exp (B) | Log-odds | Exp (B) | Log-odds | Exp (B) | Log-odds | Exp (B) | Log-odds | Exp (B) |
| Constant | 0.32* (0.17) | 1.38 | 0.12 (0.17) | 1.13 | −0.98** (0.27) | 0.38 | −0.98** (0.26) | 0.38 | −0.97** (0.24) | 0.38 |
| *Individual level* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Crime victim | −0.43*** (0.08) | 0.65 | −0.27*** (0.06) | 0.76 | −0.20** (0.06) | 0.82 | −0.21*** (0.06) | 0.81 | −0.19** (0.05) | 0.83 |
| Fear of crime | — | | −0.44*** (0.05) | 0.65 | −0.37*** (0.05) | 0.69 | −0.38*** (0.05) | 0.69 | −0.38*** (0.05) | 0.68 |
| Trust in judiciary | — | | 0.35*** (0.03) | 1.41 | 0.30*** (0.02) | 1.35 | 0.31*** (0.03) | 1.36 | 0.30*** (0.02) | 1.35 |
| Age | — | | — | | 0.00 (0.00) | 1.00 | 0.00 (0.00) | 1.00 | 0.00 (0.00) | 1.00 |
| Male | — | | — | | −0.11* (0.06) | 0.90 | −0.11* (0.05) | 0.90 | −0.11* (0.05) | 0.89 |
| Education[a] | | | | | | | | | | |
| Beyond elementary | — | | — | | −0.15* (0.07) | 0.86 | −0.16* (0.08) | 0.86 | −0.16 (0.07) | 0.85 |
| Beyond high school | — | | — | | −0.41** (0.13) | 0.67 | −0.40** (0.13) | 0.67 | −0.41** (0.13) | 0.66 |
| Family's econ. sit. | — | | — | | 0.25*** (0.05) | 1.28 | 0.25*** (0.05) | 1.29 | 0.25*** (0.05) | 1.28 |
| Country's econ. sit. | — | | — | | 0.49*** (0.07) | 1.64 | 0.49*** (0.07) | 1.63 | 0.49*** (0.07) | 1.64 |
| *Country level* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Homicide rate | — | | — | | — | | −0.03*** (0.00) | 0.98 | — | |
| Rule of law | — | | — | | — | | — | | 0.08** (0.02) | 1.09 |
| Country-level random effect, $u_{oj}$ | 0.2886 | | 0.2787 | | 0.6027 | | 0.5992 | | 0.5281 | |

*Note*: *$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***$p \leq .001$ (one-tailed test). Standard errors are reported in parentheses. The country-level variable "homicide rate" is grand-mean centered. The country-level random effect for the intercept-only (unrestricted) model is 0.2817.
[a]The reference category is "elementary or lower."

Table 3
*Statistics from the Multilevel Logistic Models Predicting Preference for Democracy (PFD) in 10 Latin American Countries*

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | | Model 5 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Log-odds | Exp (B) | Log-odds | Exp (B) | Log-odds | Exp (B) | Log-odds | Exp (B) | Log-odds | Exp (B) |
| Constant | 1.19*** (0.13) | 3.29 | 1.22*** (0.14) | 3.40 | 0.44* (0.22) | 1.55 | 0.44* (0.23) | 1.55 | 0.44* (0.22) | 1.55 |
| *Individual level* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Crime victim | −0.07 (0.04) | 0.93 | −0.05 (0.05) | 0.95 | −0.09 (0.06) | 0.91 | −0.09 (0.06) | 0.91 | −0.09 (0.06) | 0.91 |
| Fear of crime | — | | −0.08* (0.04) | 0.93 | −0.06 (0.05) | 0.94 | −0.06 (0.05) | 0.94 | −0.06 (0.05) | 0.94 |
| Trust in judiciary | — | | −0.00 (0.02) | 1.00 | −0.00 (0.02) | 1.00 | −0.00 (0.02) | 1.00 | −0.00 (0.02) | 1.00 |
| Age | — | | — | | 0.02*** (0.00) | 1.02 | 0.02*** (0.00) | 1.02 | 0.02*** (0.00) | 1.02 |
| Male | — | | — | | −0.02 (0.06) | 0.98 | −0.02 (0.06) | 0.98 | −0.02 (0.06) | 0.98 |
| *Education*[a] | | | | | | | | | | |
| Beyond elementary | — | | — | | 0.33** (0.10) | 1.38 | 0.33** (0.10) | 1.38 | 0.33** (0.10) | 1.38 |
| Beyond high school | — | | — | | 0.62*** (0.14) | 1.86 | 0.62*** (0.14) | 1.86 | 0.62*** (0.14) | 1.85 |
| Family's econ. sit. | — | | — | | 0.10* (0.04) | 1.10 | 0.10* (0.04) | 1.10 | 0.09* (0.04) | 1.10 |
| Country's econ. sit. | — | | — | | 0.02 (0.07) | 1.02 | 0.02 (0.07) | 1.02 | 0.02 (0.07) | 1.02 |
| *Country level* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Homicide rate | — | | — | | — | | −0.00 (0.00) | 1.00 | — | |
| Rule of law | — | | — | | — | | — | | 0.02 (0.02) | 1.02 |
| Country-level random effect, $u_{oj}$ | 0.1859 | | 0.1813 | | 0.4366 | | 0.4443 | | 0.4437 | |

*Note:* *$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***$p \leq .001$ (one-tailed test). Standard errors are reported in parentheses. The country-level variable "homicide rate" is grand-mean centered. The country-level random effect for the intercept-only (unrestricted) model is 0. 1934.
[a]The reference category is "elementary or lower."

respondents who did not experience victimization are 1.38 times more likely to be satisfied rather than dissatisfied with democracy and 3.29 times more likely to prefer rather than reject a democratic form of government. These conditional expected log-odds correspond, respectively, to probabilities of 58% of being satisfied with democracy and of 77% of preferring democracy.

Holding constant the random variability, self-reported crime victimization is associated with a significant and substantial reduction in the log-odds of SWD ($b = -0.43$). Thus, being a crime victim cuts the odds of being satisfied with democracy to 0.65 as otherwise. At the same time, being a crime victim is associated with a small decrease in the log-odds of PFD ($b = -0.07$), although this change does not reach statistical significance. These initial results are consistent with our hypotheses that satisfaction with democracy is sensitive to crime victimization but that preference for democracy is not. With the introduction of crime victimization in the analysis, the amount of explainable between-country variation in log-odds, calculated using the formula proposed by Kreft and De Leeuw (1998), increases only in the case of PFD (4%).

Adding extra variables in the equation provides insight into the robustness of the effect exerted by the main predictor and the factors associated with public support for democracy. Both fear of crime and trust in the judiciary, added in Model 2, affect people's expressed support for democracy in ways that are consistent with our expectations. As noted in Table 2, net of the other predicting variables, being fearful of crimes significantly reduces the odds of being satisfied with democracy, whereas trust in the judiciary significantly increases SWD's odds. The corresponding results for PFD (Table 3) show that only fear of crime exerts a statistically significant effect, albeit its magnitude is rather negligible. Compared to the previous model, the addition of the two control variables is responsible for increases of 3.5% and 2.5% in the explainable cross-country variation in the log-odds of SWD and PFD, respectively.

Estimating the conditional probability of SWD and PFD, given various combinations of the predicting variables, is another way to explore the differences between the two measures of democratic support. For respondents who are not crime victims, do not fear crimes, and trust the judiciary, the probabilities of being satisfied with democracy and preferring democracy are 62% and 77%, respectively. Alternatively, among victims who fear crime and who distrust the judiciary, the probability of being satisfied with democracy is only 36%, whereas the probability of preferring democracy is 75%. Judging by these reductions in probability, it seems that PFD is less sensitive to victimization than SWD, a finding which, again, is consistent with our hypotheses.

Also worth noting is that the introduction of fear of crime and trust in the judiciary into the equation reduces the effect of crime victimization on SWD. Thus, some variance in satisfaction with democracy that was attributed to victimization status in Model 1 is accounted for by the other two variables

added in Model 2. Despite this decline in the size of the coefficient, the effect of crime victimization on SWD remains moderately large and statistically significant after controlling for fear of crime and trust in the judiciary.

Building on the previous model, Model 3 introduces several individual-level variables into the analysis. The findings indicate that SWD is sensitive to all of the individual-level variables, except age. Especially revealing is the effect of education, as the results show that the odds of being satisfied with democracy significantly decline with increases in education. However, in contrast to SWD, education has a direct effect on PFD, whereby the odds of preferring democracy significantly increase among individuals with a level of schooling at least beyond elementary. These findings illustrate how one socio-demographic characteristic, educational level, operates in opposite ways when it comes to predicting two different attitudes that tap support for democracy.

The two dependent variables also respond differently to people's perception of their family's economic situation, as well as their assessment of their country's economic situation. Whereas SWD's odds increase significantly and substantially with every unit increase in the perceived economic situation of the respondent's family and country, PFD is less sensitive to either variable. Thus, perceived economic situation of family exerts a statistically significant (albeit small in size, compared to SWD) effect on preference for democracy. By the same token, PFD is independent of people's assessment of their country's economic performance.

Compared to Model 2, the inclusion of additional controls increases the amount of cross-country variation in the log-odds of SWD and PFD. This situation is rather common when variables exerting strong effects, such as education, are included in the analysis. Net of all the controls at the individual level, being a crime victim has a moderate inverse effect on SWD ($b = -0.20$) that is statistically meaningful ($p \leq .01$), but the corresponding effect on PFD is smaller ($b = -0.09$) and statistically insignificant.

Besides the individual variables, Models 4 and 5 independently introduce two country-level measures believed to influence public support for democracy. Model 4 adds homicide rate into the analysis. The findings for this model suggest that homicide rate does not affect PFD and that, net of the effects of other variables in the equation, a 1-unit increase in the homicide rate (from the 10-country mean of 20.32) significantly ($p \leq .001$) reduces the log-odds of SWD ($b = -0.03$). The pattern of effects for crime victimization on both SWD and PFD reported in previous models remains unchanged. An improvement in fitting statistics is observable for SWD, as the country homicide rate increases the explainable between-country variation in the log-odds of this dependent variable by 13.5%, compared to Model 3.

The last model enters the other country-level measure, rule of law, while retaining the previously introduced individual variables. The results for Model

5 indicate that, all things considered, rule of law is a direct predictor ($b = 0.08$; $p \leq .01$) for SWD only. Also, relative to Model 3, the previously reported effects of crime victimization on the two dependent variables persist. Compared to the model where only individual variables are added, the inclusion of "rule of law" into the analysis raises the explainable cross-country disparity in SWD's log-odds by 23.8%.

The findings reported in Tables 2 and 3 permit conclusions consistent with the hypotheses developed in this study. Even after introducing control variables at the individual and country levels of analysis, victims of crime are much less likely to be satisfied with the way in which democracy works in their country. However, people's preference for democracy as a system of government remains relatively constant, regardless of the respondent's victimization status. The same pattern holds true for other variables: whereas SWD is sensitive to educational attainment, people's subjective assessments of their family and country's economic situation, as well as the country-level homicide rate and rule of law measure, these have little or no effect on PFD. The fact that SWD and PFD respond differently to the independent variables underscores the need to treat the concept of support for democracy as a multifaceted phenomenon in analyses of the effects of crime and violence on political culture in Latin America.

The results further suggest that the increase in crime in Latin America may pose a threat to the stability and deepening of democracy, as the literature contends (e.g., Cruz, 2000, 2008a, 2008b; Malone, 2010; Pérez, 2003/2004; Seligson & Azpuru, 2001). However, our findings also indicate that the negative effects of crime victimization on political culture operate mainly by eroding people's support for the current political regime. The latter is contingent on factors such as the perceived economic performance of the national economy, people's own economic well-being, as well as their sense of vulnerability to crime, their trust in the judiciary, and their confidence in the government's ability to promote the rule of law. But neither crime victimization nor the other variables associated with SWD have much effect on people's preference for democracy as a form of government. This suggests that PFD, by virtue of being less contingent on transitory events, is a more stable and longer lasting dimension of political culture. Thus, the reported results have methodological and substantive implications for the study of the political effects of crime, particularly with respect to Latin American countries.

## Conclusion

The focus in this study on attitudes associated with the maintenance and deepening of democracy traces its roots to classic studies carried out in the 1950s and early 1960s (Almond & Verba, 1963; Lipset, 1959). In recent years,

the notion that attitudes, values, and preferences shape politics and democratic institutions has undergone something of a renaissance, expressed in the works of Fukuyama (1995), Huntington (1996), and Inglehart (1997), among others. The renewed emphasis on political culture, in turn, is consistent with studies that focus on the political consequences of the upsurge in crime and violence that has taken place in Latin America in recent decades. Attention has focused, specifically, on the corrosive effects of the increase in criminal behavior on public support for democracy.

The concept of support for democracy has been commonly measured in public opinion surveys by two questionnaire items. One records the degree to which people are satisfied with the way democracy works in their country (SWD). Rather than tapping people's endorsement of democracy *per se*, numerous analysts have observed that satisfaction with democracy is conflated with the public's assessment of the efficacy and effectiveness of regime performance, and is, therefore, sensitive to current events and individual experiences. The other questionnaire item asks respondents if they always prefer democracy over any other form of government or whether, in some circumstances, they would opt for an authoritarian government over a democratic one (PFD). Eliciting a respondent's abstract and less contingent commitment to democracy as a preferred system of government, the latter is, presumably, a more enduring core element of political culture.

In this study of the political consequences of crime surge in Latin America, we invoked the conceptual differences between SWD and PFD as a means to advance our understanding of the way in which increasing crime rates influence the political attitudes and preferences deemed relevant to the stability of democratic regimes and to the prospects of democratic consolidation. If the literature on the political consequences of crime surge in Latin America is prone to sweeping statements, the conceptual differences between the two measures of support for democracy suggest a more nuanced approach. Specifically, we hypothesized that crime victimization has a strong negative effect on satisfaction with democracy but that it does not erode people's preference for democracy as a political system. This expectation was corroborated by our analysis of 10 Latin American countries using AmericasBarometer survey data.

Our findings show that, net of individual- and country-level control variables, people who have been a victim of a crime in the previous year are significantly more likely to express lower levels of satisfaction with the way democracy works in their country. In contrast to satisfaction with democracy, our analysis suggests that people's preference for democracy is neither sensitive to crime victimization nor, for that matter, to other key variables in the equation, such as fear of crime and trust in the judiciary. Thus, the results reported in this study argue strongly in favor of treating public support for

democracy as a multifaceted phenomenon and for testing the effects of crime victimization on different measures of support for democracy. More generally, it appears that individuals who have had a direct experience with crime may hold governments responsible for their vulnerability to crime, yet their victimization does not erode their endorsement of democracy as a preferred form of government. If crime victimization reduces people's satisfaction with the way that democracy works in their country, democrats can nonetheless take some comfort in the observation that, regardless of victimization status, people in Latin America continue to prefer democracy as a form of government.

## Acknowledgements

## Appendix A

*Original Question Wording and Response Choices for Attitudinal Constructs*

| Variable | Questionnaire item |
| --- | --- |
| Satisfaction with democracy (SWD) | "In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the way in which democracy works in [country]?" (1) "Very satisfied," (2) "Satisfied," (3) "Dissatisfied," (4) "Very dissatisfied," (8) "DK/DR (missing)". |
| Preference for democracy (PFD) | "With which of the following statements do you agree the most?" (1) "To people like me, it doesn't matter whether a regime is democratic or non-democratic,"(2) "Democracy is preferable to any other type of government," (3) "In some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one," (8) "DK/DR (missing)." |
| Victim of a crime | "Have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months?"(1) "Yes," (2) "No," (8) "DK (missing)." |
| Fear of crime | "Speaking of the place or neighborhood where you live, and thinking of the possibility of falling victim to an assault or a robbery, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe or very unsafe?" (1) "Very safe," (2) "Somewhat safe," (3) "Somewhat unsafe," (4) "Very unsafe," (8) "DK (missing)." |

(continued)

**Continued**

| Variable | Questionnaire item |
| --- | --- |
| Trust in judiciary | "If you were a victim of a robbery or assault, how much faith do you have that the judicial system would punish the guilty party?" (1) "A lot," (2) "Some," (3) "Little," (4) "None," (8) "DK/DR." |
| Country's economic situation | "How would you describe the country's economic situation?" (1) "Very good," (2) "Good," (3) "Neither good nor bad (fair)," (4) "Bad," (5) "Very bad," (8) "DK/DR." |
| Family's economic situation | "How would you describe your overall economic situation?" (1) "Very good," (2) "Good," (3) "Neither good nor bad (fair)," (4) "Bad," (5) "Very bad," (8) "DK." |

*Source:* The AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), www.LapopSurveys.org.

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