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The Political Culture of Democracy in Guatemala and in the Americas, 2016/17:

A Comparative Study of Democracy and
Governance

Executive Summary

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Chapter 1. Support for Electoral Democracy in the Americas.....	6
Chapter 2. The Supply of Basic Liberties in the Americas.....	10
Chapter 3. Vulnerability, Exclusion, and Migration in Guatemala.....	16
Chapter 4. Conventional and Non-Conventional Participation in Guatemala.....	21
Chapter 5. Perceptions of Institutions and Relevant Legislation in 2017.....	27
Chapter 6. Democratic Orientations in the Americas.....	34



Introduction

Democracy is on the defensive in the Americas and around the world. In a number of places across the Americas, countries have been coping with security and economic crises, and scandals emanating from governments and parties. Among the mass public, skepticism is brewing over the extent to which democracy can succeed in delivering on citizens' expectations and improving the quality of their daily lives. The 2016/17 AmericasBarometer taps into this simmering frustration and permits it to be studied in comparative perspective across population subgroups, countries, and time. It also documents some notable signs of resilience. In this same vein, the survey reveals important nuances in challenges to democratic governance across a heterogeneous region. In this way, the AmericasBarometer provides a refined tool with which to make the types of diagnoses and distinctions that are so important to designing and implementing effective policy.

A core focus of the AmericasBarometer is citizens' evaluations of "democratic governance." Democratic governance refers to a system of politics and policy in which citizens' direct, indirect, and representative participation is privileged and enabled via basic freedoms, with the goal of ensuring that states are held accountable for their actions. As the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2013)¹ has defined it, "Democratic governance is governance that takes place in the context of a democratic political system, which is representative of the will and interests of the people and is infused with the principles of participation, inclusion, and accountability" (p. 37). The appeal of democratic governance is derived from its potential to improve the quality of citizens' lives by facilitating efforts to decrease corruption, increase economic development (and decrease poverty), and build strong communities. The legitimacy of democratic governance hinges, at least in part, on how well it delivers on these expectations (Booth and Seligson 2009).² For this reason, taking stock of its successes and shortcomings requires assessing citizens' varied experiences and evaluations under democratic governance.

¹ USAID. 2013. USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance. Washington, D.C. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdax557.pdf (Accessed on July 29, 2017).

² Booth, John A. and Mitchell A. Seligson. 2009. *The Legitimacy Puzzle in Latin America: Political Support and Democracy in Eight Nations*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

This report summarizes the main findings of the 2016/17 AmericasBarometer survey in Guatemala. A more detailed country report is published separately. LAPOP has carried out the AmericasBarometer survey in Guatemala since 1991, and in coordination with other countries since 2004. The 2016/17 survey was conducted by ASIES between February and May 2017; 1,546 people were interviewed as part of the nationally representative survey.

Chapter 1. Support for Electoral Democracy in the Americas

This chapter evaluates support for the abstract concept of democracy and two of its most fundamental components: elections and parties. There is a significant decline in the extent to which the public agrees that democracy, despite its flaws, is better than any other form of government. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, support for democracy decreased by almost nine percentage points between 2014 and 2016/17. Overall, in an average country in the region, as many as two out of five people do not express support for democracy in the abstract. As shown in Figure 1, the percentage of Guatemalans who support democracy has decreased to its lowest level in 12 years, reaching only 48.4% in 2017. Guatemala ranks as the country with the lowest rate of support for democracy compared to the rest of the countries in the region.

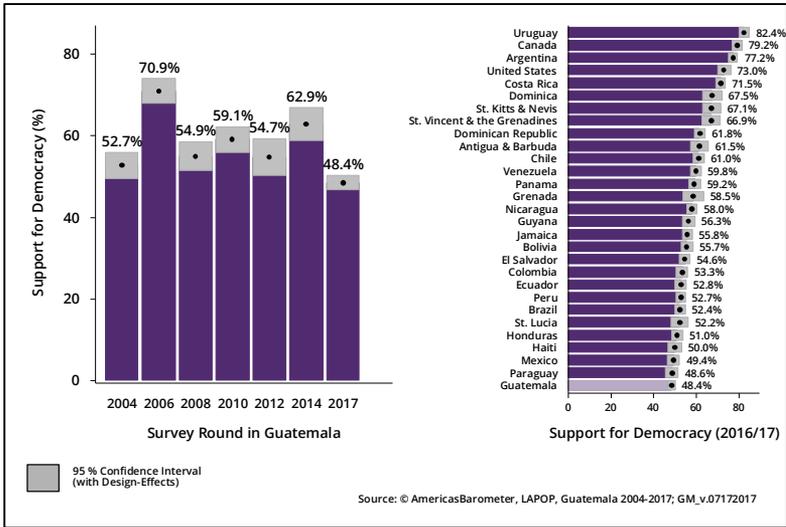


Figure 1. Support for Democracy in Guatemala and in the Americas

In addition to support for democracy in theory, acceptance of democracy as “the only game in town” is key to the stability and persistence of democratic governance. This means, in short, that citizens in democratic societies should not support the closure of legislative bodies by the executive branch. Support for executive coups in Guatemala is lower than support for military coups. However, as shown in Figure 2, the level of support for an executive closure of the Congress increased in the AmericasBarometer 2016/17 for Guatemala by more than 10 percentage points compared to the 2014 survey. Nearly a quarter of Guatemalans support the president's closure of Congress in difficult times. Guatemala is among the countries with the highest support for executive coups (24.4%) in 2016/17.

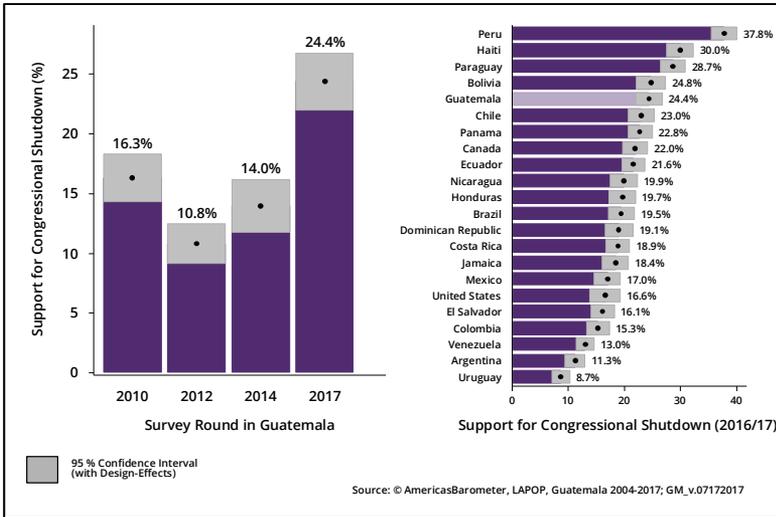


Figure 2. Support for Executive Coups in Guatemala and in the Americas

Electoral democracy relies on citizen participation through elections: voters select their representatives and voice their preferences at the ballot box. Public trust and participation in elections are therefore important for understanding citizen support for democracy as it functions in the real world, while also serving as a signal of citizens' commitment to democracy.

Citizens legitimate electoral democracy by participating in elections and by trusting that elections serve as a mechanism to select leaders. On average, trust in elections is low in the Americas. As shown in Figure 3, Guatemala is in a low intermediate range compared to other countries in the region: more than a third of Guatemalans (34.7%) report trusting elections, a significant increase of almost seven percentage points compared to the 2014 survey.

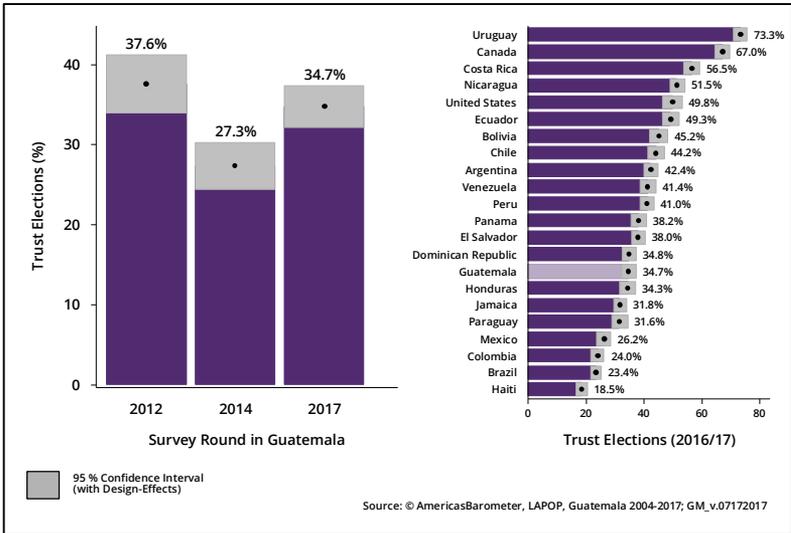


Figure 3. Trust in Elections in Guatemala and in the Americas

Parties also serve an important role for citizens. By organizing politics on policy lines, parties enable voters to identify a “team” that aligns with their preferences. At their best, parties facilitate citizen participation in the democratic process and ensure high quality representation. Guatemalans exhibit a low level of trust in political parties (14.6%) compared to the rest of countries in the region. Figure 4 shows that trust in political parties has fluctuated greatly in Guatemala since 2004. In 2017, only 14.6% report trusting parties. However, between 2014 and 2017, trust in political parties increased slightly.

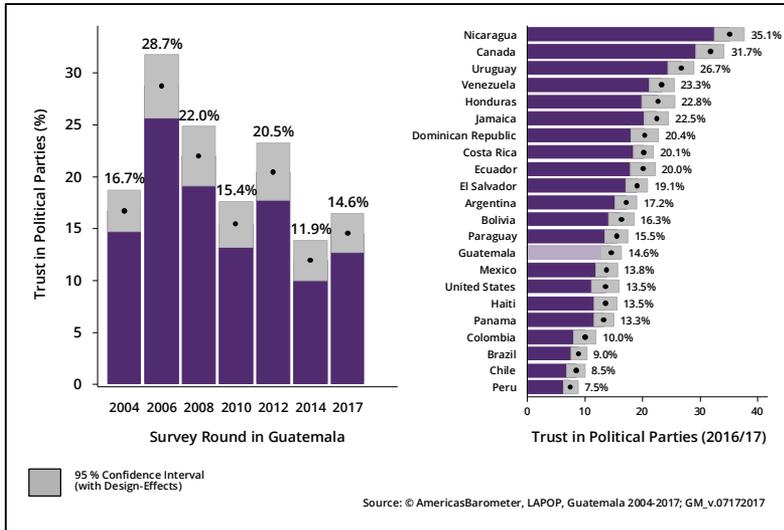


Figure 4. Trust in Political Parties in Guatemala and in the Americas

Chapter 2. The Supply of Basic Liberties in the Americas

This chapter addresses the topic of basic liberties, such as freedom of the media, expression, and fundamental human rights, which are critical to public engagement and inclusion in the democratic political system. Restrictions on basic liberties may undermine motivations to participate and erode individuals' support for the incumbent administration and the democratic system more generally.

Guatemala is among the countries with a higher percentage of respondents who perceive restrictions on press freedom. As can be seen in Figure 5, 57% of Guatemalans believe that there is very little press freedom, 22% believe there is too much and 21% believe that the level of freedom of the press is sufficient.

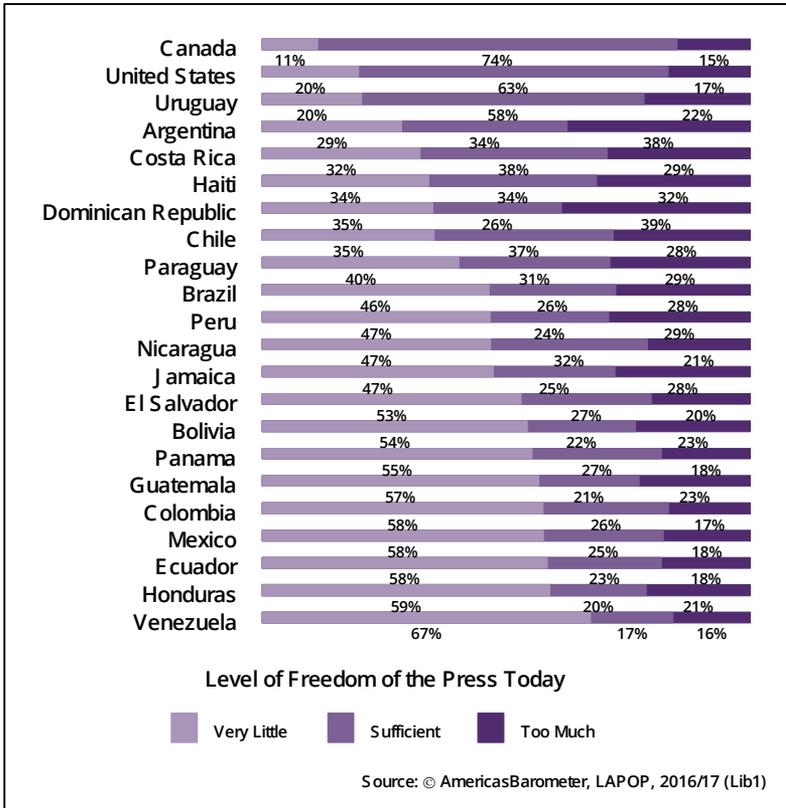


Figure 5. Assessments of Freedom of the Press, 2016/17

Trust in the media has decreased in the Americas over time; in 2016/17, in the average country, only about one in two individuals trusts the media. Guatemala ranks high compared to other countries in the region, with more than half of respondents (58.4%) expressing trust in the media (see Figure 6). The percentage of Guatemalans that trust in the media returned to its highest level in 2017, reaching similar levels expressed in 2004. Compared to 2014, trust in the media increased by more than 10 percentage points.

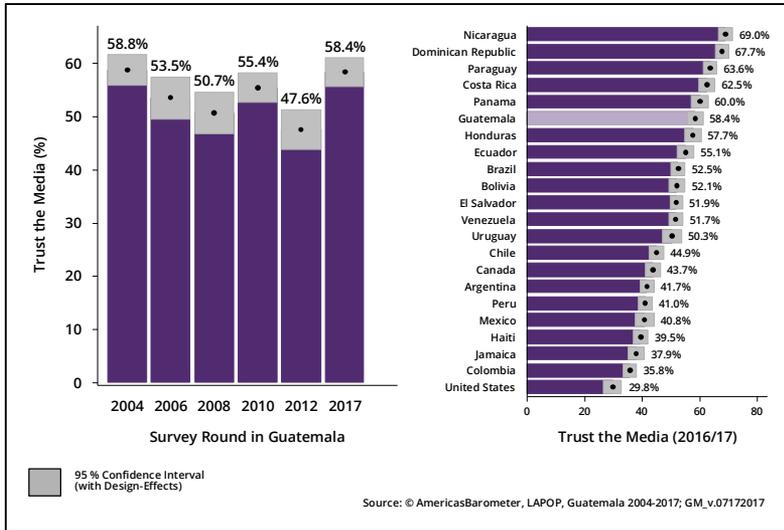


Figure 6. Trust in the Media in Guatemala and in the Americas

Freedom to express political opinions is particularly important in a democracy. In 2017, more than two thirds of Guatemalans feel that there is very little freedom to express political opinions without fear (see Figure 7). Only 18% think there is enough freedom to express political opinions. Guatemala is among the countries with a high percentage of citizens who perceive “very little” freedom of political expression.

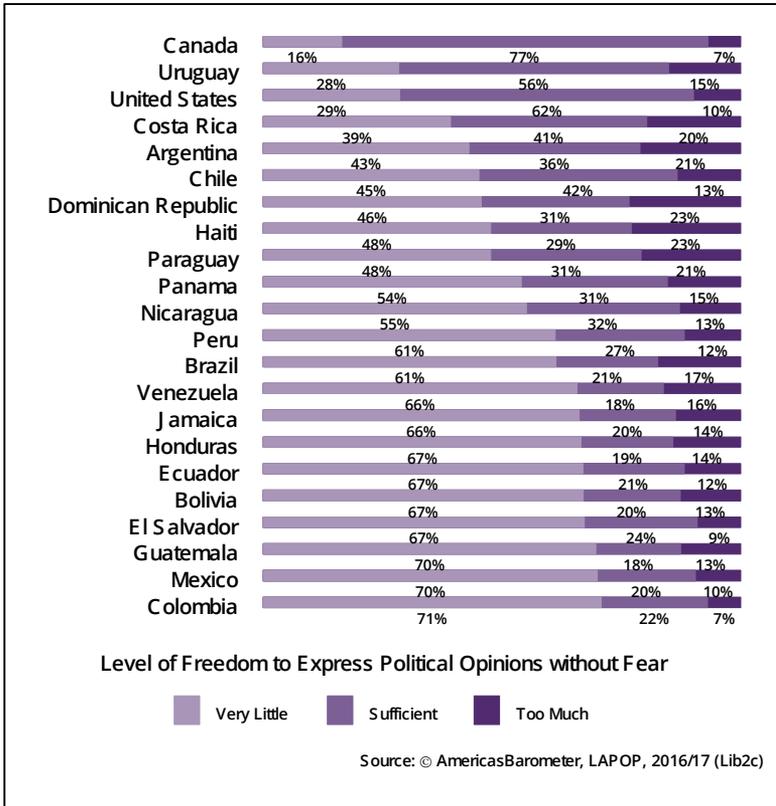


Figure 7. Assessments of Freedom of Political Expression, 2016/17

While concerns about deficiencies in levels of freedom of the press and of expression are elevated in the Americas, data from the 2016/17 AmericasBarometer reveal that concerns about human rights are even more pronounced. As shown in Figure 8, Guatemala is in an intermediate range in regards to the percentage of citizens who believe there is sufficient protection for human rights in the country, with 68% expressing that there is very little protection of this type of right in 2017.

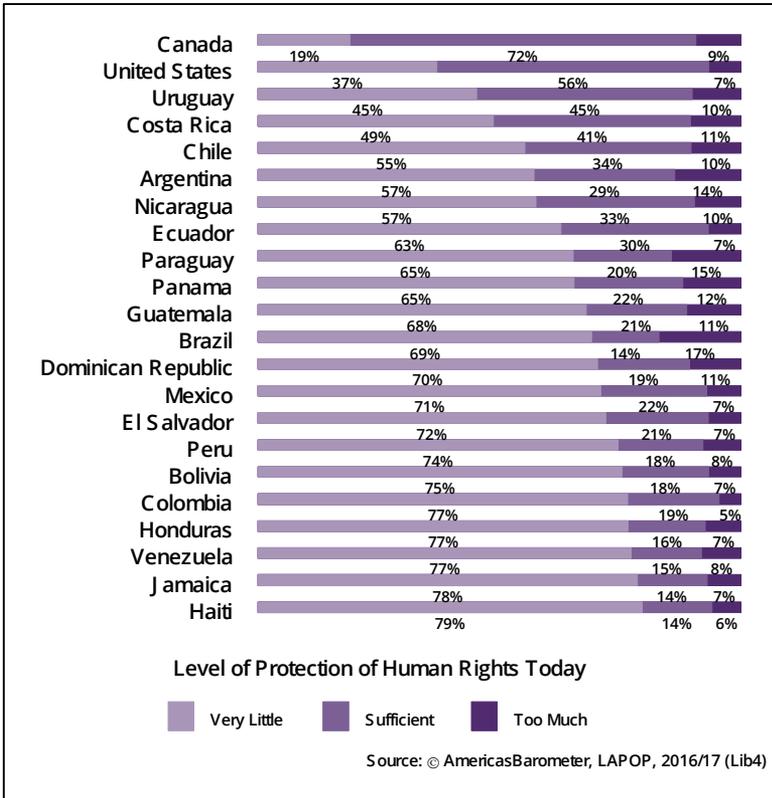


Figure 8. Assessments of Protection of Human Rights, 2016/17

The public’s assessments regarding the supply of liberties are condensed into a summary “basic liberties deficit” index.³ In the majority of countries – Nicaragua, Panama, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Jamaica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Bolivia, Mexico, Colombia, Honduras, and Venezuela – the mean degree of perceived inadequacy in the supply of basic liberties is above the mid-point (>50) on the 0 to 100 scale (see Figure 9), which is not a positive finding.

³ For more information see the AmericasBarometer 2016/17 regional comparative report: https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2016/AB2016-17_Comparative_Report_English_V2_FINAL_090117_W.pdf

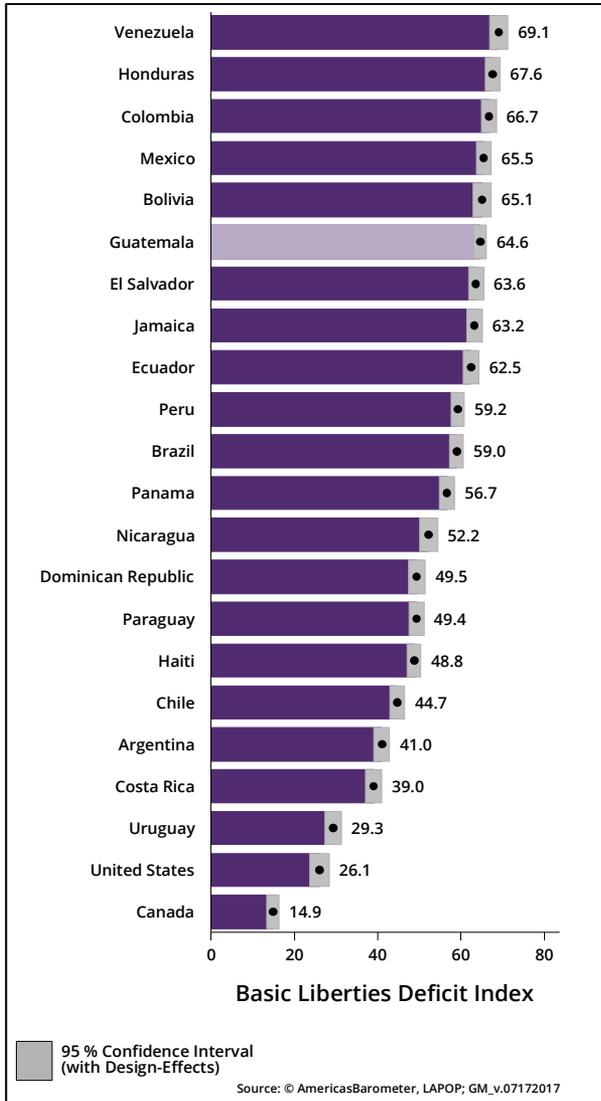


Figure 9. Basic Liberties Deficit Score, 2016/17

Chapter 3. Vulnerability, Exclusion, and Migration in Guatemala

This chapter analyzes whether certain variables of economic vulnerability (such as a precarious family economic situation), physical vulnerability (such as crime victimization), and social exclusion (such as discrimination) are related to the intention to emigrate from Guatemala.

As seen in Figure 10, 27.2% of those interviewed indicated that they intend to emigrate from Guatemala in the next three years. The percentage of respondents who indicated that they intend to emigrate has fluctuated between 14% (in 2012) and 27% (in 2017). Guatemala is in an intermediate position with regards to other countries in the Americas. In 14 countries the percentage of citizens who express an intention to emigrate is higher than in Guatemala. In 10 countries, the difference is statistically significant and in 12 countries, it is lower. The highest percentages of intention to emigrate occur in the Caribbean countries.

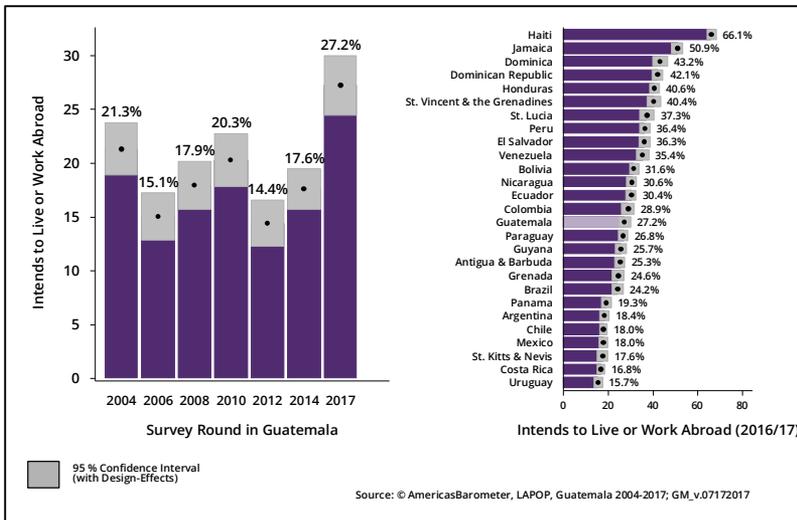


Figure 10. Intentions to Emigrate in Guatemala and in the Americas

A higher percentage of individuals whose family economic situation is precarious say they intend to emigrate within the next three years: 36.2% of individuals whose families have major economic difficulties (and do not have enough on which to live) intend to emigrate (see Figure 11). The percentage drops to 29.2% among those who reported having difficulties (although not major difficulties). The difference between these two groups is not statistically significant. However, there is a significant difference between these two groups and those who say that family income is enough for them to get by, and those who say that their family income is enough and they can save. A 22.7% of those who indicate that the family income is enough to get by express their intention to emigrate, and the percentage drops to 20.9% among those who said they have enough to save. In this sense, it is worth mentioning that the question leaves open the possibility that respondents might want to leave the country to study abroad.

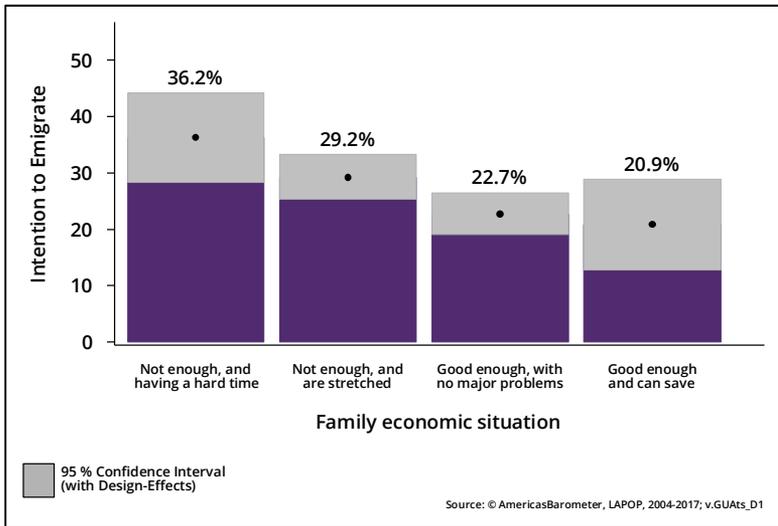


Figure 11. Intention to Emigrate and Family Economic Situation, Guatemala 2017

Additionally, those who indicated that they were actively looking for work, the unemployed, are more likely to want to emigrate. Figure 12 clearly shows that the percentage of intention to emigrate from Guatemala is much higher among the unemployed, reaching 45.4%. On the other hand, only 23.9% of those who are employed said they intend to emigrate.

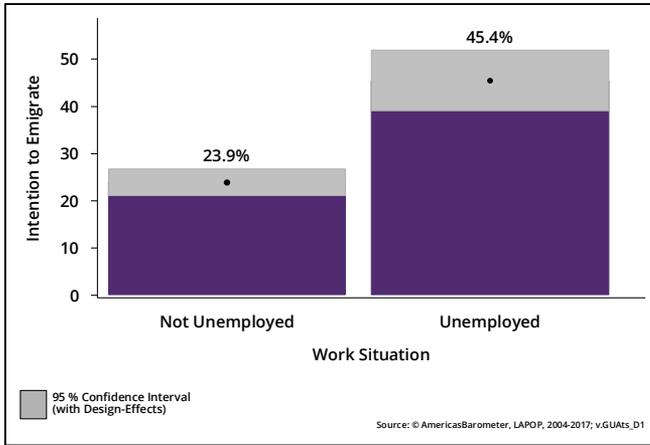


Figure 12. Intention to Emigrate and Employment Situation, Guatemala 2017

There is a clear relationship between crime victimization and a greater intention to emigrate. While 23.9% of those who have not been victims say they want to emigrate, the percentage rises to 37.3% among those who have been victimized (see Figure 13). The difference between both groups is statistically significant.

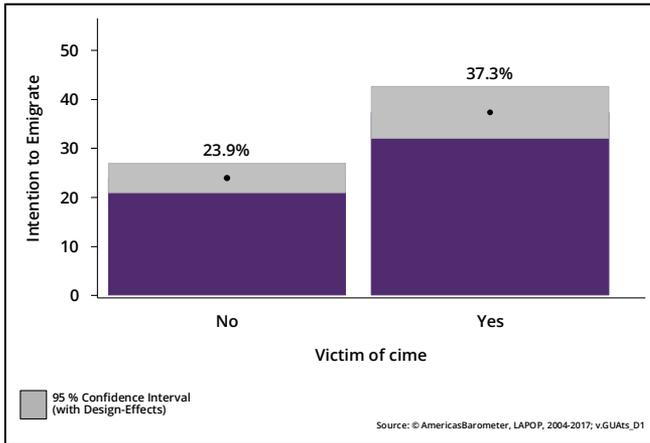


Figure 13. Intention to Emigrate and Crime Victimization, Guatemala 2017

Apart from victimization, people who have felt forced to change their behavior because of crime are more likely to want to emigrate. Figure 14 shows the difference in the intention to emigrate between those who had to change their daily life routine due to crime and those who did not have to make such a change. In all the categories, the percentage of intention to emigrate is higher among those who have had to change their behavior or avoid doing certain things, because of crime. The difference between those who had to change their life routine and those who did not is statistically significant.

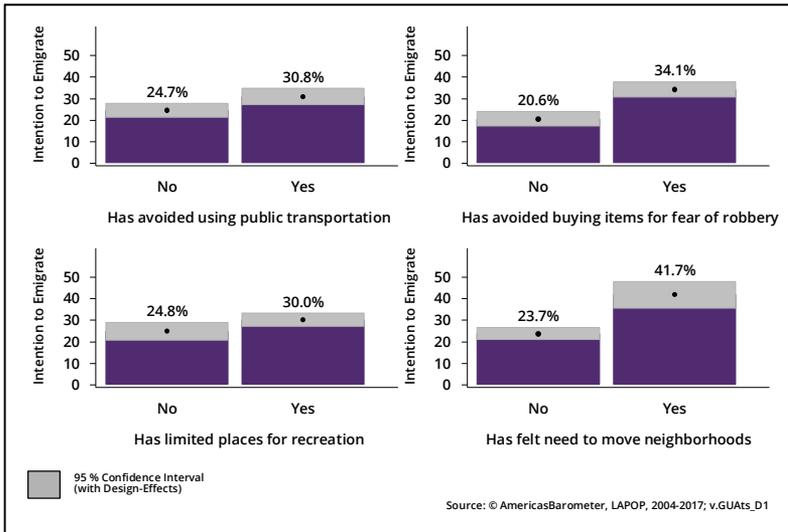


Figure 14. Intention to Emigrate and Change in Behavior Due to Crime, Guatemala 2017

Additionally, in neighborhoods where there have been attacks on women, the proportion of those who intend to emigrate is much higher. Figure 15 shows this relationship: 36.8% of Guatemalans who lived in a community where there were attacks against women intend to emigrate, but the percentage drops by more than ten percentage points among those who live in communities where there have been no such attacks.

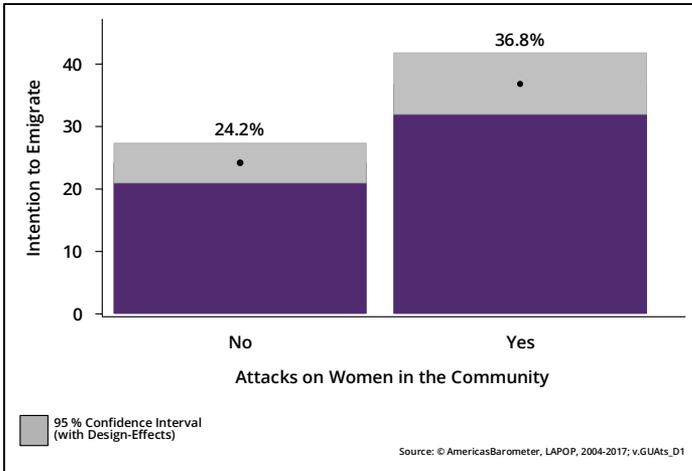


Figure 15. Intention to Emigrate By Attacks on Women in the Neighborhood, Guatemala 2017

There is a correlation between the intention to emigrate from Guatemala and having suffered discrimination in a public place or at the hands of a public official. Among those who have been discriminated against in a public place, 44.9% say they intend to emigrate, compared to 24.9% of those who have not (see Figure 16). The difference is even more marked among those who have been discriminated against by the authorities: 53.7% of those who have been discriminated against by a public official intend to emigrate from Guatemala, compared to 25.7% of those who have not been discriminated against.

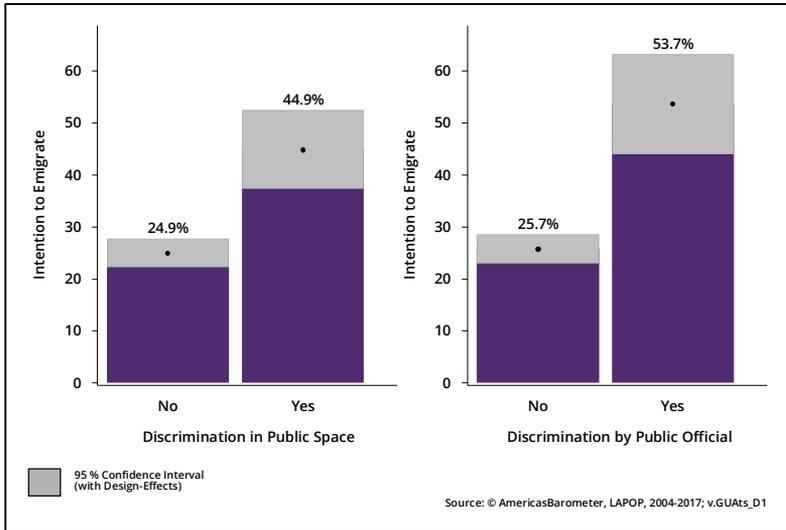


Figure 16. Intention to Emigrate and Discrimination, Guatemala 2017

Chapter 4. Conventional and Non-Conventional Participation in Guatemala

This chapter examines the topic of participation in the 2015 protests, but also discusses the issue of participation in protests in general, as well as other forms of participation. More specifically, a distinction is made between conventional participation and non-conventional participation. Conventional participation includes various forms of participation with the purpose of influencing the government or the decision-making process, such as voting, running for public office and participating in a political campaign. Unconventional participation includes activities such as protest, civil disobedience and even extra-legal actions, such as blocking roads (Dalton 2014).⁴

In regards to conventional participation, Guatemalans have maintained a similar level of voter registration and participation in general elections. As seen in Figure 17, the vast majority of Guatemalans are registered to vote in 2017, at 82.6%. Only 17.2% of citizens said they

⁴ Dalton, Russell J. 2014. *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Washington D.C.: CQ Press.

were not registered, and less than 1% indicated that they are in the process of registering. The percentage of registered citizens has increased significantly since 2008 and has remained relatively stable, although it is shown a slight but statistically significant decrease between 2012 and 2017, going from 86.8% to 82.6%.

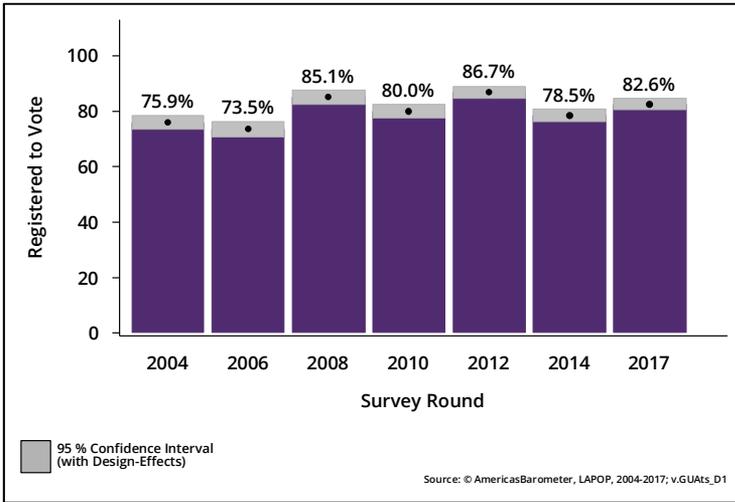


Figure 17. Voter Registration by Year in Guatemala

Regarding the act of voting in the last presidential election, Figure 18 shows the percentage of respondents who indicated they had voted. Nearly 76% of those interviewed said they had voted in the first round of elections in September 2015, while a quarter of them said they had not done so.⁵ The percentage of Guatemalans who indicated that they had participated in the first round of the presidential election increased significantly from 2008 onwards and has remained at over 70%.

Three factors stand out in relation to electoral participation: People with more education report higher levels of participation, younger Guatemalans participate less and those who participated in the protests against corruption in the second half of 2015 are more likely to have participated in the elections of 2015.

⁵ The Supreme Electoral Tribunal of Guatemala in its Electoral Report (TSE 2015) indicates that 69.74% of registered Guatemalans went to the polls on September 6.

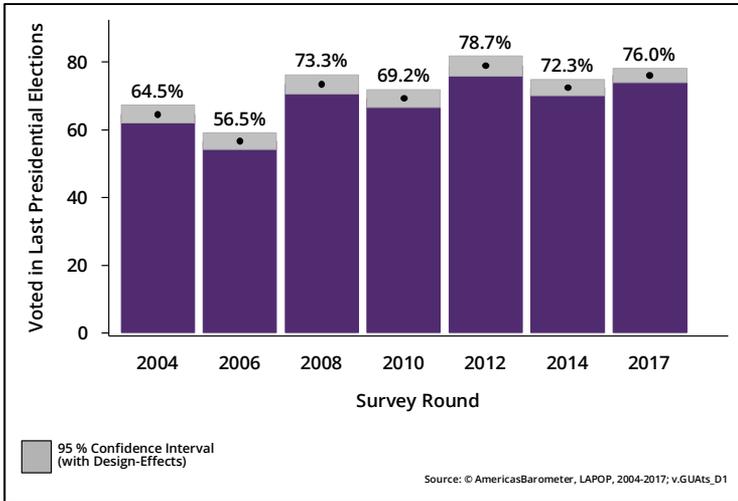


Figure 18. Electoral Participation, Guatemala 2004-2017

Guatemalans have high levels of participation in community groups. As seen in Figure 19, about 7% of Guatemalans said they attended once a week, and 22.7% said they attended once or twice a month, which means that a third of the Guatemalan population actively participates in neighborhood or community groups. At the other extreme, half of the population (50.8%) does not participate in these groups.

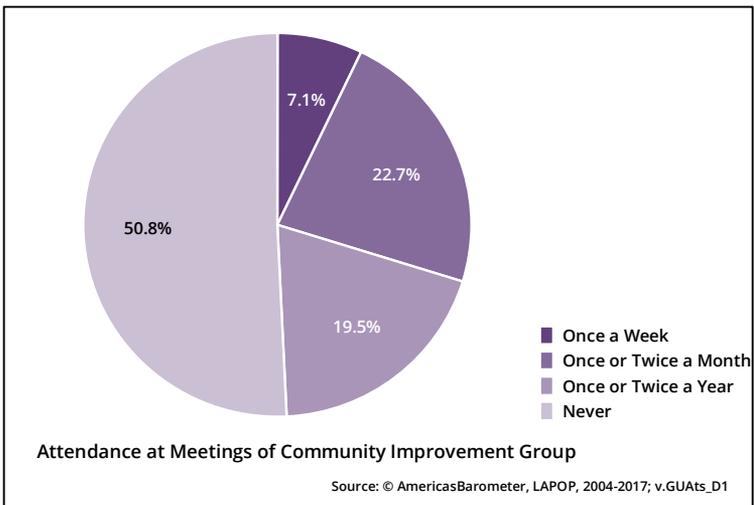


Figure 19. Participation in Community Groups, Guatemala 2017

A worrisome finding is that Guatemala is the country with the lowest identification with political parties in the Americas; only 5.9% of respondents said they identify with a party (see Figure 20). This percentage is the lowest in the Americas.

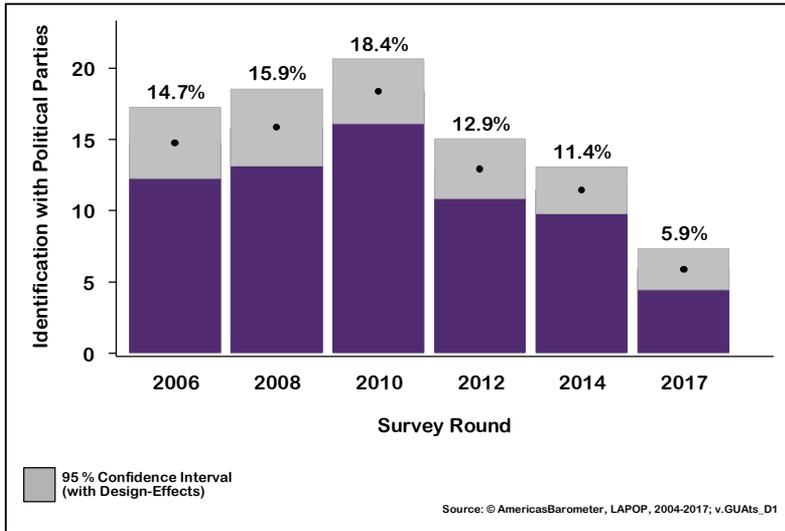


Figure 20. Identification with Political Parties, Guatemala 2006-2017

In regards to non-conventional participation, that the percentage of Guatemalans who in the previous rounds of the democratic culture survey said they had participated in protests in the previous 12 months, has remained below 10%, and was particularly low in 2014 (See Figure 21).

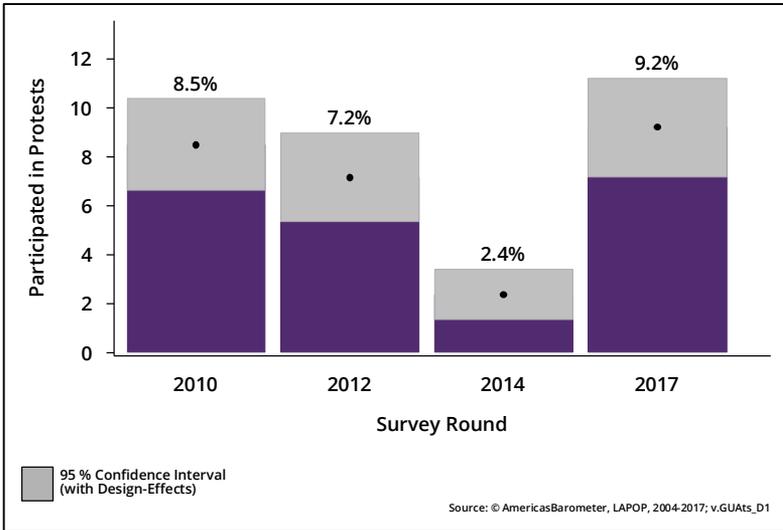


Figure 21. Participation in Protests, Guatemala 2010-2017

However, nearly one in six respondents (16.2%) reported participating in the anti-corruption protests in 2015 (see Figure 22). This percentage is higher than the percentage of participation in protests normally observed in Guatemala, which is lower than 10%.

Better educated and male Guatemalans were more likely to participate in anti-corruption demonstrations in 2015. Corruption victimization has a high correlation with participation in the 2015 protests. Crime victimization also correlates with that participation. This indicates that the protests of 2015 channeled the discontent of the population with several issues.

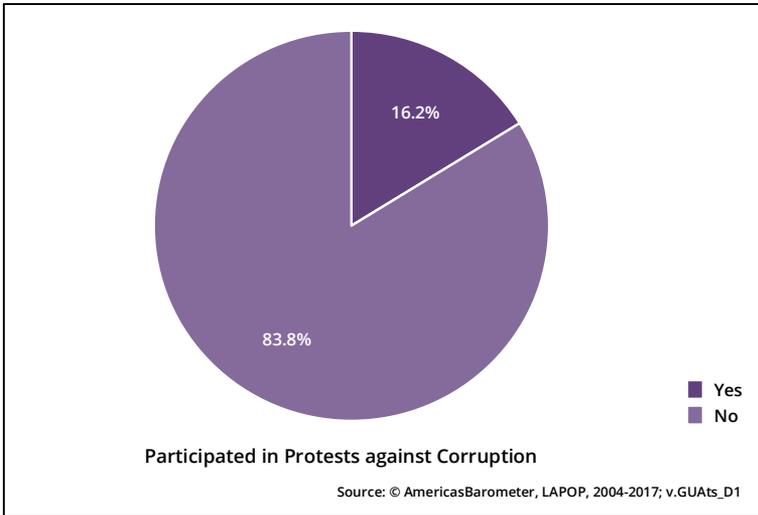


Figure 22. Participation in Anti-Corruption Protests in 2015

The majority of Guatemalans approve of participation in legal demonstrations (see Figure 23). Although one fifth of the population (20.6%) strongly approves of others protesting (in a legal demonstration), a relatively high percentage (11%) strongly disapproves. If the positive categories are added together (6 to 10), the majority of Guatemalans approve the right to participate in protests, that is, 58.6% of the population.

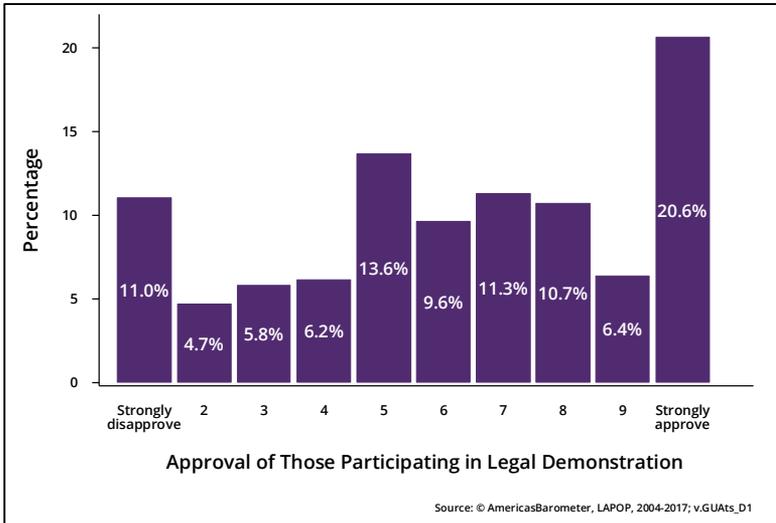


Figure 23. Approval of Participation in Protests, 2017

Chapter 5. Perceptions of Institutions and Relevant Legislation in 2017

This chapter addresses the issue of citizen trust in political institutions, in addition to offering a perspective on satisfaction with certain government services and the opinion on certain specific legislation that has been debated in Guatemala in 2017.

Certain key political institutions (the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the Constitutional Court, the Executive Branch, the Congress and the municipality of the respondent) have maintained a stable level of public trust in recent years (see Figure 24).

The Supreme Electoral Tribunal, followed by the Constitutional Court, are the political institutions that garnered the most confidence in 2017, although they remain at the middle of the 0-100 scale used in this study.

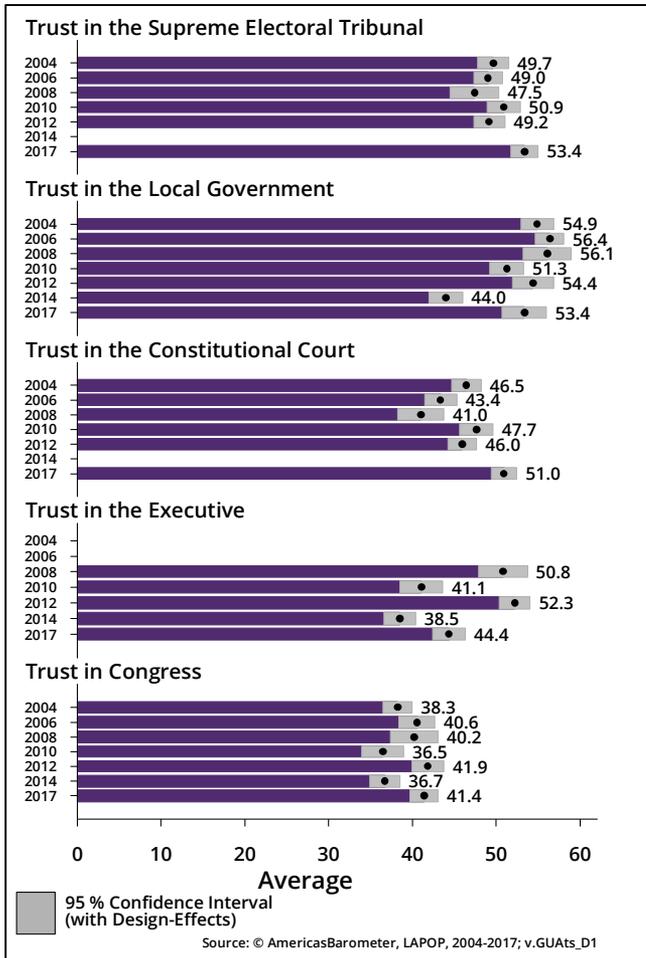


Figure 24. Trust in Key Political Institutions, Guatemala 2004-2017

Regarding trust in institutions within the judicial sector (the Attorney General Office, the Human Rights Ombudsman, the National Civil Police and the courts), in 2017, all institutions improved their score in relation to previous years, an increase which was especially high for the Public Ministry.

Among all institutions of the justice sector, the Attorney General Office (Public Ministry) obtained the highest trust score, followed closely by the Human Rights Ombudsman, as seen in Figure 25.

Guatemalans residing in urban areas have lower trust in the performance of the National Civil Police in comparison with the inhabitants of the rural area, but both value in a similar way the effort made by the institution to reduce crime in the community.

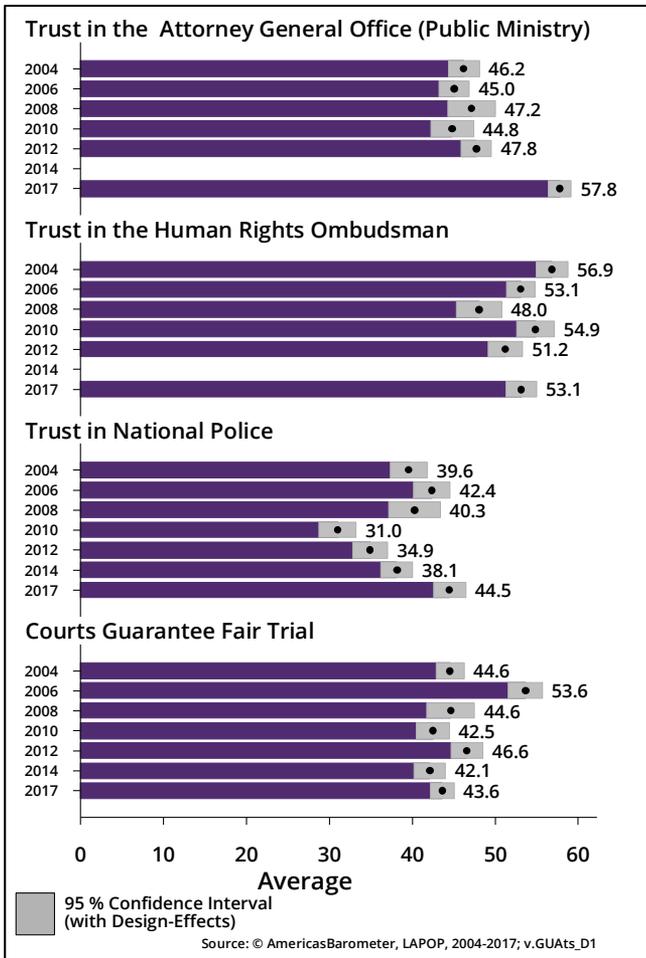


Figure 25. Trust in Justice Institutions, Guatemala 2004-2017

The CICIG garners a higher level of trust than any Guatemalan institution in 2017. The media also garners a high level of trust although it is lower than CICIG (see Figure 26).

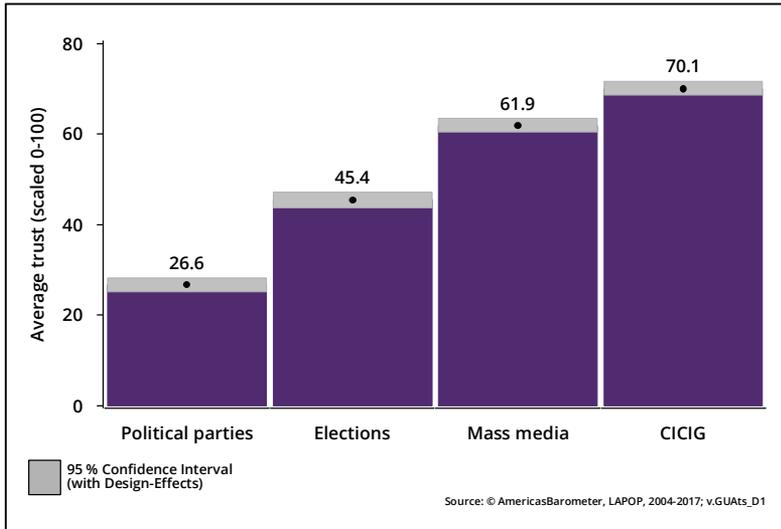


Figure 26. Trust in Other Institutions, Guatemala 2017

The percentage of Guatemalans who trust that the judicial system punishes those who are guilty doubled in 2017 compared to previous years: while in 2014 only 14% of Guatemalans had a lot of confidence in the capacity of the judicial system to punish the guilty, the percentage increased to 27% in 2017 (see Figure 27). This result places Guatemala among the countries in the Americas with the highest levels of trust that the judicial system punishes those who are guilty.

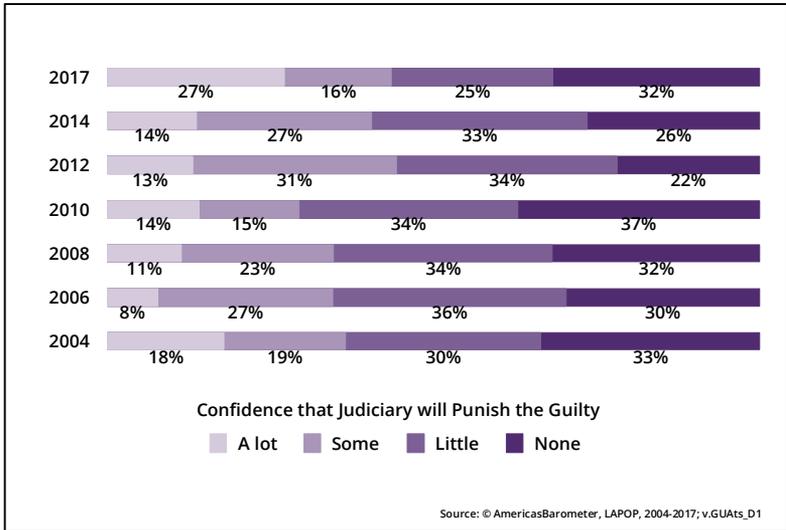


Figure 27. Trust that the System Punishes the Guilty, Guatemala 2004-2017

Various sociodemographic factors are significantly associated with higher or lower trust in key political institutions in Guatemala.⁶ Guatemalans with less education have higher levels of trust in key institutions than those with more education: the average trust among those without any education is 49 points (on a 0-100 scale) but it decreases significantly among those with some college education (only 42.2 points). With regards to age, Guatemalans between 18-25 years of age show higher confidence in key institutions (52.7 points) than other age groups and the difference is statistically significant. Citizens older than 66 years have the lowest level of trust in institutions (43.7 points).

Trust in key institutions is also higher in rural areas of the country and in smaller cities, compared to the Metropolitan Area, as shown in Figure 28.

⁶ This analysis is based on an index that combines the values of trust in the five institutions (local government, Supreme Electoral Tribunal, president, Congress and Constitutional Court).

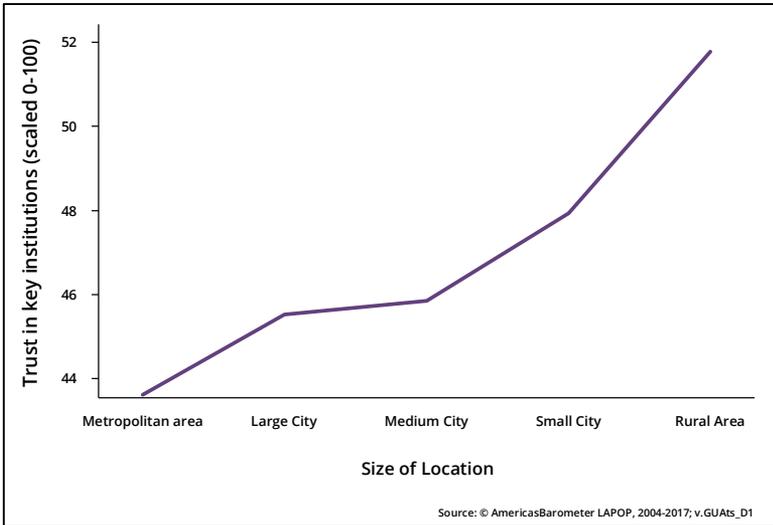


Figure 28. Trust in Key Institutions by Size of Location, Guatemala 2017

Regarding other variables (not sociodemographic or geographic) related to trust in key institutions, Figure 29 shows that crime victimization and corruption victimization have an important effect on trust in political institutions. Guatemalans who have been victims of a crime and who have experienced one or more acts of corruption, have lower levels of trust in key institutions. The difference in both cases is statistically significant.

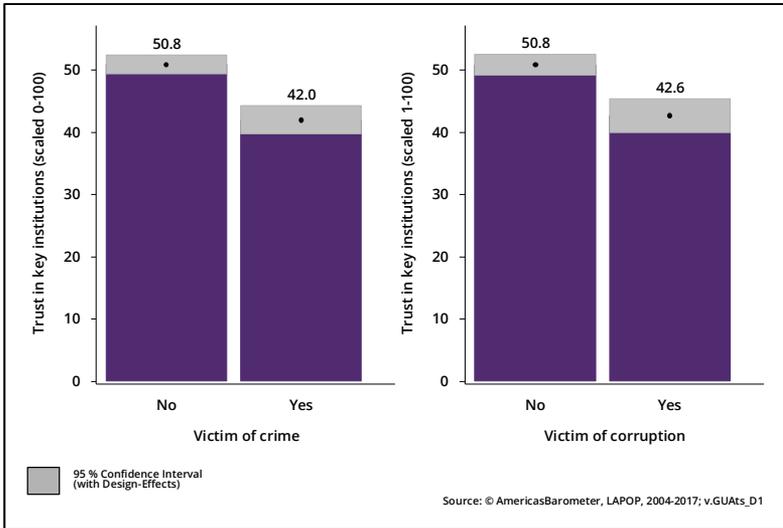


Figure 29. Trust in Key Institutions by Crime and Corruption Victimization, Guatemala 2017

Finally, Figure 30 shows that low legitimacy (trust) in institutions has a direct relationship with satisfaction with democracy. Those who feel very satisfied or satisfied with democracy have a much higher level of trust in institutions, in the range of 56 and 57 points on the 0-100 scale. At the other extreme, those who feel dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with democracy in Guatemala have much lower levels of institutional trust.

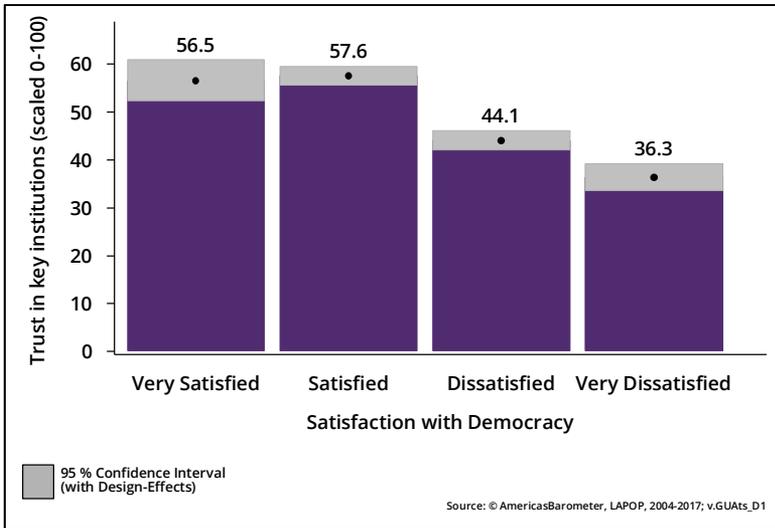


Figure 30. Trust In Key Institutions and Satisfaction with Democracy, 2017

Chapter 6. Democratic Orientations in the Americas

Over the years, LAPOP has hypothesized and found that democracy rests on firmer grounds to the extent that the following joint conditions are met: the public perceives the political system to be legitimate and it supports the right to participate of those who may hold diverging political views. Legitimacy and tolerance are, therefore, core elements of democratic culture. These attitudes combine to make unique profiles of democratic orientations.

Figure 31 compares levels of the system support index and its five components in Guatemala since 2004. The index and individual component variables are scores that range from 0 to 100, where higher values indicate more positive attitudes toward the system. Support for the political system reached its highest level in Guatemala in 2017 (53.6 points on the 0-100 scale used). This is due to increases in several of the components of this system support index in 2017: respect for institutions, level of normative support for the system and pride in the political system in Guatemala.

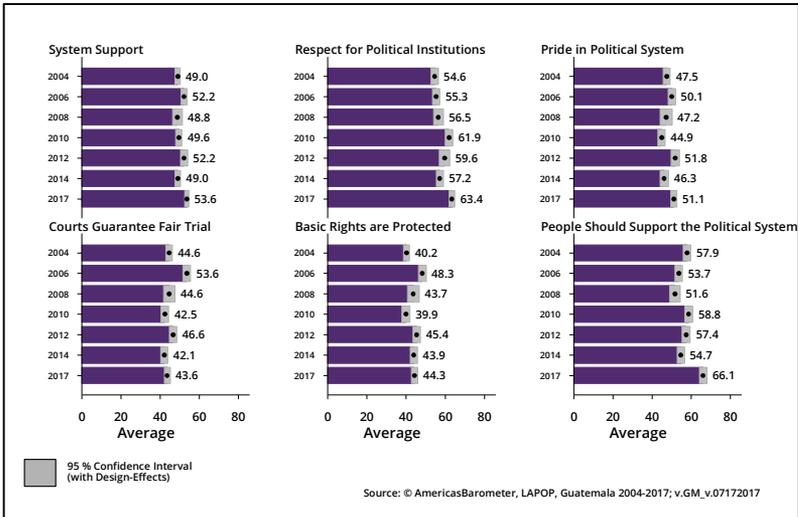


Figure 31. System Support and Its Components in Guatemala, 2004-2017

As shown in Figure 32, Guatemala is positioned at an intermediate level in terms of the support for the political system compared to other countries of the region.

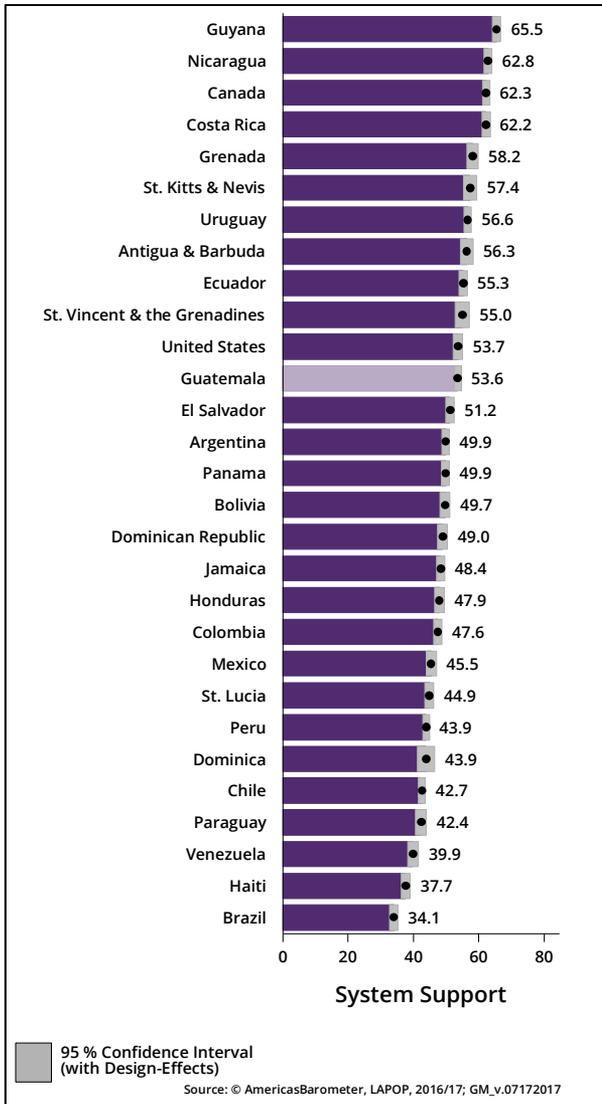


Figure 32. System Support in the Americas, 2016/17

High levels of support for the political system do not guarantee the quality and survival of liberal democratic institutions. Liberal democracy also requires citizens to accept the principles of open democratic competition and tolerance of dissent. Political tolerance in

Guatemala had a significant increase between 2014 and 2017, reaching a score of 50.7 points (see Figure 33). The increase in political tolerance among Guatemalans is due to significant increases in all the components of this index, which constitute measures of approval of the right of regime critics to protest, vote, give speeches, and to be a political candidates.

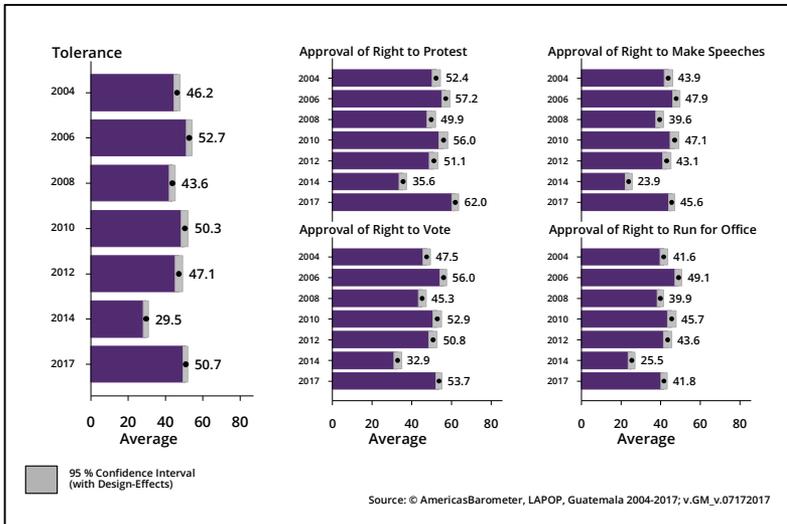


Figure 33. Political Tolerance and Its Components in Guatemala, 2004-2017

Although Guatemala experienced a significant increase in political tolerance between 2014 and 2017, the country is positioned among the countries of the region with low levels of political tolerance.

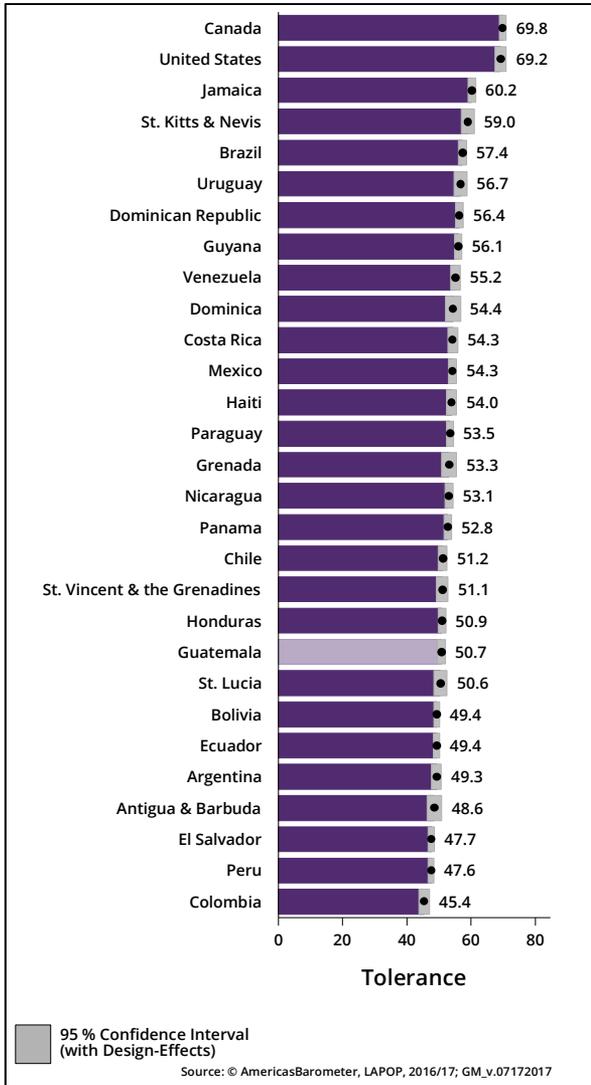


Figure 34. Political Tolerance in the Americas, 2016/17