

THE IMPACT OF CRIMINAL VIOLENCE ON REGIME LEGITIMACY IN LATIN AMERICA

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Abstract: What is the impact of exposure to criminal violence on support for political institutions in Latin America? The increase in criminal violence in the region since the return to democratic rule makes this a timely question. Several scholars have demonstrated the impact of a series of variables (political performance, economic performance, interpersonal trust, perception of corruption) on citizens' support for political institutions (system support). The goal of this study is to assess the impact of two additional variables (victimization and perception of violence) that have been neglected in the literature. I test the impact of exposure to violence on system support by using survey data from the 2004 edition of the Latin American Public Opinion Project. My findings demonstrate that both victimization and high perception of violence have a negative impact on system support in Latin America.

Does criminal violence affect support for political institutions (i.e., system support)? What is the impact of victimization and high perception of violence on citizens' system support? The explosion of criminal violence in Latin America in the past twenty years offers an opportunity to try to answer these questions. Many Latin American countries democratized at some point between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s. The focus of the scholarly community has shifted from democratic transitions to the quality and performance of these new democracies (Smith 2005). However, the dramatic increase in criminal violence may pose a redoubtable threat to the stability of democratic institutions in Latin America. Yet, remarkably, this critical issue has received limited attention in the literature.¹

In this article, I look into one potentially negative effect of the increase of violence on the health of democracy in Latin America. I analyze the impact of skyrocketing criminal violence on the legitimacy of democratic institutions in the region. It is essential to advance our understanding of the causes of political distrust in these new democracies, as it has been demonstrated that a decrease in political support can lead to political instability. In fact, political distrust can be self-reinforcing and can pave the way for further dissatisfaction with political leaders and governmental institutions, which in turn can lead to public support for measures that would radically alter institutional arrangements (Hetherington 1998). Moreover, low levels of system support can trigger unconventional and ag-

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1. Bergman (2006) argues that the explosion of criminality in Latin America in general has not triggered significant scholarly attention. This is clearly the case in the field of political science.

gressive political behaviors that pose a threat to the established political order, especially if low regime support is accompanied by feelings of high personal influence and belief in the efficacy of past collective political aggression (Muller 1977; Muller and Jukam 1977). On the contrary, citizens who trust political institutions are more likely to engage in conventional forms of political participation, including contacting public officials and being involved in political parties (Smith 2009). Finally, political trust drives compliance with the policies implemented by governmental authorities. As Tyler (2006, 375) lucidly points out, "Because of legitimacy, people feel that they ought to defer to decisions and rules, following them voluntarily out of obligation rather than out of fear of punishment or anticipation of reward." This compliance is essential because it eliminates the need to enforce policies through coercive and costly means, especially during times of crisis. In summary, people who trust political institutions become self-regulating (Gamson 1968; Tyler and Huo 2002; Tyler 2006).

In what follows I briefly present the increase in both criminal violence and the perception of insecurity in Latin America since the beginning of the 1990s. I then review the literature that has investigated the causes of support for political institutions. From this discussion, I derive two hypotheses that I test using data from the 2004 Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) surveys. Finally, I conclude by presenting the implications of my findings.

CRIMINAL VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

One of the major sociopolitical problems facing Latin America today is the increase in criminality, which affects all countries in the region. Two main sets of factors contribute to this phenomenon. First, illicit transnational flows, such as drug trafficking and the proliferation of small arms, trigger criminality. In fact, as a result of the US-led "war on drugs," a division of labor has been established in the drug trade, and many more Latin American countries now participate in the production, transshipment, and distribution of illicit drugs, which has led to an increase in levels of violence in poor urban areas (Tickner 2007). Second, internal factors feed insecurity in the region. The implementation of neoliberal policies in the 1990s resulted in increased socioeconomic inequality (Bulmer-Thomas 1996). Some analysts believe that this inequality is the driving force behind the growing levels of violence in Latin America (Hopenhayn 2002). So far, Latin American states have not been able to cope with the increase in criminality or to ensure the implementation and effectiveness of the laws and policies they make to fight insecurity. The police are sometimes completely absent from the most dangerous areas. In other cases, the police respond to increased insecurity with arbitrary violence, which aggravates the perception of insecurity among citizens (Brinks 2008). Moreover, the corrupt and inefficient judicial system that exists in most Latin American countries leads to generalized impunity. For instance, only a slight minority of homicides committed in the region are subjected to a complete judicial process. This impunity may increase the incentives for potential criminals to engage in violence (Estévez 2003; Manrique 2006).

The widespread increase in the homicide rates in Latin America suffices to

Table 1 Homicide rates in Latin America, 1995–2006 (rates per 100,000 inhabitants)

Country	1995	2006	Percentage change
Argentina	4.2	5	19.0
Brazil	25.7	29.2	13.6
Chile	3.2	5.8	81.3
Costa Rica	5.2	8	53.8
Ecuador	13.4	18.4	37.3
El Salvador	51.2	63.8	24.6
Guatemala	19.7	27.5	39.6
Mexico	18.4	11.2	−39.1
Nicaragua	11.7	17.5	49.6
Panama	9.4	12.4	31.9
Paraguay	18.6	16.1	−13.4
Peru	5.5	2.9	−47.3
Uruguay	4.7	4.7	0.0
Venezuela	14.8	31.9	115.5
Average	14.7	18.2	26.2

Source: Pan American Health Organization, *PAHO Basic Indicator Data Base*, http://new.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=1775&Itemid=2003.

show the stark consequences of the explosion of criminal violence that Latin America has suffered in the past twenty years. Table 1 shows the evolution of the homicide rate in different Latin American countries between 1995 and 2006. The upward trend in the homicide rates is visible in almost every case.

SYSTEM SUPPORT: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The issue of political support has attracted considerable scholarly attention, especially since the beginning of the third wave of democratization, which brought about many fragile democracies in which political legitimacy has since wavered (Inglehart 2003). I aim to expand on this literature by assessing the impact of high criminality on support for political institutions.

Political support has been defined as the way in which a person evaluatively orients him- or herself, through his or her attitudes or behaviors, toward the political system—that is, political institutions and the values undergirding the regime (Easton 1975). Easton's (1965) original conceptualization of political support was very broad. Easton identified three objects of political support: the political community, the regime, and the authorities. Since the publication of this seminal work, the issue of regime support (i.e., support for political institutions and regime values) and support for political authorities has received considerable scholarly attention. Support for the performance of political authorities is known as *specific support*, whereas the concept of *diffuse support* is associated with the citizens' attitudes toward the political system (i.e., political institutions). In this article, I focus on diffuse support or system support, even though I control for the possibility of a positive correlation between specific support and diffuse support,

as this is a hypothesis that has been advanced in the literature. Political support is very closely linked to the concept of political legitimacy and trust in government institutions. Political trust refers to the evaluation of the performance of the political institutions according to normative expectations (Miller 1974b).

The most common explanation of political support at the individual level is the performance of government. Some scholars have focused on the political performance of governmental authorities. For example, Miller (1974a, 1974b) focuses on structural problems of the political system that can have a negative impact on political support. He argues that sustained discontent may crystallize when members of a given social group in a divided society are continuously unable to influence the political sphere through voting or other means. When a high proportion of individuals in a country feel powerless to prevent political outcomes that are unfavorable to them, cynicism may become widespread and lead to a decline in support for the political system. Another view presents a decrease in political trust as contingent on the performance of incumbent political leaders. In short, a loss of political support reflects dissatisfaction with the authorities in power at a given point in time (Citrin 1974; Citrin and Green 1986). More recent work has also emphasized the importance of political performance on support for democratic regimes, especially in new democracies. Mishler and Rose (2001) show that transitional governments can generate system support by responding effectively to public priorities and by protecting newly acquired freedoms.

Another stream of the literature explores the impact of governmental economic performance on popular support for political institutions. It is hypothesized that political authorities are held accountable for how they manage the economy. Some works have shown that economic downturn has only a limited impact on political support in established democracies (e.g., Western European countries) that benefit from high levels of legitimacy (Clarke, Dutt, and Kornberg 1993; Finkel, Muller, and Seligson 1989). However, the impact of economic performance on support for democratic political systems is less clear in third-wave democracies. While some scholars studying Eastern European transitions have shown that economic performance is a poor predictor of support for democratic institutions (Evans and Whitefield 1995; Gibson 1996), others have argued that economic performance and successful market reforms are key to building regime support (Kitschelt 1992; Mishler and Rose 2001). Mattes and Bratton (2007) show that in sub-Saharan Africa the acquisition of civic culture and political learning about the content and the consequences of democracy are at the root of popular attitudes toward democratic institutions, whereas economic considerations have a limited role in shaping the attitudes of individuals toward democratic political institutions. In light of this scholarly debate, it is important to control for economic performance in the context of fragile Latin American democracies. It is plausible that poor economic performance has much direr consequences for trust in governmental institutions in Latin America than it does in more developed regions of the world. During democratic transitions, citizens have high, sometimes unrealistic, expectations about the economy. These expectations may in turn create political dissatisfaction (Przeworski 1991; Rose, Shin, and Munro 1999).

Other explanations for different levels of political support in different con-

texts have also been proposed. Inglehart (2003) is the best representative of the modernization approach. In Inglehart's view, economic development gradually leads to a change in attitudes and the emergence of "self-expression values"—a combination of tolerance, trust, a participatory outlook, and emphasis on freedom of expression—which in turn bring about increased mass support for democracy. The social capital approach advances that participation in social networks, and especially high levels of interpersonal trust, drive confidence in political institutions (Brehm and Rahm 1997). It has also been demonstrated that conventional political participation, such as campaigning and voting, is positively correlated with support for the overall political system (Finkel 1985, 1987). Finally, negative media coverage of political life can lead to cynicism and increased dissatisfaction with political institutions (Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbring 1979).

These theories have emerged in response to political events in the United States, where they were first tested. However, a growing body of literature analyzes levels of political support in fragile Latin American democracies. Part of this burgeoning literature applies the theoretical frameworks presented earlier to the Latin American context. For example, Power and Clark (2001) demonstrate that high interpersonal trust is also a positive predictor of regime support in Latin America. Graham and Sukhtankar (2004) analyze the impact of economic crisis on support for democratic institutions in the region and conclude that satisfaction with how democratic institutions are working has decreased as a result of economic hardships in many countries.

However, other theoretical developments try to assess political support in the Latin American context in a more original way. In a study of the impact of corruption on regime legitimacy in Latin America, Seligson (2002) demonstrates that exposure to corruption leads to erosion of political support at the individual level. Other studies explore the impact of local government performance on citizens' support for the political system in Bolivia and Argentina, and conclude that dissatisfaction with local political institutions can lead to a decrease in support for the regime (Hiskey and Seligson 2003; Weitz-Shapiro 2008). This is a fascinating finding in the context of Latin America, where formal, national-level democratic institutions often coexist with local-level authoritarian enclaves (Gibson 2006).

In a recent rich analysis of the sources and consequences of different dimensions of legitimacy, Booth and Seligson (2009) demonstrate that—in addition to personal experiences and attitudes—demographic variables have an impact on individuals' degree of system support. In particular, they show that age, gender, and education influence support for political institutions. Young individuals tend to be more supportive of regime institutions than older citizens. Women are also more likely than men to support the political institutions of their country. Finally, more educated respondents tend to express lower levels of system support. According to Booth and Seligson (2009, 115) less educated citizens "have less capacity for critical analysis of various facets of regime performance than persons with more advanced education." In my statistical analysis, I include variables controlling for these demographic characteristics of respondents.

Until recently, the issue of the impact of criminal violence on political support in Latin America had been completely neglected. In the past decade, though,

some works focusing exclusively on Central America have started to address this issue. Pérez (2004) analyzes how public insecurity affects democratic legitimacy in El Salvador and Guatemala. One of the limitations of this article is that the questions asked of survey respondents were different in El Salvador and in Guatemala, so the author's data may not be comparable or his findings reliable. Much more sophisticated on the methodological front, the work of José Miguel Cruz (2003) still begs the question of the generalizability of his conclusions. Cruz demonstrates that criminality and violence have a negative impact on regime legitimacy in three Central American countries (Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador). But as table 1 shows, criminal violence is more widespread in these three countries (especially El Salvador and Guatemala) than in most other Latin American countries. I try to assess here whether Cruz's findings are also valid in other countries in Latin America, where criminal violence has increased considerably but still remains at much lower levels. Another recent contribution explores how violence affects support for political institutions in Latin America (Richard and Booth 2008), but the authors focus on political violence and political terror, ignoring the more timely preoccupation with criminal violence.

The present article intends to fill the gaps identified in the previous works, to gain a broader understanding of the impact of criminal violence on political support in Latin American countries. I contend that crime-related variables are essential for understanding system support in Latin America, where criminal violence has increased exponentially since the return to democratic rule. Victimization and a high perception of violence may lead to a decrease in support for the political system for three main reasons. First, Latin American citizens exposed to criminal violence may become disenchanted with a political system that is unable to respond efficiently to one of their main areas of concern (i.e., public security). Second, they may grow dissatisfied with a judicial system that fails to punish those responsible for the increased violence. Third, direct or indirect exposure to criminal violence may have a negative impact on interpersonal trust, which in turn negatively affects system support.

This discussion yields the following two hypotheses:

H₁: Individuals who are victims of violence tend to have lower levels of system support.

H₂: Individuals who perceive criminal violence as high in their country tend to have lower levels of system support.

DATA AND METHOD

Data

The level of analysis in this article is the individual. I analyze whether individuals suffering directly or indirectly from criminal violence distrust government institutions.² Survey data are the best way to look into this issue. I draw on

2. Of course, if a large proportion of individuals distrust government institutions, negative consequences at the aggregate level may emerge. Moreover, although individuals are the ones who hold these orientations vis-à-vis political institutions, individuals' social interactions may influence their level of political support.

the series of surveys conducted in 2004 by LAPOP at the University of Pittsburgh.³ The LAPOP surveys are carefully constructed so as to maximize their representativeness. The sampling process involves multistage stratification by country and then substratification within each country by major geographic region to increase precision. Within each primary sampling unit (PSU), survey respondents are selected randomly.⁴ The surveys are conducted in Spanish, but local-language translations of the questionnaire are also available (Mayan translations for Guatemala, and Quechua and Aymara for Ecuador and Bolivia).

A significant advantage of LAPOP surveys on public opinion trends in Latin America is their broad comparability. The surveys ask the same questions of respondents in different countries across Latin America, which facilitates comparative analysis. However, some questions of interest for this study were asked in only some countries. For example, because Central America is more affected by criminal violence and has more fragile institutions than other countries in Latin America, the surveys of this region featured more questions related to these topics. Nonetheless, enough relevant questions were asked in all countries to allow me to conduct this analysis.

The 2004 edition of the LAPOP surveys includes ten countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama). Among these countries are Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama. Although crime rates have increased in the past twenty years in all these countries, the level of criminal violence is much lower in these countries than in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.⁵ Hence, the data allow us to evaluate whether Cruz's (2003) conclusions on the negative correlation between criminal violence and support for political institutions in the three most violent countries in Central America hold in Latin American countries with lower crime rates.

Method

The relationship between support for political institutions and the two independent explanatory factors of interest (victimization and perception of violence) is estimated by regressing relevant variables identified in the LAPOP surveys.

The concept of political legitimacy (or political trust) is multidimensional. Refining Easton's (1965) conceptualization, Norris (1999) argues that legitimacy has five components: political community, regime principles, regime performance, re-

3. LAPOP has since moved to its current institutional home at Vanderbilt University, where it is affiliated with the Center for the Americas. I thank the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and its major supporters (the United States Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Program, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available.

4. The survey's selection of respondents applies quotas for sex and age at the household level. Selection at every other stage was random and based on proportion to size. More technical information about each survey can be obtained at the website of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/core-surveys.php>).

5. Homicide rates in Mexico decreased steadily in the period 1988–2004, but they exploded since the arrival to power of Felipe Calderón in 2006. Today, Mexico is one of the most violent countries in Latin America (Trelles and Carreras 2012, 92–97). But since the statistical analysis is conducted with survey data from 2004, we consider Mexico in this article as a country with moderate levels of criminal violence.

Table 2 Variables measuring support for regime institutions: Survey items (on a 7-point scale transformed to a 1–100 range)

-
1. How much do you respect the political institutions of _____?
 2. How proud do you feel to live under the _____ political system?
 3. How much do you think one should support the _____ political system?
-

Table 3 Variables measuring exposure to violence: Survey items

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1. Speaking of the place or neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being a victim of assault or robbery . . . do you feel very safe, more or less safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe? (Recoded to 0 = very unsafe, and 100 = very safe)
 2. Have you been a victim of physical violence or some crime in the past twelve months? (1 = yes, and 0 = no)
-

gime institutions, and political actors. The present study evaluates the impact of exposure to crime on diffuse support for regime institutions. It is preferable to use multiple related survey items to ensure the construct validity of a concept such as support for political institutions (Dalton 2004; Booth and Seligson 2009). Hence, I construct my dependent variable, system support, by creating an index of three variables that tap support for the political system (see table 2).

This index of system support has high construct validity, as indicated by standard reliability statistics (Cronbach's alpha = .801). Moreover, Booth and Seligson (2009) carried out a confirmatory factor analysis of the different dimensions of legitimacy using the same LAPOP survey data from 2004 that I use here. The three items of my index loaded strongly on the factor that Booth and Seligson label "support for regime institutions," which is clearly distinct from other dimensions of legitimacy.

I use two items from the surveys as my main independent variables (see table 3). The first item measures perception of violence in the neighborhood. A more general question tapping insecurity at the country level was asked in only some countries. Hence, I could not integrate this question into my study. The second item measures whether the respondent had been the victim of a crime in the previous year.

In the multivariate model that follows, I include a series of survey items that allow me to control for the different factors that previous studies have found to be related to system support.⁶ Following the standard procedures used by LAPOP scholars (e.g., Booth and Seligson 2009), I recoded all independent variables, except the dummy variables, to the range of 0 to 100 in order to reduce the measurement effects of differently coded variables in the statistical analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

The first two models are ordinary-least-squares (OLS) regressions with robust standard errors and use individual-level characteristics to predict system support. Table 4 presents the OLS regressions estimating the correlation between system

6. Appendix 1 provides the questions from LAPOP surveys used to measure these different factors. Appendix 2 provides descriptive statistics for all the variables included in the analysis.

Table 4 Ordered logistic regressions: Determinants of system support in Latin America, 2004

	Model 1	Model 2
	OLS with robust standard error (full model)	OLS with robust standard error (most violent countries excluded)
<u>Crime-related variables</u>		
Perception of violence	-.033*** (.006)	-.038*** (.008)
Victim of crime	-1.386*** (.524)	-1.477** (.603)
<u>Control variables</u>		
Political performance	.187*** (.010)	.163*** (.012)
Economic performance	.083*** (.010)	.088*** (.012)
Political participation (attending party meetings)	.061*** (.009)	.074*** (.010)
Political participation (voting)	.786 (.501)	.264 (.596)
Perception of corruption	-.044*** (.007)	-.052*** (.008)
Local government performance	.091*** (.010)	.095*** (.011)
Interpersonal trust	.051*** (.007)	.049*** (.008)
Exposure to TV	.002 (.006)	-.007 (.007)
Women	-1.032** (.403)	-.945** (.457)
Primary education	-2.395** (1.076)	-1.998 (1.439)
Secondary education	-2.140* (1.101)	-2.226 (1.464)
College education	-2.431** (1.153)	-1.597 (1.498)
Age 21–30	-1.488** (.713)	-.837 (.853)
Age 31–40	-1.259* (.754)	-.827 (.898)
Age 41–50	-.805 (.805)	-.539 (.943)
Age 51–60	-.465 (.878)	.538 (1.026)
Age 61 and older	-.358 (.950)	1.104 (1.107)
Constant	46.45*** (1.678)	47.88*** (2.078)
Observations	13,903	9,943
R ²	0.178	0.195

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed test)

support and the independent variables of interest (perception of violence and victimization). The difference between models 1 and 2 is that model 2 excludes the most violent countries (Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) from the analysis. The other explanatory factors identified in the literature are incorporated into the models as control variables. I also include dummy variables for each country to measure whether significant national characteristics (unexplained by the model) lead to different levels of system support.⁷

I first focus on the first model in table 4, which includes all countries in the statistical analysis. The results of that model provide support for my two hypotheses. The negative and statistically significant coefficient for the variable perception of violence suggests that when respondents perceive more violence in their environment, they are less likely to support the country's political institutions. The results show that support for political institutions among individuals who have a low perception of crime is more than 3 percent greater than among those who have a high perception of crime.

In the same vein, the negative and statistically significant coefficients for the variable measuring victimization indicate that respondents who have been victims of crimes are less likely to express system support. Victimization leads to a decrease of 1.3 points in the system support scale. In summary, violence negatively affects system support. Hence, the widespread increase of criminal violence in the region poses a serious threat to the quality of democracy in Latin America.

As for the control variables, the statistical model validates the main factors identified in the literature as determinants of system support. It is not surprising that a better evaluation of the economic and political performance of the government—both at the national and the local level—increases the likelihood of system support. Attending party meetings has a positive impact on system support. Electoral participation, however, is not significantly associated with system support, which suggests that voting is a weaker predictor of political trust in Latin America than in other regions. Perception of corruption is negatively correlated with support for political institutions: a higher perception of corruption reduces the likelihood of an individual expressing high system support. The positive and statistically significant coefficient of the variable interpersonal trust indicates that an increase in this factor increases the probability of system support. The coefficient for the variable exposure to TV does not reach standard levels of statistical significance. Hence, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that media consumption and support for political institutions are unrelated in Latin America. However, more research is needed to determine whether the tone of political coverage (i.e., media negativity) has an impact on system support. Finally, the model confirms that respondents' demographic characteristics affect support for political institutions. Women, older, and more educated citizens tend to express lower levels of system support.⁸ However, the effect of age found here is not as strong as that

7. For ease of presentation, the estimates of the country dummies are not reported here, but the full model is available upon request from the author.

8. I measured age and education with a series of dummy variables. The excluded base groups in the regressions are the youngest age cohort (age group 16–20) and citizens without any formal education.

Table 5 Conditional coefficients of victimization at various levels of perception of violence

Level of perception of violence	Conditional coefficient of victimization (violent crime)
0	-1.386*** (.523)
41.5	-2.765*** (.562)
100	-4.711*** (.788)

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed test)

found by Booth and Seligson (2009). Citizens in the age cohorts 21–30 and 31–40 tend to have lower levels of system support than citizens in the age cohort 16–20, but the effect disappears for older cohorts.

The use of the same scale for all items allows for comparison of the effect of different factors on political trust in Latin America. The evaluation of the performance of the government is clearly the best predictor of system support. But the two independent variables of interest (perception of violence and victimization) have an impact on support for political institutions that is comparable in size to many of the other variables privileged in the political behavior literature. The coefficients measuring perception of violence and victimization are only slightly smaller than other variables that have been associated with political legitimacy in the region in previous research (e.g., interpersonal trust, perception of corruption). Moreover, exposure to violence has an even greater impact on the probability of supporting political institutions when respondents are both victims of crime and have high perceptions of violence. Table 5 presents coefficients for the relationship between victimization and system support when perception of violence is at the minimum (0), the mean (41.5), and the maximum (100).⁹

A respondent who has been victimized is less likely to express system support, regardless of his or her perception of violence. However, the conditional effects clearly show that the negative effects of victimization and perception of violence reinforce each other. The negative impact of victimization on political trust is much greater when perception of violence is also high. In fact, a respondent who has the maximum level of perception of violence and has been victim of crime is likely to express system support that is 4.7 points lower than an average respondent in the 100-point scale. This effect is similar in size to the impact of citizens' retrospective evaluations of the economy and greater than the effect of most of the other variables included in the model. Figure 1 illustrates this effect.

9. The conditional effects were calculated using the LINCOM command in Stata 11.0.

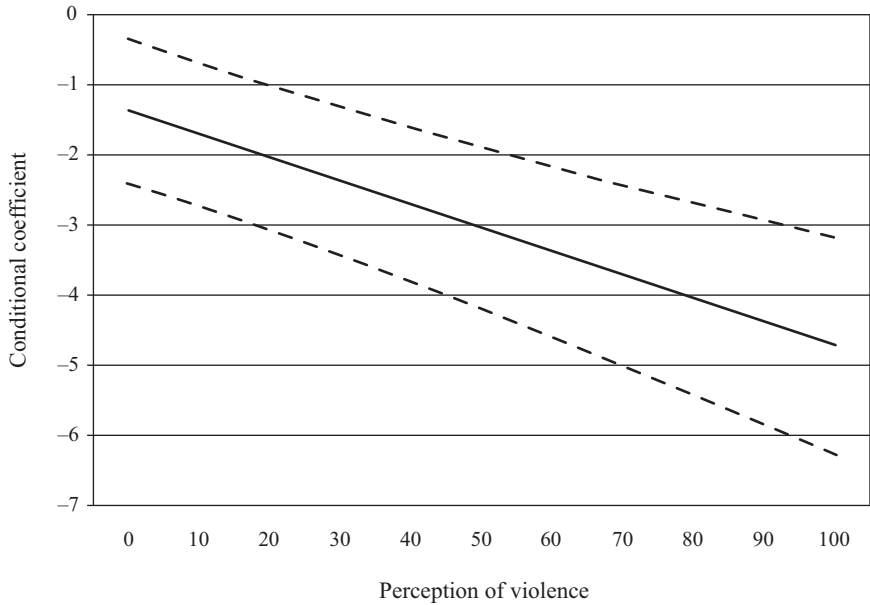


Figure 1 Conditional effect of victimization and perception of violence on system support

Another purpose of this article is to test whether the negative impact of criminal violence on political trust that some authors have found in three Central American countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) holds in the rest of Latin America. To tackle this question, the second model in table 2 excludes the most violent countries from the analysis (Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras). For the countries that remain in the analysis criminal violence has increased (see table 1), but it is still much lower than in the four countries excluded from the second model. The model clearly shows that the negative impact of crime on system support is not specific to the very violent countries in Central America. In fact, the coefficients for the variables perception of violence and victimization remain in the expected direction and are statistically significant. Interestingly, the coefficients are greater in model 2 than in model 1, which suggests that exposure to violence may have even more detrimental effects on political trust in countries with moderate crime rates.

A tentative explanation for this phenomenon is that a moderate rise in criminal violence in countries with relatively low crime rates may be very visible and attract a lot of attention from the media, whereas a rise in criminal violence in countries that are already very violent may be comparatively less damaging for system support, as citizens are accustomed to directly experiencing crime and have been exposed to criminal violence through the media. Considering the numbers in table 1 and the results of the current analysis, the rise in the homicide rate from 13.4 to 18.4 per 100,000 inhabitants in Ecuador between 1995 and 2006 has

had a much more negative impact on system support than the rise from 51.2 to 63.8 per 100,000 inhabitants in El Salvador during the same period.

For ease of presentation, the estimates of the nine country dummies are not shown. In all but one case, the coefficients of the country dummy variables were statistically significant at $p < 0.1$ in a two-tailed test. The sign and magnitude of the specific country coefficients are not, in and of themselves, of interest here, but the results suggest that it is important to take contextual and institutional factors into account when explaining political support in the region.

Results for country fixed effects indicate that it is necessary to account for unique national circumstances when explaining system support in Latin America. Hence, in the four models below, I introduce system-level factors to the regressions. To examine the effect of both system- and individual-level measures on political trust, I use the hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) technique.¹⁰ As there are only ten countries in the study, I can include only one system-level variable at a time in the HLM regressions.

The use of hierarchical models is particularly useful for estimating the impact of criminal violence on system support while also controlling for the modernization argument (Inglehart 2003), which cannot be measured at the individual level. Moreover, it allows me to use alternative measures of government effectiveness by using the Polity IV score and the World Bank government effectiveness index. Table 6 presents the HLM models predicting the level of system support in Latin America.

The main conclusion to be drawn from this second set of models is that economic development and human development affect the average level of political trust in Latin American countries, as the modernization argument suggests. Confidence in political institutions tends to be higher in more developed countries. The variables measuring socioeconomic development (human development indicator and per capita gross domestic product) are both positive and statistically significant at the .05 level (two-tailed test). Government effectiveness and the consolidation of democracy also appear to increase the general level of political trust in Latin American countries. The Polity IV measure and the World Bank government effectiveness index are positively associated with system support, and both coefficients are statistically significant at the .01 level (two-tailed test).

It is important to note that controlling for the country-level variables does not affect the coefficients of the main independent variables in the models. Both victimization and perception of violence remain statistically significant in all HLM models, and the size of the impact is fairly similar.

DISCUSSION

What are the reasons driving these results? Why do victimization and a high perception of violence have a negative impact on support for political institutions? First, I consider the direct effects of criminal violence on system support in

10. All HLM models here were calculated with the XTMIXED command in Stata 11.0.

Table 6 HLM regressions: Determinants of system support in Latin America, 2004

Variables	HLM Model 1	HLM Model 2	HLM Model 3	HLM Model 4
<u>Individual-level variables</u>				
Perception of violence	-.033*** (.006)	-.033*** (.006)	-.033*** (.006)	-.033*** (.006)
Victim of crime	-1.384*** (.509)	-1.383*** (.511)	-1.293** (.511)	-1.425*** (.502)
Political performance	.187*** (.010)	.187*** (.010)	.187*** (.010)	.187*** (.010)
Economic performance	.083*** (.010)	.083*** (.010)	.083*** (.010)	.083*** (.010)
Political participation (attending party meetings)	.061*** (.008)	.061*** (.008)	.061*** (.008)	.060*** (.008)
Political participation (voting)	.775 (.495)	.781 (.495)	.778 (.495)	.791 (.495)
Perception of corruption	-.044*** (.007)	-.044*** (.007)	-.044*** (.007)	-.044*** (.007)
Local government performance	.091*** (.009)	.091*** (.009)	.091*** (.009)	.092*** (.009)
Interpersonal trust	.051*** (.006)	.051*** (.006)	.051*** (.006)	.051*** (.006)
Exposure to TV	.002 (.006)	.002 (.006)	.002 (.006)	.002 (.006)
Women	-1.025** (.402)	-1.030** (.402)	-1.053*** (.402)	-1.023** (.401)
Primary education	-2.420** (1.027)	-2.407** (1.027)	-2.391** (1.027)	-2.423** (1.027)
Secondary education	-2.185** (1.061)	-2.162** (1.061)	-2.134** (1.061)	-2.197** (1.060)
College education	-2.482** (1.119)	-2.456** (1.119)	-2.441** (1.119)	-2.495** (1.118)
Age 21–30	-1.492** (.719)	-1.490** (.719)	-1.478** (.719)	-1.505** (.719)
Age 31–40	-1.271* (.758)	-1.267* (.758)	-1.249* (.758)	-1.289* (.757)
Age 41–50	-.817 (.807)	-.810 (.807)	-.791 (.807)	-.830 (.807)
Age 51–60	-.483 (.882)	-.475 (.882)	-.449 (.882)	-.504 (.882)
Age 61 and older	-.378 (.945)	-.362 (.945)	-.339 (.945)	-.400 (.944)
<u>System-level variables</u>				
Human Development Index	.831*** (26.02)			
Per capita gross domestic product (logged)		20.26**		

Table 6 (continued)

Variables	HLM Model 1	HLM Model 2	HLM Model 3	HLM Model 4
		(8.886)		
Level of democracy			4.152*** (1.589)	
Government effectiveness				.396*** (.066)
Constant	-15.74 (18.28)	-27.49 (31.85)	12.55 (12.60)	27.70*** (3.36)
Observations	13,903	13,903	13,903	13,903
Number of groups	10	10	10	10

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$

Latin American countries. Second, I analyze how criminal violence has an impact on the legitimacy of political institutions indirectly through its effect on interpersonal trust.

Direct Effects of Criminal Violence on System Support

The first explanation of the link between crime and low system support is that the increased criminal violence in Latin America makes blatantly clear the inefficiency of state institutions to provide security to citizens. For the past twenty years, crime rates have been on the rise throughout Latin America, making it the most violent region in the world.¹¹ The political institutions of fragile Latin American democracies have been incapable of dealing effectively with the issue. Latin American citizens may stop supporting the political system of their countries when they perceive the state as being unable to protect them from violence and crime, which constitutes a clear rupture of the Hobbesian pact. Media portrayal and the politicization of the issue aggravate the problem, which in turn has the effect of exaggerating citizens' perception of violence.

The second explanation for why victimization and a high perception of violence are negatively correlated with system support is the inefficiency of Latin America's judicial systems. As already mentioned, few homicides in the region are subjected to a judicial process (Estévez 2003; Manrique 2006), and the record is even worse for less serious crimes. This inefficiency leads to generalized impunity, which is perceived negatively by Latin American citizens, especially those who have been victims of violent crime and seek redress. Hence, victimization may have a negative impact on system support because victimized citizens are

11. Sub-Saharan Africa is also an extremely violent region, but the violence that plagues that region is more closely related to civil conflicts than to criminal violence.

disappointed in responses from the judicial institutions. Malone (2010, 122) demonstrates this effect in Central American countries, showing that “crime control performance is significantly linked to diffuse support for the justice system as a whole.” Citizens who perceive that the neighborhood in which they live is violent have lower levels of trust for the justice system of their countries and are less likely to believe that the national courts guarantee a fair trial (see also Herrmann, MacDonald, and Tauscher 2011).¹²

*Indirect Effects of Criminal Violence on System Support:
The Impact of Crime on Interpersonal Trust*

A third explanation for the negative effects of victimization and perception of violence on the probability of expressing system support is that criminal violence may lead to a decrease in interpersonal trust. The literature has identified being part of a social network and having high levels of interpersonal trust as determinants of system support (Brehm and Rahm 1997; Power and Clark 2001). Putnam (1993) argues that interpersonal trust allows individuals to participate in civic associations, which in turn is key for citizens’ development of confidence in the political institutions of their country. My statistical model supports this claim: the coefficient for the variable interpersonal trust in table 2 is positive and statistically significant. Higher levels of interpersonal trust increase the likelihood of an individual expressing system support. In communities with widespread violence, individuals may respond by abandoning public spaces, where the risk of experiencing violence is greater. Also, participation in social and community activities decreases as individuals remain more within their private spheres, and accordingly the citizens’ social capital shrinks (Cruz 2000). Moreover, high perceptions of violence lead to interpersonal distrust. In highly violent environments, distrust and fear replace confidence and reciprocity, and people tend to rely on their own resources rather than engaging in social networks (Ayres 1998).

CONCLUSION

The existing literature on system support has paid scant attention to the effects of violence on political trust. This article has shown that criminal violence has a negative impact on system support in Latin America. Both victimization and a high perception of violence decrease the likelihood of support for political institutions. This is an important finding, and given the skyrocketing levels of criminal violence in Latin America, it can have implications at the aggregate level.

This article advances three explanations for this correlation. First, Latin American citizens become disenchanted with a political system that is unable to respond efficiently to one of their main concerns (public security). Second, individu-

12. I replicated Malone’s (2010) analysis with the database used for this article and found very similar results. Exposure to violence (i.e., victimization and fear of violence) appears to erode support for the judicial system in the ten Latin American countries included in this analysis. The results of this model are not reported here but are available upon request from the author.

als who are victims of violence or who perceive violence as high are dissatisfied with judicial systems that fail to punish those responsible for the increased violence. Third, exposure to criminal violence has a negative impact on interpersonal trust, which in turn negatively affects system support.

These findings have serious implications for the quality and stability of democracy in Latin America. A pillar of democratization in Latin America is the acquisition of a democratic political culture by the citizens of the region's newer, fragile democracies. Citizens' acceptance of existing political institutions as adequate for the country is essential to the stability and legitimacy of democratic regimes. Political legitimacy is the result of citizens' satisfaction with the performance of political institutions in some key areas (Diamond 1993; Lipset 1994; Cruz 2003). The literature on political legitimacy has largely neglected insecurity while paying much more attention to the performance of institutions in other areas (mainly the economy). The results of this study suggest that increasing criminal violence may also have a negative impact on the democratic political culture in Latin America, thus undermining one of the building blocks of democratization in the region.

The negative impact of perception of violence and victimization on system support may have deleterious consequences for democratic stability in another important way. Discontent with the performance of political institutions in combating insecurity may lead disenchanted Latin American citizens to support extralegal, quasi-authoritarian means to reestablish order. This may lead to the emergence of gray areas in which the democratic rule of law is not respected (O'Donnell 1993; Méndez, O'Donnell, and Pinheiro 1999). A main step forward for democratization in Latin America has been the emergence of civilian governments and the return of the armed forces to the barracks. However, in the past ten years some Latin American countries have called on the military to fight criminal groups and to restore order in extreme circumstances. For example, Brazil's armed forces sometimes conduct police operations in the favelas, and in some areas of Mexico the military is currently engaged in a drug war with organized criminal groups. This use of the military for purposes of policing is made possible by the disenchantment of Latin American citizens with other state institutions that have not responded adequately to such issues, such as the well-documented abuses and killings by the police in some Latin American countries, especially Brazil. Hence, urban masses in cities like Buenos Aires, São Paulo, and Salvador often end up accepting the necessity of highly repressive means by the police or the military to fight increasing levels of violent crime (Brinks 2008).

This article opens up interesting avenues for further research. First, it would be interesting to test whether exposure to violence leads Latin American citizens to become less attached to democratic values. If individuals who suffer from violence have lower levels of system support, they may be more likely to support extralegal or authoritarian solutions to the restoration of order, especially if they live in areas where violence is out of control. The LAPOP surveys ask respondents how concerned they are about civil rights and liberties, and whether they would support authoritarian regimes in certain circumstances (e.g., increased criminal activity). So it is possible to test whether the decrease in system support provoked

by an increase in violence also negatively affects democratic political culture among Latin American citizens.

My findings also have implications outside Latin America. The region is not the only one experiencing widespread violence. For example, the design could be replicated with data from African countries to assess whether violence (not necessarily criminal violence) has a negative impact in that region. Also, even if violence is not as pervasive in more developed and institutionalized Western democracies, there are neighborhoods affected by criminal violence in every major urban center. It would be worth testing whether victimization and a high perception of violence also lead to lower levels of system support among citizens in these areas in developed democracies.

Appendix 1 Operationalization of independent variables: 2004 LAPOP surveys

Variables	Survey items
Political performance	Speaking generally of the current government would you say that the job the current president is doing is very good, good, average, bad, or very bad? (Recoded to very bad = 0, and very good = 100)
Economic performance	In general how would you categorize the economic situation of the country? Would you say it is very good, good, average, bad, or very bad? (Recoded to very bad = 0, and very good = 100)
Political participation (attending party meetings)	Please tell me if you attend political party meetings at least once a week, one or two times a month, once or twice a year, or never? (Recoded to never = 0, and at least once a week = 100)
Political participation (voting)	Did you vote in the last presidential elections of 2002? (1 = yes, and 0 = no)
Perception of corruption	Taking into account your experience or what you have heard, is corruption among public officials very common, common, not very common, or uncommon? (Recoded to uncommon = 0, and very common = 100)
Local government performance	Would you say that the services the municipality is providing are excellent, good, average, poor, or awful? (Recoded to awful = 0, and excellent = 100)
Interpersonal trust	Now, speaking in general terms of the people from here, would you say that people in this neighborhood are generally: very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or untrustworthy? (Recoded to untrustworthy = 0, and very trustworthy = 100)
Exposure to TV	With what frequency do you watch news on TV: every day, once or twice a week, rarely, or never? (Recoded to never = 0, and every day = 100)

Appendix 2 Descriptive statistics (country averages)

	System support index	Victimization	Perception of violence	Political performance	Retrospective economic evaluation	Perception of corruption	Attending party meetings	Voting	Local government performance	Interpersonal trust	Exposure to TV
Bolivia	49.9	24.5%	47.5	54.1	35.3	67.4	18.5	75.4%	45.9	48.4	81.2
Colombia	62.8	14.4%	40.5	70.3	38.7	73.5	11.8	66.9%	57.5	64.1	84.6
Costa Rica	75.2	15.2%	42.2	54.1	39.8	74.6	2.8	74.3%	52.8	70.9	85.6
Ecuador	46.2	14.9%	39.9	42.9	31.3	79.4	3.6	87.4%	55.4	58.2	82.8
El Salvador	65.8	17.1%	43.6	61.1	36.9	65.8	5.3	75.6%	57.2	63.1	76.3
Guatemala	53.4	12.1%	45.8	57.4	29.7	70.8	7.3	64.5%	51.9	57.2	59.5
Honduras	54.6	13.6%	45.9	46.1	27.8	69.4	8.7	72.9%	52.1	63.2	59.6
Mexico	61.5	17.2%	40.8	53.5	34.8	73.1	6.9	75.6%	49.5	58.1	81.6
Nicaragua	53.7	15.2%	45.3	50.1	27.8	72.1	11.2	75.3%	50.2	56.1	57.4
Panama	56.7	14.8%	47.2	40.9	33.9	73.8	17.4	76.1%	46.8	52.9	78.4
Mean	57.9	15.9%	43.9	53.1	33.6	72.0	9.4	74.4%	51.9	59.2	74.7
Standard deviation	8.1	3.2%	2.7	7.9	3.9	3.5	4.9	5.6%	3.6	5.8	10.2

Source: LAPOP (2004)

Appendix 3 Descriptive statistics: System-level measures

	Human Development Index	GDP per capita	World Bank Government Effectiveness Index	Polity IV score
Bolivia	0.68	2572	33.5	8
Colombia	0.77	5395	54.4	7
Costa Rica	0.83	6680	68.0	10
Ecuador	0.74	3561	20.4	6
El Salvador	0.72	2732	50.0	7
Guatemala	0.65	4035	31.1	8
Honduras	0.67	2025	34.5	7
Mexico	0.80	7357	63.1	8
Nicaragua	0.67	1923	26.7	8
Panama	0.79	5869	57.3	9
Mean	0.73	4214	43.9	7.8
Standard deviation	0.06	1796	15.0	1

Source: UN Development Program (2004); *Historical Statistics of the World Economy* (online database), Groningen Growth and Development Centre, Groningen, The Netherlands, <http://www.ggdcc.net/maddison/oriindex.htm>; World Bank, *Worldwide Governance Indicators*, <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/>; Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr (2008).

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