

Learning to Protect and Serve in Latin America: Building Relationships between Police and the Communities They Serve

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Abstract

How can democracies build police forces that fight crime and protect the rights of citizens? Most Latin American countries have grappled with this question, as they have struggled to create new police forces, or reform existing ones, while simultaneously confronting sharp increases in violent crime. To understand how Latin American democracies can develop civilian police forces that do indeed protect and serve their communities, I examine police-community relations in Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, and Uruguay. I rely upon the Latin American Public Opinion Project's (LAPOP) 2014 public opinion data to analyze public perceptions and personal experiences with the police. Using binomial and ordinal logistic regression, I examine the linkage between public experiences with the police (e.g., response time, solicitation of bribes, etc.) and trust in police, evaluation of police performance, and public security police preferences.

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“Fleeing Gangs, Children Head to U.S. Border” *New York Times*, July 9, 2014

“Graft, Greed, Mayhem Turn Honduras into Murder Capital of World” *Miami Herald*,
January 21, 2012

“Venezuela, More Deadly Than Iraq, Wonders Why” *New York Times*, August 22, 2010

Headlines around the world drive home a sobering point: violent crime is endemic throughout the Latin American region, and in several cases threatens democratic stability. In 2013, more than a third of all global homicides occurred in the Americas, and Central America tied with sub-Saharan Africa as the most violent region in the world (UNODC 2014). As police and military forces confront suspected criminals and even armed drug cartels, many fear that crime could undermine relatively recent transitions to democracy. These fears are backed by considerable theoretical and empirical evidence. New democracies frequently do not have sufficient time to develop their institutional capacities to fight crime, and can find themselves weak and ineffective when trying to maintain order (Bermeo 1997, 2003; Diamond 1999). This institutional weakness creates opportunities for other actors (such as organized crime and gangs) to challenge the state’s monopoly of force (Bruneau, Dammert and Skinner 2011). It also leads some states to supplant traditional justice institutions (the courts and police) with alternative actors like the military and private security forces, even though these alternative actors typically lack adequate training to interact with civilian populations and suitable mechanisms for oversight and accountability (Malone 2014, Ungar 2007). Even in less extreme cases, some democracies find themselves devoting a larger share of the national budget to domestic security matters, diverting investments from other public goods like social services.¹

Crime can also chip away at democracy in more subtle ways, such as eroding support for democratic norms and fostering undemocratic behaviors. For example, in El Salvador a fearful public has registered support for measures that allow authorities to act on the margins of the law. In Guatemala, vigilante justice has increased at an alarming rate. In some Honduran neighborhoods, the military has assumed the powers of domestic police, and unleashed excessive force against suspected criminals. In a seminal work, Bailey (2009) describes the current relationship between crime and democratic governance as a security trap, whereby crime weakens the institutional and societal foundations of democratic governance, and weaker democracies in turn find themselves ill-equipped to maintain security within their borders. If this cycle becomes self-reinforcing, new democracies become ensnared in a security trap.

¹ When crime reaches high levels, it can monopolize the resources of the state and siphon off funds for other vital public services. Rather than investing in public infrastructure and social services, democratic governments often find their resources monopolized by rising levels of public insecurity. The World Bank noted that in addition to the pain and trauma crime brings to victims and their families in the region, “crime and violence carry staggering economic costs” that consume approximately eight percent of the region’s GDP, taking into account the costs of law enforcement, citizen security and health care” (World Bank 2011, 5).

Given crime's pernicious effects on the quality and stability of democratic governance, it is imperative to identify and study countries that have escaped from the security trap, at least partially. Crime has tested all Latin American democracies, but some have weathered this challenge better than others. In particular, six countries have distinguished themselves as escaping from the security trap to some degree: Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, and Uruguay. These countries differ tremendously on a variety of socio-economic and political indicators yet share one commonality -- they have registered at least partial success in insulating their democratic governments from the regional crime crisis. One of the key ways these countries have insulated themselves from the regional crime crisis is through the formation of professional and civilian police forces, regarded as legitimate in the eyes of the communities they serve.

This paper is part of a larger research project that aims to identify the ways in which some Latin American countries have succeeded in creating civilian police forces that are connected to the communities they serve. In this paper, I rely upon the Latin American Public Opinion Project's (LAPOP) 2014 Americasbarometer survey to identify the determinants of public trust in police, public evaluations of police performance, and public preferences for different policing strategies.² For over three decades, LAPOP has been the leading organization collecting public opinion data in Latin America, and has tailored its recent surveys to focus on crime, violence, and policing practices throughout the region.

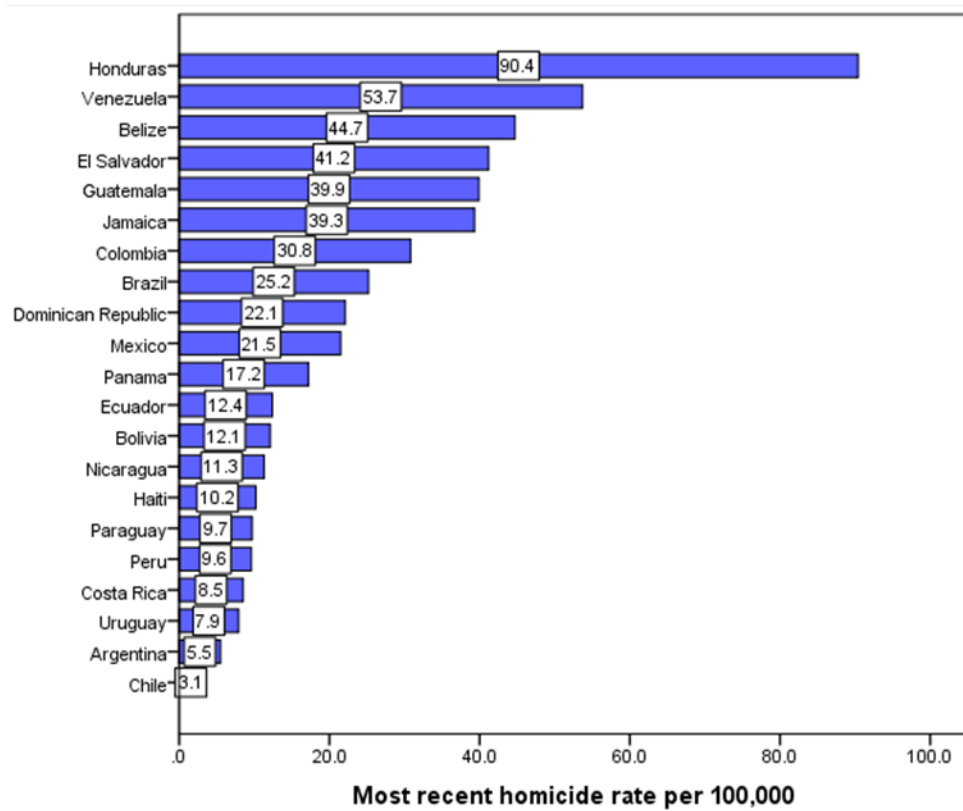
Overview of Cases

Over the past decade, the six countries examined here -- Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, and Uruguay -- have registered different types of success. Chile and Uruguay have crime rates far below the regional average. As Figure 1 illustrates, Chile, Uruguay, and Costa Rica report rates of violent crime far lower than the regional average. Rates of police corruption are also lower in these countries, as citizens in public opinion polls report fewer instances of bribe solicitation (Zechmeister 2014).³

² The author would like to thank LAPOP and its major supporters (the United States Agency for International Development, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available.

³ This combination of low homicide rates and low rates of bribery stands in contrast to the case of Argentina. Argentina has low rates of violent crime for the region, but high rates of police corruption. Furthermore, in some provinces the Argentine police have also organized strikes that culminated into a breakdown of public order and widespread looting.

**Figure 1: Homicide Rates in Latin America
(2014 United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime Report)**



The Chilean police are also highly regarded, despite their complicity in the dictatorship of 1973-1990 (Dammert 2009). Chileans report that their police forces are far less likely to solicit bribes or abuse citizens' rights when compared to their counterparts in other Latin American countries (LAPOP 2010 and 2014). Chile has also pioneered the inclusion of the community in its crime control policies, launching a series of initiatives to include citizens' input in designing neighborhood-based security strategies (Frühling 2009, Malone 2013).

Costa Rica is also frequently highlighted as a success story, and Costa Rican exceptionalism is typically cited as the reason why Costa Rica has not struggled with crime to the same extent as other Central American countries. Costa Rica differs from its Central American neighbors on a variety of fronts – public health, sanitation, democratic governance, educational achievement. It stands to reason, many argue, that it would do better in crime prevention and maintenance as well. Costa Rica has had the resources and political will to develop justice institutions that are less corrupt, more professional, and more integrated into civil society. In this context, it is not surprising that its crime control policy stresses the importance of civil society, and combines punitive and preventive tactics. Such a quick appraisal overlooks some important contemporary problems, however, as recently there have been signs of strain. Public trust in the justice system has dipped sharply in the past five years, and Costa Rican officials themselves have lamented

that current crime trends have left their justice system “sobre cargado” (overburdened). Costa Ricans register high levels of public insecurity in national surveys, data belied by very visible investments in private security. One of the key reasons why the Costa Rican system has become *sobre cargado* is due to changes in the major routes of the international drug trade. When Mexico unleashed its war on drugs in 2006, the illicit drug market seized this advantage and shifted its operations south into Central America. In 2006, 23% of cocaine shipments moving north passed through Central America. By 2011, this amount had jumped to 84%, as the Mexican offensive pressed cartel activity south (Archibold and Cave 2011). The violence and corruption associated with illicit trade began to tarnish the Costa Rican police and courts with corruption scandals. Thus, while public security in Costa Rica has historically been much better than regional trends, recent changes in the status quo have led to a deterioration of public security and heightened levels of public fear of crime. While Costa Rica appears successful compared to its neighbors, citizens register disappointment with rising rates of violent crime and corruption.

Colombia has only recently entered the limelight, as observers have applauded police reforms implemented over the past decade. Colombia still faces very high rates of violent crime, with a homicide rate over six times higher than that of the United States. Still, homicide rates have decreased steadily from their peak in the mid 1990s, when the dominance of drug cartels gave Colombia the infamous distinction as the murder capital in the world. Under Plan Colombia, the United States provided a great deal of military aid to the Colombian army to combat drug cartels. Since very little aid was devoted to overseeing military operations, widespread human rights violations led the United States to curb aid to the army and instead enlist the police. Particularly over the past ten years, Colombia has transformed its policing practices while simultaneously confronting an armed insurgency and the drug trade. Reductions in violence cannot be tied completely to improvements in policing, however. The crackdown in Colombia created market incentives for drug operations to shift to other countries. However, domestic and international observers have charted concrete improvements in policing practices in Colombia, and experts have encouraged countries like Mexico and Peru to adopt similar policing reforms.

Nicaragua is not a typical success story, yet recent events indicate that this case merits more scrutiny. Inequality and political violence have marked Nicaragua for much of its history; however, in the past decade it has registered crime rates far lower than the rest of the region. Nicaragua reports a GDP less than a quarter of that of Costa Rica, yet over the past decade its homicide rate was roughly the same. Nicaragua’s rate of violent crime is 80% lower than the other post-conflict countries in the region, Guatemala and El Salvador, despite registering lower levels of GDP per capita than these other countries. Furthermore, both state and societal forces tend to shun militarized policing practices, favoring preventive and community-based initiatives. Still, recent reports indicate that Nicaragua is becoming more vulnerable to the influence of organized crime and its accompanying corruption. Interior Minister Ana Isabel Morales sharply rebuked judges and magistrates who consistently reduced prison sentences (or simply released) drug traffickers, which she cited as evidence of organized crime’s influence over the Nicaraguan justice system. In a recent high profile trial, officials from the Nicaraguan National Police and Supreme Electoral Council were charged with complicity in money laundering and drug trafficking operations (Meléndez and Orozco 2013).

Panama's trajectory has also differed from that of the Northern Triangle. Given its geographic location, Panama has long served as a hub facilitating the transfer of legal and illegal goods and services, and this trend intensified in the 1980s following General Manuel Noriega's seizure of power. The 1989 U.S. invasion destroyed the Panamanian army and captured Noriega, prompting a complete overhaul of security forces and the creation of a civilian national police force. However, problems with corruption and illicit trade persisted. Democratic reforms transformed Panamanian institutions throughout the 1990s, but the illicit sector proved resilient, particularly with the complicity of corrupt elites. Despite persistent problems with corruption at the higher levels of government, police reforms throughout the past decade have reduced the prevalence of petty corruption among the police on the streets. Homicide rates rose an alarming 90% in Panama from 2000-2010, but a series of Chilean-style police reforms enacted from 2010 to the present have succeeded in reducing rates of violent crime and police corruption. Reformers have prioritized a civilian, community policing model in Panamanian cities, and have aimed to integrate police officers more cohesively into the communities they serve. Police salaries and professional training have improved, and civil society groups tie such reforms to improved professionalism on the streets and a reduction in bribe solicitation from average citizens. However, problems with police corruption and abuse remain a problem outside the cities. In particular, the Servicio Nacional de Fronteras (SENAFRONT) has come under harsh criticism amid charges of corruption and abuse of human rights in the rural areas of drug trafficking corridors. Still, in urban areas community-oriented police reforms have generally succeeded in raising salaries and professional standards.

In sum, these six countries report different types of successes in curbing crime and its impact on politics and society. Even though they have very different historical, socio-economic, and political foundations, they illustrate how Latin American countries can escape the security trap. This paper focuses on one particular escape path – the development of professional and civilian police forces. Each of these countries has registered at least some success in improving policing practices, particularly police-community relationships. This is a crucial step for developing effective and sustainable public security policies. If citizens view their police as corrupt, inefficient, or abusive, they will not turn to police for protection or to solve problems in their communities or homes. Extra legal options become more appealing, leading citizens to turn to extra-legal actors (ranging from private security guards to organized crime syndicates) to mete out justice or provide adequate protection. When political elites doubt the efficacy of their own police forces, they also are tempted to rely on alternative actors. For example, Mexican leaders cited police corruption and inefficiency as reasons to enlist the military in their campaign against organized crime, and El Salvador has dispatched its military to police the streets despite peace accords forbidding this practice. In Guatemala, paramilitary groups have been linked to political and economic elites. In most cases these alternative actors have proven no better than police in controlling crime, and they create new problems as they elude legal mechanisms for accountability and oversight. Thus, to avoid the problems posed by military, extra-legal, or private actors, it is imperative to identify the ways in which professional civilian police forces connect with the communities they are supposed to serve.

Measuring Support for the Police

To measure public support for the police, I rely upon three measures. First, I examine levels of diffuse trust in the police compared to levels of trust in other institutions (relative trust). Second, I assess public evaluations of police performance. While this measure is correlated with public trust in the police, it taps into the more specific dimension of performance evaluation. Finally, I examine public preferences for public safety policies. Specifically, I gauge preferences for reducing crime through preventive measures, punitive ones, or a mixture of the two.

Relative Trust in the Police

To measure public support for political institutions, scholars typically begin by examining levels of diffuse trust or support. Most famously, Easton (1975) defined diffuse support as a durable, generalized attachment to political objects. According to Easton, diffuse support is an evaluation of “what an object is or represents . . . not of what it does,” comprising:

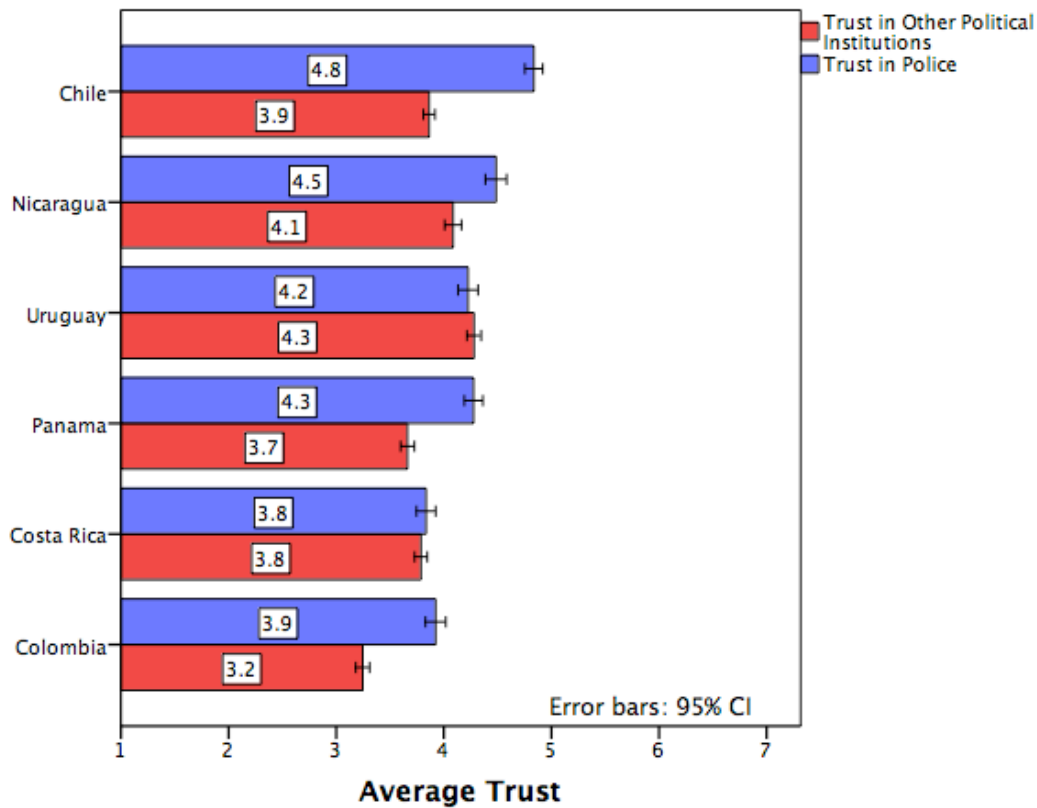
a reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed . . . outputs and beneficial performance may rise and fall while this support, in the form of a generalized attachment, continues (Easton 1975: 444).

Thus, diffuse support for police can tell us whether citizens accept the police as legitimate, and whether this support will lead them to still rely upon the police to resolve problems rather than extralegal actors. Still, there are problems with examining support or trust in police in isolation, as public opinion scholars have long noted that trust in institutions like the police tend to be highly correlated with trust in other political institutions, as well as economic trends.

Examples from LAPOP’s Americasbarometer illustrate this problem. LAPOP asked respondents to indicate their levels of trust in a series of institutions, including the police.⁴ When we examine correlations among these items, we find that they are very closely linked, with Pearson’s r ranging from .309 to .417. Despite these high correlations, it is interesting to note that in the cases of Chile, Nicaragua, Panama, and Colombia, average trust in police is significantly higher than average trust in other political institutions. Figure 2 compares average trust in police to average responses given for six other state institutions: the justice system, congress, political parties, president, municipal government, and elections. In these four cases, respondents registered more trust in police than for these other political institutions.

⁴ The exact text of the survey question read “On this card there is a ladder with steps numbered 1 to 7, where 1 is the lowest step and means NOT AT ALL and 7 the highest and means A LOT. For example, if I asked you to what extent do you like watching television, if you don’t like watching it at all, you would choose a score of 1, and if, in contrast, you like watching television a lot, you would indicate the number 7 to me. If your opinion is between not at all and a lot, you would choose an intermediate score. So, to what extent do you like watching television? Read me the number.” Respondents were then asked to indicate their levels of trust in a variety of institutions, including: the police, justice system, congress, political parties, president, municipal government, and elections.

Figure 2: Trust in Police and Trust in Other Political Institutions



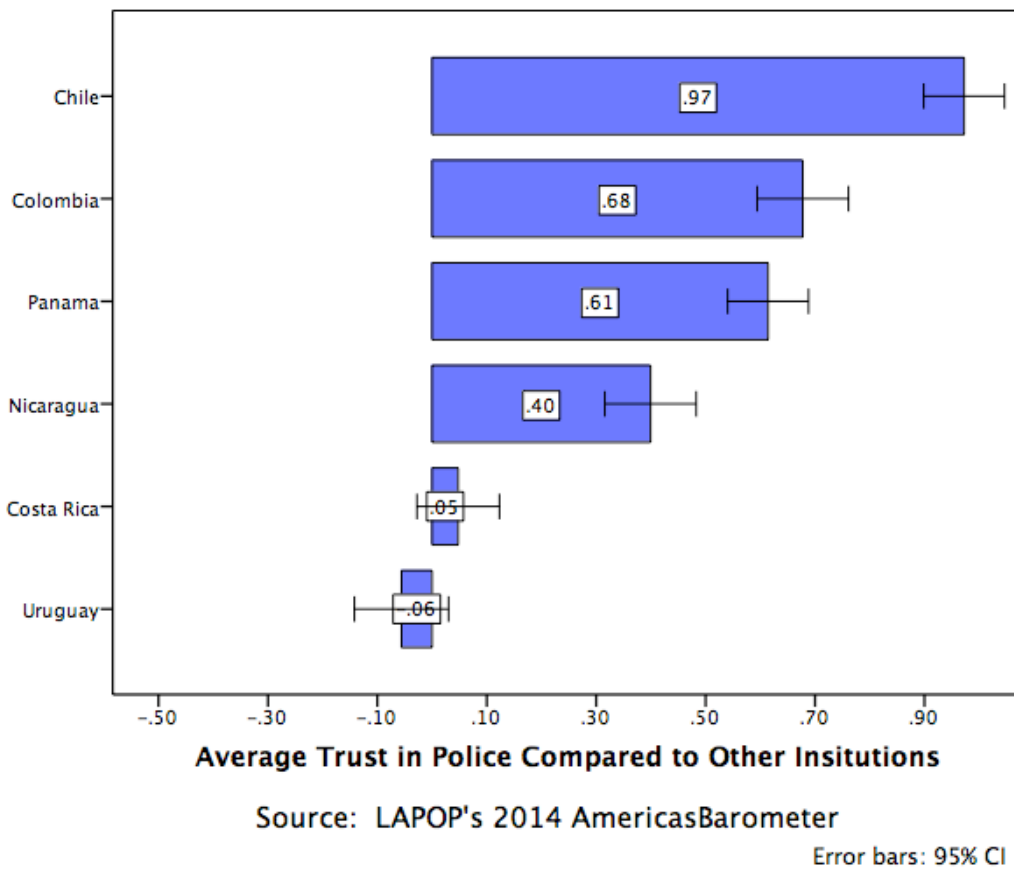
Source: LAPOP's 2014 Americasbarometer

Higher levels of trust in the police indicate that the public registers more support for the police on average than other political institutions in these four cases. However, if we aim to understand what factors predict public trust in the police, it is desirable to parcel out the variance attributable to these other institutions. To this end, I created a composite variable gauging average trust in the key political institutions in each country. I computed average levels of respondents' trust in the justice system, congress, political parties, president, municipal government, and elections.⁵ I then subtracted each respondent's trust in the police from the average trust in other political institutions.⁶ The resulting variable, relative trust in police, measured the extent to which respondents trusted police more than other political institutions. Positive values represented more trust in the police, while negative values indicated that respondents trusted the police less than other political institutions. Figure 3 depicts average levels of relative trust in police in each country. As Figure 3 illustrates, in Chile, Colombia, Panama, and Nicaragua, trust in police was substantially higher than average trust in other political institutions. In Costa Rica and Uruguay, relative trust in police hovered around zero, indicating that respondents registered similar levels of trust in police and other institutions.

⁵ Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .813.

⁶ Relative trust in police = trust in police – average trust in other political institutions.

Figure 3: Relative Trust in Police



Public Evaluations of Police Performance

In addition to diffuse trust in police, I also aim to examine public evaluations of police performance more specifically. LAPOP asked respondents: “In general, are you very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the performance of the police in your neighborhood?” For ease of interpretation, I recoded the scale so that (1) very unsatisfied (2) dissatisfied (3) satisfied (4) very satisfied. This measure is much more specific, asking respondents to evaluate how well police do their jobs in their neighborhood. Since this measure is one that targets police performance, I expect that this measure will be more closely tied to police patrols, police ability to contain crime, police treatment of community members, and police corruption.

Public Security Policy Preferences

Lastly, I turn to examine support for two main approaches to reducing criminality: prevention and punishment. These two policy preferences have been the subject of much debate in

contemporary Latin American discourse, particularly as many politicians have pledged to crackdown on suspected criminals with a “mano dura” or iron fist, and rely on harsh punitive measures to punish criminals and deter crime. Mano dura policies have succeeded in increasing prison populations, but they have not resulted in reductions in crime rates. Furthermore, critics have charged that mano dura practices are linked to abuses of human rights and civil liberties (Appialoza and Lucía Dammert 2011). Rather than relying solely on punitive measures, critics of mano dura argue that politicians should invest in prevention policies, which seek to address the root causes of criminality. Such approaches have been credited with success in Nicaragua, for example, which has employed a holistic crime fighting policy and targeted at risk youth in “preventive and rehabilitative efforts” that focus on “family, school, and community interventions” (Ribando Seelke 2011, 11). The city of León has pioneered the use of GPS tracking and other technology to identify at-risk areas and individuals, and target preventive measures accordingly (Espinoza and Herrera 2009). Panama has also begun to invest more resources in prevention policies, offering alternatives for at risk youth to dissuade them from joining maras. With the help of domestic and international non-governmental organizations, Panama has provided some access to extracurricular activities like theatre and sports to Panamanian youth, as well as rehabilitation for former gang members.

I aim to determine whether public perceptions of police can lead to support for certain types of public security policies. To this end, I rely upon the following LAPOP survey item: “In your opinion, what should be done to reduce crime in a country like ours: Implement preventive measures or increase punishment of criminals? (1) Implement preventive measures (2) Increase punishment of criminals (3) [Don’t read] Both.”

Predicting Support for the Police

Police Performance Measures

What can shape public perceptions and evaluations of police? Recent research underscores the importance of personal interactions. For example, in a U.S. study, Peffley and Hurwitz (2010) tie racial disparities in trust in the justice system to different personal experiences with justice institutions, particularly the police. For example, their study found that “one of every three Blacks reports being treated unfairly by the police . . . whereas the number of Whites reporting unfair treatment . . . is closer to one in ten” (Peffley and Hurwitz 2010: 65). Given these differences in personal experiences, not surprisingly Whites and Blacks perceive the same justice system in starkly different terms. Whites tend to view the justice system as largely fair, while Blacks “generalize from their experience by recognizing that such maltreatment exists on a wider scale” (Peffley and Hurwitz 2010: 66). Additional research also highlights the role personal experiences with institutions can play in shaping citizens’ attitudes towards democracy and its norms. Tyler and Huo (2002) argue that when authorities treat community members in ways that foster perceptions of fairness (i.e., with dignity and respect), people will register more support and deference to legal authorities.

While in prior surveys LAPOP included questions measuring several different interactions with the police, in 2014 there was only one question that gauged direct experiences with police: “Has

a police officer asked you for a bribe in the last twelve months?” Respondents were coded (1) yes and (0) no. This question measures the prevalence of police misconduct in the form of bribe solicitation, as self-reported by respondents.

LAPOP did include another measure gauging respondents’ perceptions of police responsiveness, posing the following question: “Suppose someone enters your home to burglarize it and you call the police. How long do you think it would take the police to arrive at your house on a typical day around noon? (1) Less than 10 minutes, (2) Between 10 and 30 minutes, (3) More than 30 minutes and up to an hour, (4) More than an hour and up to three hours, (5) More than three hours, (6) [DON’T READ] There are no police/they would never arrive.” While this is not a direct measure of citizen-police interactions, it does gauge citizens’ anticipation of police responsiveness to their calls.

Finally, LAPOP asked citizens to assess the ability of the justice system as a whole to punish criminals: “If you were a victim of a robbery or assault how much faith do you have that the justice system would punish the guilty? (1) none (2) little (3) some (4) a lot.” In prior surveys LAPOP had posed this question separately for police and the courts; however, due to high levels of correlation between perceptions of police and court performance in this area, the 2014 survey included just one question to measure assessments of the justice system. In include this measure to determine whether public support for police is tied to broader assessments of the efficacy of the justice system.

Experiences with and Perceptions of Crime

I also include a series of questions to gauge respondents’ experiences with and perceptions of crime. As crime is one of the most salient issues in Latin America today, and one that is closely related to the police, I aim to gauge whether respondents translate their experiences with crime into more or less support for police forces. Are police penalized when crime is high? If so, which experiences and/or perceptions of crime are most closely linked to police performance?

To measure personal victimization, I rely upon the following survey item: “Now, changing the subject, have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past twelve months? That is, have you been a victim of robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats or any other type of crime in the past twelve months?” Respondents were coded as (1) yes and (0) no.

To estimate respondents’ evaluations of their own personal security, the survey posed the following question: “Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being assaulted or robbed, do you feel (1) very safe; (2) somewhat safe; (3) somewhat unsafe; (4) very unsafe?” This question is a cognitive measure of fear of crime, as it determines respondents’ own risk assessments of the chances of personal victimization by specific crimes in their immediate environment. This cognitive measure asks respondents to indicate their fear of victimization by more “commonplace” crimes, as opposed to those sensationalized drug-related crimes that feature so prominently in the media.

Finally, I aim to determine trends in perceptions of crime. Respondents may become accustomed to a certain level of criminality, and judge police performance by deviations in the

status quo. This appears to be the trend in Costa Rica, where politicians and the media heightened their criticism of the police when public security deteriorated, despite the fact that Costa Rica maintained low levels of criminality for the region. To capture public evaluations of trends in crime, I use the following survey question: “Do you think that the current level of violence in your neighborhood is higher, about the same, or lower than 12 months ago? (1) lower (2) about the same (3) higher.”

Socio-economic and Demographic Indicators

Individual Attributes

Finally, I included the socioeconomic and demographic variables standard in survey research to control for individual level attributes. To take these characteristics into account, this analysis follows the conventions of survey research and incorporates variables measuring sex (men=1, women=0), age (measured in cohorts), and education (measured as the number of years of formal schooling respondents completed). I also included variables to measure the size of respondents’ hometowns,⁷ and income according to the number of household possessions owned by respondents.⁸ To include a measure of race and/or ethnicity, I relied upon LAPOP’s measure of respondents’ skin color on a range of 1-11.⁹ Finally, I incorporated country dummy variables to control for country-level characteristics, with Costa Rica as the reference category.

⁷ The variable measuring the size of respondents’ town or city was coded as: (1) rural area; (2) small city; (3) medium city; (4) large city; (5) capital city.

⁸ The income scale was calculated based upon answers to the following survey items: Do you or any member of your household have any of the following possessions? TV; car; refrigerator; telephone; cell phone; computer; microwave oven; washing machine; drinking water; sewage system. Responses were coded as (1) yes and (0) no. I created an index of personal income using a means formula that included a case if there were valid responses to at least eight of the ten items.

⁹ See the LAPOP survey for the exact formulation of this survey question (variable colourr)
http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2014/LAPOP2014-v15.2-Eng-131218_W.pdf.

Analysis

The first empirical analysis relies upon OLS regression to predict relative levels of trust in police. Since this variable subtracted trust in police from average trust in other political institutions, the resulting variable ranged from -6 to +6, making it incompatible with ordinal logistic regression. Table 1 reports the results of this OLS analysis.

As Table 1 indicates, police response time and police corruption are significant predictors of relative trust in the police. When respondents think that police will be slow to respond, or will solicit bribes, they register less trust in the police. Respondents did not penalize police for the inability of the justice system to punish criminals, however. Furthermore, victims of crime did not report lower levels of support for the police. Personal experience with crime did not lead victims to penalize the police with lower levels of trust. Perceptions of crime did matter, however. Both fear of crime in the neighborhood and the perception that crime in the neighborhood increased over the past year translated into less relative trust in the police. Of the socioeconomic variables, only age and education were significant predictors of trust in police. With the exception of Uruguay, all of the country level dummy variables were significantly higher than the reference category of Costa Rica.

Table 1.

	Independent Variables	Relative Trust in Police
	Constant	.886*** (.127)
Police Performance	Police Response Time (1) less than 10 minutes – (6) wouldn't come at all	-.179*** (.014)
	Trust the Justice System Can Punish Guilty Party (1) not at all – (4) a great deal	.017 (.017)
	Police Corruption (0) no bribe, (1) bribe solicited	-.399*** (.072)
Crime	Crime Victimization (0) not a victim, (1) victim	.003 (.048)
	Fear of Victimization in Neighborhood (1) not at all – (4) a great deal	-.118*** (.020)
	Violence in Neighborhood Compared to Last Year (1) lower (2) about the same (3) higher	-.073** (.026)
Socio-economic Indicators	Municipality Size (1) rural – (5) capital city	-.024 (.013)
	Gender (0) women (1) men	.037 (.034)
	Age measured in cohorts	.022*** (.006)
	Education (0) none at all – (18) post-university	-.012* (.005)
	Income Additive index measuring possession of key consumer items (As values increase, resources increase).	.119 (.101)
	Skin Color (1) very light-skinned – (11) very dark-skinned	-.008 (.011)
	Country Dummy Variables	Chile
Colombia		.737*** (.062)
Nicaragua		.590*** (.069)
Panama		.671*** (.066)
Uruguay		-.115 (.060)
	Adjusted R Squared	.084
	N	8526
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001		

Coefficients are unstandardized, with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 2, which examines specific evaluations of police performance in respondent's neighborhoods, reports slightly different findings. As evaluations of police performance in the neighborhood range from 1-3, I relied upon ordinal logistic regression for this analysis. When respondents specifically evaluate police performance in their own neighborhoods, these evaluations are more closely tied to experiences with and perceptions of crime. All three of the crime-related variables are significantly related to evaluations of police performance. Also, evaluations of the ability of the justice system to punish criminals have a significant, positive impact on police evaluations.

In contrast, experiences with police corruption do not have an impact on evaluation of police performance. This could indicate that citizens become accustomed to a certain level of corruption as a regrettable part of daily life, and do not automatically lower their evaluations of police when a bribe is solicited. Table 1 indicated that people who experience police corruption are less likely to trust the police, but evaluations of police performance in specific neighborhoods is more closely tied to perceptions and experiences of crime, not petty corruption. In both Tables 1 and 2, however, police response time is an important predictor of both trust and performance evaluation.

Most of the socioeconomic indicators are significantly linked to police performance evaluations, with the exception of gender and skin color. The country dummy variables also exhibited different results in Table 2, as the Chile, Nicaragua, and Panama dummy variables were significantly lower than those of Costa Rica, the reference category. There was no significant difference associated with the Colombian and Uruguayan dummy variables.

Table 2: Evaluation of Police Performance

	Independent Variables	Evaluation of Police Performance	Exp(B)
Police Performance	Police Response Time (1) less than 10 minutes – (6) wouldn't come at all	-.432*** (.018)	.649
	Trust the Justice System Can Punish Guilty Party (1) not at all – (4) a great deal	.283*** (.023)	1.328
	Police Corruption (0) no bribe, (1) bribe solicited	-.038 .092	.963
Crime	Crime Victimization (0) not a victim, (1) victim	-.405*** (.061)	.501
	Fear of Victimization in Neighborhood (1) not at all – (4) a great deal	-.674*** (.027)	.510
	Violence in Neighborhood Compared to Last Year (1) lower (2) about the same (3) higher	-.269*** (.034)	.764
Socio-economic Indicators	Municipality Size (1) rural – (5) capital city	-.046** (.017)	.955
	Gender (0) women (1) men	.029 .044	1.030
	Age measured in cohorts	.044*** (.008)	1.045
	Education (0) none at all – (18) post-university	-.015* (.006)	.985
	Income Additive index measuring possession of key consumer items (As values increase, resources increase).	.463*** (.131)	1.589
	Skin Color (1) very light-skinned – (11) very dark-skinned	-.011 .014	.989
Country Dummy Variables	Chile	-.235** (.078)	.791
	Colombia	.063 .080	1.065
	Nicaragua	-.420** (.090)	.657
	Panama	-.291* (.086)	.747
	Uruguay	.011 .079	1.011
	Pseudo R Squared	.267	
	N	8477	
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001			

Table 3 aims to determine whether police performance, crime, and socio-economic indicators determine public security policy preferences. This analysis relies upon binomial logistic regression, with punishment as the reference category. Once again, we find that anticipated police response time is a significant predictor of public attitudes. Here, as people anticipate that police will take longer to respond to their calls, they are significantly less likely to favor prevention policies over punitive ones. In contrast, those who experienced police corruption were significantly more supportive of punitive public security policies. This could indicate that experiences with police corruption lead people to be more skeptical of the justice system, and shy away from punitive practices that could be tainted with corruption.

Respondents' perceptions of the efficacy of the justice system to punish criminals were not significantly linked to policy preferences. Personal experiences with crime, and fear of victimization were also not significant predictors of public security police preferences. However, respondents who stated that violence in their neighborhood had increased over the past year were significantly less likely to favor prevention-oriented policies. The country dummy variables were all significant, with Colombia, Nicaragua and Uruguay respondents less likely to favor prevention policies (after controlling for all other factors) than respondents in Costa Rica. The Chile and Panama dummy variables were significant and positive, indicating that controlling for all other factors, respondents in Chile and Panama were more supportive of prevention policies over punitive ones than people in Costa Rica.

Table 3: Public Security Policy Preferences

	Independent Variables	Prevention (instead of punishment)	Exp(B)
Police Performance	Police Response Time (1) less than 10 minutes – (6) wouldn't come at all	-.059** (.020)	.943
	Trust the Justice System Can Punish Guilty Party (1) not at all – (4) a great deal	.033 (.026)	1.034
	Police Corruption (0) no bribe, (1) bribe solicited	.341** (.111)	1.406
Crime	Crime Victimization (0) not a victim, (1) victim	.093 (.072)	1.097
	Fear of Victimization in Neighborhood (1) not at all – (4) a great deal	-.016 (.029)	.984
	Violence in Neighborhood Compared to Last Year (1) lower (2) about the same (3) higher	-.089* (.040)	.915
Socio- economic Indicators	Municipality Size (1) rural – (5) capital city	.009 (.019)	1.009
	Gender (0) women (1) men	-.103* (.051)	.902
	Age measured in cohorts	.060*** (.009)	1.062
	Education (0) none at all – (18) post-university	.088*** (.008)	1.092
	Income Additive index measuring possession of key consumer items (As values increase, resources increase).	-.003 (.151)	.741
	Skin Color (1) very light-skinned – (11) very dark-skinned	-.003 (.017)	.997
Country Dummy Variables	Chile	.851*** (.102)	2.341
	Colombia	-.335*** (.092)	.715
	Nicaragua	-.672*** (.104)	.511
	Panama	.505*** (.105)	1.657
	Uruguay	-.384*** (.090)	.681
	Pseudo R Squared	.116	
	N	8485	
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001			

Conclusion

This paper aimed to link police performance and crime-related variables to public trust in police, public evaluations of police, and police preferences. This preliminary analysis indicates that there are concrete things that police can do to improve their standing among citizens. Most consistently, police response time was linked to public trust in police, evaluations of police in the neighborhood, and support for prevention-oriented policies. By responding quickly to citizens' calls, police can improve their legitimacy. Police corruption was a significant indicator of trust and support for preventive policies, highlighting the importance of implementing Chilean-style reforms that reduce incentives for petty bribery and raise the professional standards of police conduct. Overall, personal experience with crime victimization mattered less than perceptions of crime in the neighborhood. Thus, police can improve their public image by investing in measures that reduce public fear of crime (e.g., improved lighting, addressing neighborhood incivilities, etc.).

This research has a both theoretical and practical import. Theoretically, it is imperative to understand how Latin American democracies can strengthen their police forces. This is particularly important in countries with newer democratic institutions, where police and/or military repression was a major grievance prior to democratic rule (Cruz 2015). In countries that transitioned to democracy more recently, critics denounced the past militarization of domestic security and prioritized police reform as a crucial vehicle for the protection of human rights and civil liberties. In addition, Cruz (2015) notes that since police typically have the most extensive contact with average people, police performance is a crucial component of the legitimacy of democratic governance more broadly (Cruz 2015). Understanding how police garner legitimacy will enhance our ability to improve the quality of democracy in the region.

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