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- Submitted: March 2014.

- Accepted: September 2014.

THE ARMED FORCES AND PUBLIC OPINION IN LATIN AMERICA

Abstract

The armed forces have played an important role in the progress and setbacks of democratic politics in Latin America. The return to democracy and the consolidation of these democratic regimes in the past thirty years leads us to consider how Latin Americans see the new role that the armed forces have to develop in the regional context. To do this, we have analysed data from four regional polls: the 2011 Latinobarómetro Report, LAPOP Public Opinion Project reports, the research conducted by FLACSO in 2010 and the University of Salamanca's survey data on the parliamentary elite.

These all show us, although with some differences, that the armed forces continue to enjoy significant support and confidence among the citizens of Latin America. Citizens show great support for the Armed Forces, highlighting their work with human rights, their role in natural disasters, their organisational and training skills and performance in the context of high levels of crime.

KeyWords

Armed Forces, Public Opinion, Democracy, Latin America, Institutional Trust

THE ARMED FORCES AND PUBLIC OPINION IN LATIN AMERICA

I. INTRODUCTION

The armed forces have historically played an active role in the politics of Latin America. This presence, underpinned by the professionalisation seen in national armies since the end of the 19th century, was justified on the grounds of organic nation-building and national development. In some cases, these were oligarchical political projects that were extended to the emerging middle and professional classes; in other instances, the army remained the armed wing of small oligarchical groups, as was the case in Central America in the first half of the 20th century.

After the Second World War, given the difficulties experienced by sections of the national bourgeoisie as they tried to consolidate a national political project and the fear generated by some of the developmental projects of a populist ilk, which had brought widespread mobilisation among swathes of the population in their wake, military ambitions became a major element within the doctrine of national security. For some authors, the constitution of political armies in Latin America was the result of two processes: one the one hand, the consolidation of a consistent interventionist doctrine and the fostering of professional skills within armed institutions and, on the other hand, the creation of a “military vocation”, which was able to legitimise “military sacrifice” as part of nation building.¹ The second process subsequently contributed to the creation of a military “quasi-party”, when armed institutions became an organised area for formulating general strategies and specific tactics for political interference and control of the state by means of the doctrine of national security.²

Analysing the matter, Agüero describes two types of military participation in Latin America.³ Firstly, there is the protective type, of lesser influence, in which the military,

1 D. Kruijt and K. Koonings (2002), “Fuerzas Armadas y política en América Latina: perspectivas futuras” [Armed Forces and Politics in Latin America: Future Prospects], *Iberoamericana*, II, Vol. 8, pp. 7-22.

2 A. Rouquié (1989): *The Military and the State in Latin America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

3 F. Agüero (1992), “The Military and the Limits to Democratization in South America”, in Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O’Donnell and Arturo Valenzuela (comps.), *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: the New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*. Notre Dame: University of Notre

in concert with the business elite, develop industrial policies that in turn weaken some of the oligarchies that are drivers of a non-military democratisation process (such as the cases of Peru and Ecuador until quite recently). The opposite of this is the expansive type as seen in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. Here, the military perceive democracy as a source of social division and partisanship as an issue of national security. They develop a doctrine of national security tasked with maintaining internal order and reprimanding any socio-political mobilisation that they see as an attack against the established order.

Kruijt and Koonings⁴ distinguish three ideal types of political militarism: that which they call “return to the barracks”, “armoured democracies” and “civil-military strongmen”.

The “return to the barracks” type refers to a situation of consolidated and successful institutionalisation of civil governments. In such cases, governmental succession is determined by free elections with freedom of information and there is growing mass public support for the democratic system. As a by-product of the legitimacy that elected political representatives have enjoyed in a democratic manner, Latin America exhibits a progressive erosion of military privileges (Costa Rica, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and, potentially, Bolivia). Although the authors also include the case of El Salvador, we instead consider this to correspond to weak military subordination.

The type “armoured democracies” refers to the preservation of the interventionist ambitions of the military. These ambitions may remain in place within a context of military hegemony (i.e. dictatorships, as would be the case in Chile in the 1990s) or where democratic governments are marked by their weakness or where they are at odds with one another (Guatemala).

The third type, that of “civil-military strongmen”, is the modernised version of the civil-military alliance of an authoritarian and plebiscitary political regime, whose strong arm are the armed institutions (as in Venezuela from the 1990s onwards or Peru under the Fujimori government).

Dame Press, pp. 153-198.

4 D. Kruijt and K. Koonings (2002), *op. cit.*

2. DEMOCRACIES AND NEW CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

The processes involved in the transition to democracy also oblige us to redefine civil-military relations. Stepan⁵ therefore develops two lines of analysis to establish four different types of military regimes in transition:

1. The military contests civil elected authorities or similar degree of conflict between politics and the military.
2. Institutional military prerogatives or acquired rights that are eventually formalised, or not as the case may be, in order to exercise effective control over its internal order, associated areas in the state apparatus or even in order to structure relations between state and society.

When combined, these two dimensions result in four potential scenarios:

- a) Effective civilian oversight: the armed forces prerogatives remain low and within a constitutional framework, as does their criticism of democratic institutions (with neither opposition, conflict nor prerogatives); if both aspects are accepted by both military leaders and political representatives this model does not generate major questioning of the democratic regime;
- b) Untenable situation for the military: this occurs when criticism, in the form of the armed forces' questioning of or disloyalty to democracy, is high, but when, notwithstanding this criticism, the prerogatives of the armed forces are minimal. In this configuration, the military finds itself in a critical position, which could be considered untenable but which could be channelled by substituting, for instance, military commanders;
- c) Unequal civil adaptation (there is no unrest in exchange for quite a few privileges): in this position, the armed forces maintain major prerogatives within constitutional order, that is to say that the democratic regime does not call into question their corporative privileges and the operational autonomy of the military; and,
- d) In the fourth position, besides being a case where the military institution preserves major prerogatives within the new democratic regime, the military question and show disloyalty the rules of the game and democratic processes to

⁵ A. Stepan (1988), "Las prerogativas militares en los nuevos regímenes democráticos" [Military Prerogatives in New Democratic Regimes], *Desarrollo Económico*, vol. 27, no. 108, pp. 479-504.

a great extent. This case represents a critical position for democratic leaders and also regarding the possibility of a return of authoritarian rule with the military hierarchy at the helm.

While it is true that these four dimensions are of particular relevance to transition scenarios, they also provide us with an opportunity to rethink potential military regression or the contexts in which we are able to push forward various reform projects, whether they concern corporative issues or the functions that these institutions should perform at a time when military competences vis-à-vis security are being reconsidered.⁶ Without a shadow of a doubt, however, changes have certainly taken place in terms of how the constitutionalisation of the armed forces is approached. In fact, both security concerns in the hemisphere as well as maintaining internal order are undertakings that fall today to civil and democratically elected governments.⁷

Olmeda⁸ considers military political subordination to be significant in Honduras, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, whilst such subordination is weak in El Salvador, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. In the case of Mexico, but also of Bolivia, despite the fact that real military subordination exists, this does not translate into effective management and coordination of defence by civilians.

The existence of a general ministry of defence or its management by the military instead of civilians, the lack of distinction between military expenditure and defence expenditure as well as no distinction being drawn between staff and operating costs (operations, equipment and maintenance for the latter) are thus elements that continue to contradict principles of civilian control, which weakens the management and coordination of the armed forces in Latin America. To these we also should add the existence of parliamentary committees especially tasked with addressing fields pertaining to the military or where the subject is dealt with alongside other matters.

In the same way, Pion-Berlin⁹ maintains that the majority of Latin American governments have achieved a semblance of civilian scrutiny, although this depends on

6 One matter that is very closely associated with the issue of military prerogatives is the redefinition of “the mission of the military” and the realignment of the role of the military in contexts of democratic consolidation.

7 F. Rojas Aravena (2001), *Diseño y gestión de la seguridad internacional en América Latina* [Design and Management of International Security in Latin America]. Utrecht: Doctoral thesis, University of Utrecht.

8 J.A. Olmeda (comp.) (2005), *Democracias frágiles. Las relaciones civiles-militares en el mundo iberoamericano*. [Fragile Democracies. Civilian-Military Relations in the Ibero-American World] Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch-Instituto General Gutiérrez Mellado.

9 D.S. Pion-Berlin (2005), “Political Management of the Military in Latin America,” *Military Review* Vol. 85, p. 7, pp. 19-31.

which countries are still yet to set the boundaries of military presence and, above all, to exercise real civilian control over the armed forces.

According to Fever,¹⁰ civil-military relations should encompass all fields, with necessarily limiting themselves to aspects such as civilian control over the military or respect for the definition of defence policy and its budgets. In any case, civilian oversight of institutions has occurred in a more or less clear-cut way, despite the fact that in most countries the armed forces continue to enjoy significant internal autonomy, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the cases and transition models selected.

This civilian oversight and constitutional framework of the military needs to have a significant balancing entity within democracy, that of social support that legitimises the actions of the principal institutions of the state. Consequently, in the following sections we will focus our attention on explaining the sentiments of Latin American public opinion vis-à-vis the new role that the armed forces in the region play or should be playing.

3. A FIRST GLANCE AT THE ROLE OF THE ARMED FORCES IN LATIN AMERICA

The first study that we shall analyse is that conducted by FLACSO in Latin America from November to December 2009, which, as part of the project *Governability and Democratic Coexistence in Latin America*, made some interesting findings about perceptions and beliefs of the population concerning socially sensitive issues such as security, politics, coexistence and trust. This study was sponsored by AECID, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, conducted by IPSOS and analysed and processed by FLACSO throughout 2010.¹¹

The study enables us to evaluate social perception of the issue of the armed forces continuing to play a part on the Latin American stage, underscoring the fact that 85% of respondents endorse their existence. This first table allows us to ascertain that the vast majority of Latin Americans from countries with armed forces would prefer to keep them (85%). Only 14.5% of Latin Americans believe that this military institution should disappear.

¹⁰ P.D. Fever (1999), "Civil-Military Relations", *Annual Reviews Political Science*, Vol. 2, pp. 211-241.

¹¹ FLACSO (2010), *Gobernabilidad y convivencia democrática en América Latina. Estudio de opinión pública* [Governability and Democratic Coexistence in Latin America. Public Opinion Poll], 2009-2010, Costa Rica.

TABLE 1 EXISTENCE OF ARMED FORCES IN LATIN AMERICA

Overall level for the question “Do you think that the armed forces in the country...”	
Response	Percentage
Should continue to exist	85.0
Should disappear	14.5
No response	0.5
Total	100

Source: FLACSO-IPSOS. Opinion poll on Governability and Democratic Coexistence in Latin America 2009-2010 (2010).

It is important to note that this very survey was also conducted in Costa Rica and Panama, countries without armed forces. This revealed that 88.4% of Costa Ricans have no intention of reinstating the armed forces whereas 47.4% of those in Panama believe that they should be reinstated.

TABLE 2 EXISTENCE OF ARMED FORCES IN LATIN AMERICA BY COUNTRY

Percentages by country for the question “Do you think that the armed forces in your country...”			
Country	Should continue to exist	Should disappear	NR
Argentina	86.0	11.6	2.4
Bolivia	82.0	18.0	0.0
Brazil	90.8	7.2	2.0
Chile	86.4	13.6	0.0
Colombia	85.4	14.6	0.0
Ecuador	90.5	9.5	0.0
El Salvador	93.5	6.5	0.0
Guatemala	80.3	19.7	0.0
Honduras	83.9	16.1	0.0
Mexico	93.6	6.4	0.0
Nicaragua	83.6	16.4	0.0
Paraguay	72.7	27.3	0.0
Peru	86.6	13.4	0.0
Dominican Republic	84.6	15.4	0.0
Uruguay	73.6	23.0	3.4
Venezuela	87.1	12.9	0.0

Source: FLACSO-IPSOS. Opinion poll on Governability and Democratic Coexistence in Latin America 2009-2010 (2010).

Table 2 shows us various significant differences between countries, although none of them see the option of the removal of the armed forces reach 30% of those surveyed. The highest response rates for this option were 27.3% in Paraguay and 23% in Uruguay. The countries in which more than 90% of respondents found that it was appropriate to preserve the armed forces were: Brazil (90.8%), Ecuador (90.5%), El Salvador (93.5%) and Mexico (93.6%).

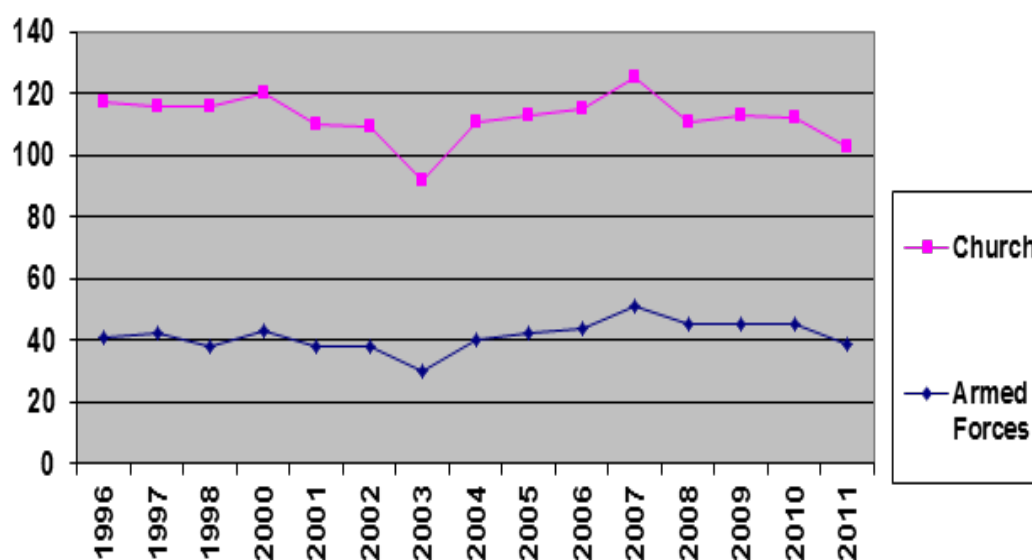
4. INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IN THE ARMED FORCES

In its latest edition from 2011, the Latinobarómetro Report¹² establishes that 39% of Latin Americans place their trust in the armed forces. In order to ascertain whether this is a lot or little, it is necessary to compare this figure with other protagonists and actors from political, institutional and economic spheres.

The percentage for trust in the armed forces is less than that enjoyed by the church -at 64.9% it is the institution with the greatest level of trust in the region-, the media (radio at 49%, television at 48% and the press at 45%), banks (43%) and government (40%). Below the armed forces, we find confidence in the state and the private sector (38%) and municipal and local government (37%).

These figures for trust in the armed forces occur in the region at a time when three presidents in Latin America are military professionals (or were in the case of Chávez) -Chávez in Venezuela, Humala in Peru and Pérez Molina in Guatemala- and another was a decade ago in Ecuador (Gutiérrez). The common denominator of the three is that they have not been candidates from traditional parties but rather political forces or new alliances, representing different ideological currents.

DIAGRAM 1 CONFIDENCE IN THE CHURCH AND THE ARMED FORCES (1996-2011)



Source: Author's own based on Latinobarómetro Corporation (2011).¹³

¹² Latinobarómetro Corporation (2011), *2011 Report*, Santiago de Chile.

¹³ Latinobarómetro Corporation (2011), *op. cit.*

TABLE 3 INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

Trust in institutions			
Total for Latin America 2011, and Average for Latin America 1996-2011			
Q: Please look at this card and tell me, for each of the groups, institutions or people mentioned in the list, whether you have a lot, some, little or no trust in them.			
*Here only 'A lot' and 'Some'			
Year 2011		Average 1996-2010	
Church	64 %	Church	71 %
Radio	49 %	Radio	55 %
Television	48 %	Television	48 %
Press	45 %	Press	45 %
Banks	43 %	Armed Forces	43 %
Government	40 %	Banks	39 %
Armed Forces	39 %	Private Sector	39 %
Private Sector	38 %	Government	37 %
State	38 %	Municipalities/Local Government	36 %
Municipalities/Local Government	37 %	Police	35 %
Police	33 %	Judiciary	31 %
Congress/Parliament	32 %	Public Administration	31 %
Public Administration	31 %	Trade Unions	28 %
Judiciary	29 %	Congress/Parliament	28 %
Trade Unions	28 %	Political Parties	20 %
Political Parties	22 %		

Source: Latinobarómetro Corporation (2011).¹⁴

As illustrated by the Latinobarómetro (2011),¹⁵ the most interesting aspect of trust in institutions this year is that there has been a generalised drop in confidence in all institutions evaluated. We see that there is widespread disenchantment among the population as a whole vis-à-vis the principal institutions in society.

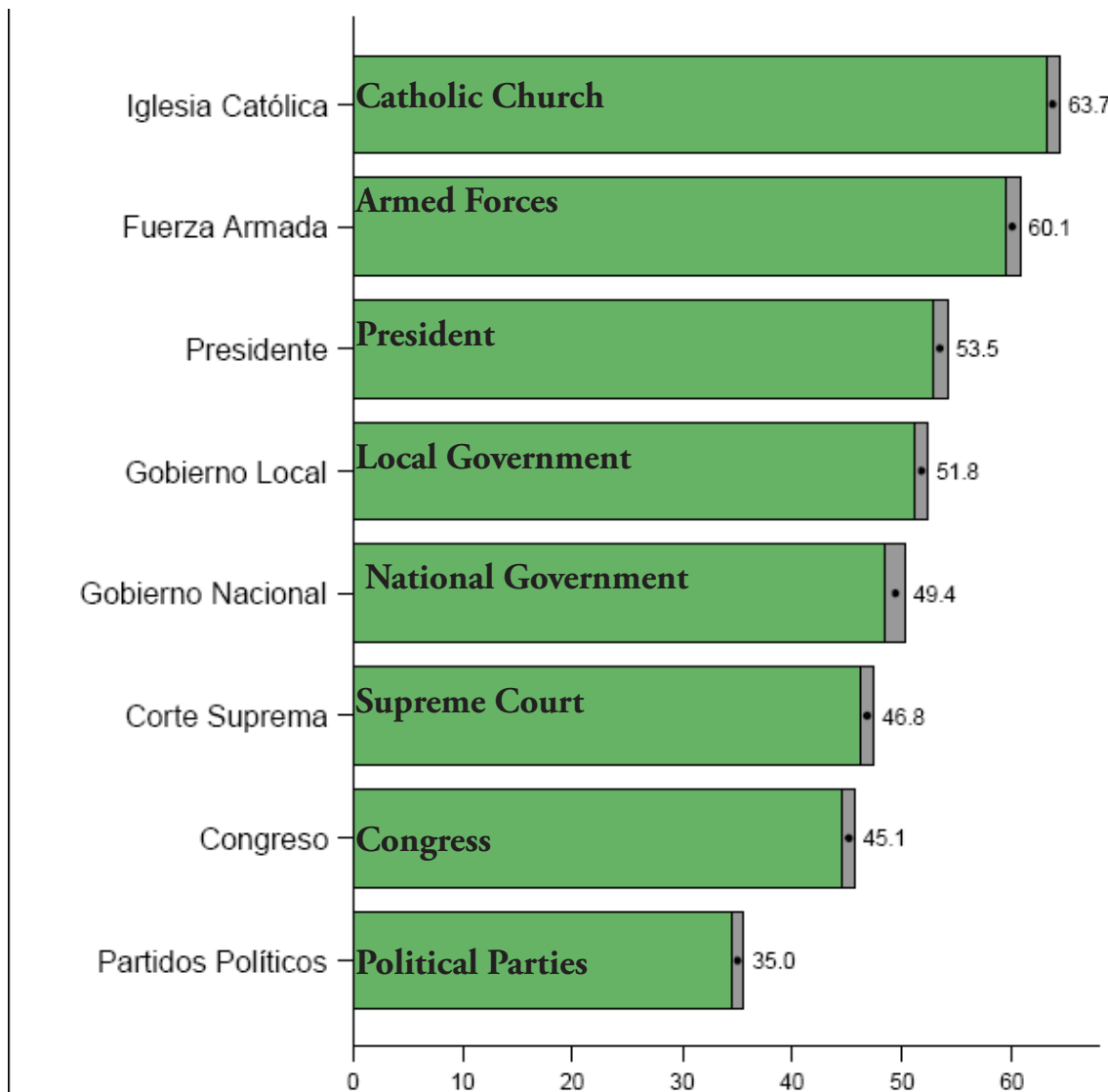
According to the AmericasBarometro¹⁶ in 2010, the armed forces retained a considerable level of trust (60.1%) compared with other state institutions.

14 Latinobarómetro Corporation (2011), op. cit., p. 52.

15 Latinobarómetro Corporation (2011), op. cit.

16 The AmericasBarometro is an endeavour carried out by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) to measure democratic values and conduct in the continent by means of national probability samples of adults of voting age. All of the national reports and respective databases are available on the LAPOP website: www.LapopSurveys.org.

DIAGRAM 2 LEVELS OF TRUST IN VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS



Source: Pérez (2012),¹⁷ based on LAPOP, 2010.

Only the Catholic Church enjoys a higher level of trust (63.7%) than that of the military. The level of trust in the armed forces is much higher than that enjoyed by other institutions. In fact, it is almost double that of political parties (35%) and it is 15 percentage points higher than levels given for parliament (45.1%). These high levels of trust reflect two factors that have characterised democratisation in the region: first of all, that armed forces have ceased to affect public policies directly and that they have

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17 O.J. Pérez (2012), *Las relaciones cívico-militares desde la perspectiva de la opinión pública* [Civilian-Military Relations from a Public Opinion Perspective], 5th Latin American Congress on Public Opinion, Bogotá (Colombia).

sought to become involved in activities that boost public opinion such as aid provided during natural disasters and the development of social infrastructure. Moreover, the armed forces have become actively involved in domestic security by assisting national police forces in their work. Secondly, the levels of trust expressed in the armed forces reflect comparisons with the actions of other institutions that have generally been condemned by citizens, in particular political parties and legislators who receive very low levels of public support, thus reflecting the weaknesses of these institutions.

3% of the Latin American population consider that an army is a good partner for channelling social demands towards the government. In Venezuela and Colombia, this is a view held by 6% and 9% of the population respectively. Out of the countries that possess an army, Uruguay and Chile display the lowest proportion of people questioned (1%) who consider this a valid means of making their views heard by the government.

As is evident in Table 4, even if the armed forces lag far behind other socio-political actors in terms of their capacity to make themselves heard by the government, there exist considerable differences between countries. The most notable is the weight that they may end up having in Mexico and the Andean nations.

TABLE 4 LATIN AMERICA: ORGANISATION MOST LISTENED TO BY GOVERNMENTS BY SUBREGION (%)

	MERCOSUR	CA + DR	ANDEAN (without Venezuela)	MEXICO	BRAZIL	LATIN AMERICA
Political parties+ trade unions	32.1	25.1	21.2	14.8	28	26.1
Television News	15.5	20.9	20.8	21.7	19.2	18.1
Businesspeople	7.3	11.8	7.6	11.6	9.6	9
Religious authorities	4.0	11.1	4.6	4.6	4.6	7
Armed Forces	3.0	1.4	3.2	4.4	2.8	2.5

Source: Author's own based on FLACSO (2010).¹⁸

Overall, we note that as many men as women do not believe that the army is a vehicle for making governments aware of their needs (those who believe this is the case represent 3% and 2% respectively). In Colombia, it is striking that almost one in

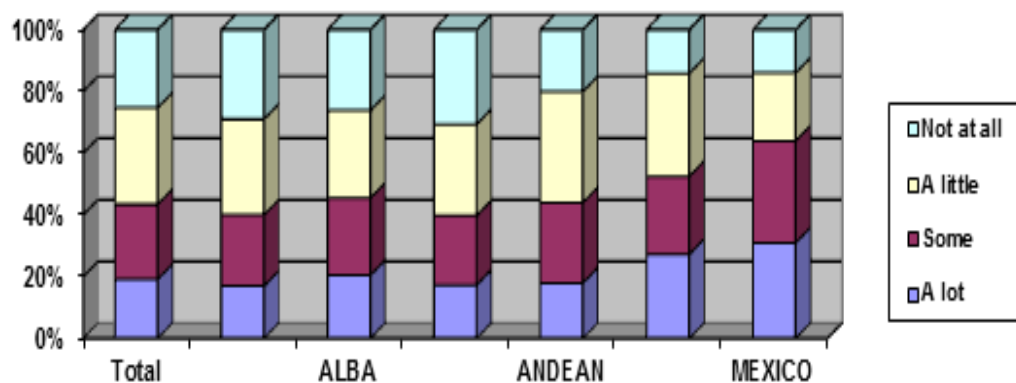
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¹⁸ FLACSO (2010), *op. cit.*

every ten men (8%) perceives the army to be an instrument for communication with the political class.

As was previously established, 85% of the Latin American population endorse the existence of armed forces in their countries. This trend manifests itself in particular among the citizens of Brazil, El Salvador and Mexico, countries in which nine out of every ten people questioned confirmed this position. In Mexico, those aged between 40 and 44 show a higher percentage agreeing with the existence of the army (98%) compared with other age groups. Age is also relevant in Brazil where adults over 55 years of age have a tendency towards being in favour of the army. In Ecuador, support for the existence of an army tends to be slightly higher among people with an elementary level of education (96%), when compared with those who have gone on to further study (90%). In countries such as Paraguay and Uruguay, there exist sections of the population interviewed (27% and 37% respectively) who state that they are in favour of seeing the armed forces disappear. In Uruguay, this idea is defended by around more than one in three people (36%) with higher education.

TABLE 5 CONFIDENCE IN ARMED FORCES FOR LATIN AMERICA AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION PROCESSES

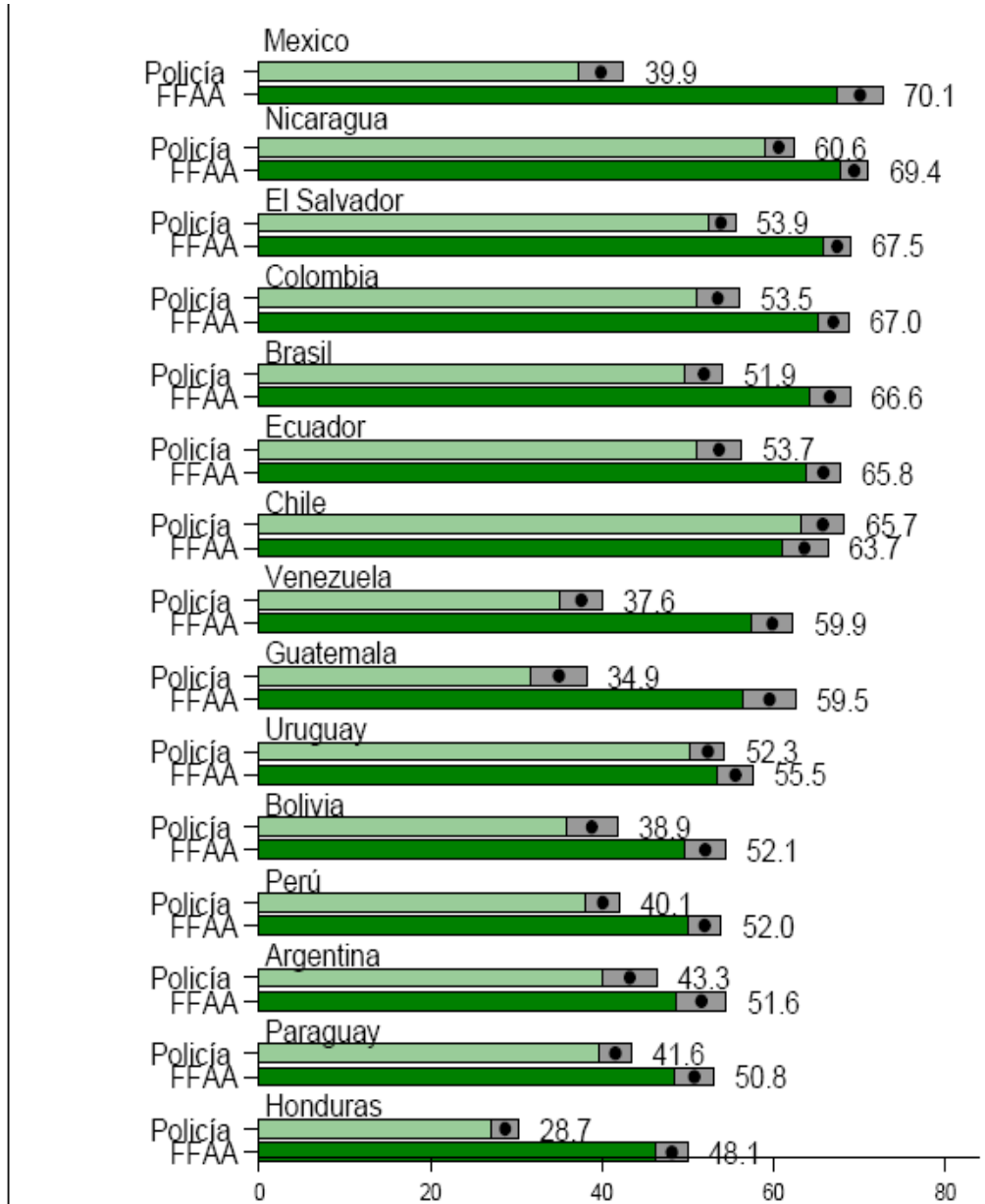


Source: Author's own based on FLACSO, 2010.¹⁹

As we can see from Diagram 3, trust in the military is significantly higher than that in the police across all countries in the region. As regards Mexico, for instance, confidence in the armed forces outstrips confidence in the police by more than 30%. The only country where both institutions enjoy a similar level of support is Chile, whereas in Uruguay, the confidence levels are almost on an equal footing.

¹⁹ FLACSO (2010), op. cit.

DIAGRAM 3 LEVELS OF TRUST IN THE ARMED FORCES AND POLICE



Source: Pérez (2012)²⁰ based on LAPOP, 2010.

Police forces are in several cases fledgling institutions that are fragile and that possess little technical capacity. They sometimes fall prey to corruption and are faced with the task of confronting the serious issue of crime and violence. In addition, the police is perhaps the institution that has most day-to-day contact with the population. Although much of this contact occurs in a positive sense, there is no doubt as to the

20 O.J. Pérez (2012), op. cit.

fact that in many cases give rise to corruption or institutional inefficiencies thereby disappointing the citizens involved. Notwithstanding this point, the military has ceased to have direct contact with citizens and projects an image of a serious, disciplined and efficient institution.

At any rate, it has already been stated that confusion between military and political roles weakens security, erodes a state's legitimacy, deprofessionalises both public security and defence and generates unnecessary risks for citizens, especially in matters relating to the use of force.²¹

5. WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT EXPLAIN THIS INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IN THE ARMED FORCES?

This section addresses the factors that have had the greatest influence on levels of trust in the armed forces. Taking trust in the armed forces as a dependent variable, Pérez²² identifies various factors as explanatory variables for this trust, inter alia traditional socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, wealth, level of education and an urban-rural component.

Other elements that may have a bearing on institutional trust may be connected to perceptions of training and organisation within the armed forces, their work helping to cope with natural disasters, their respect for human rights and their involvement in the fight against crime and violence. Moreover, Pérez includes support for the political system, satisfaction with democracy and ideology. Changes to the political system may thus significantly influence levels of trust in the armed forces in as far as greater support for a political system may imply a greater level of support for the armed forces as a key state institution.

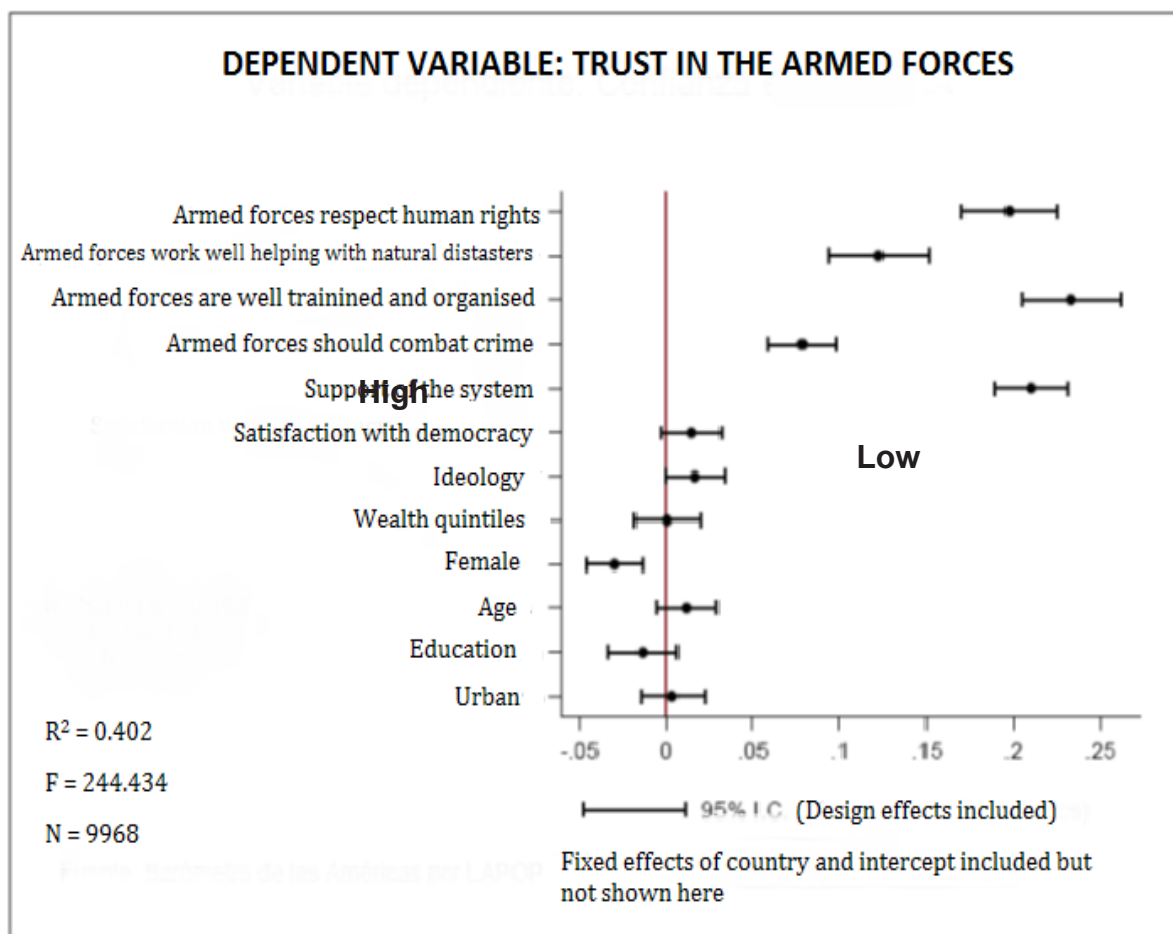
In the same vein, satisfaction with democracy is a variable that may have a considerable impact on levels of trust in the armed forces. This variable, however, can act in two contradictory ways: on the one hand it is possible that inasmuch as citizens are dissatisfied with democracy, their levels of trust in the armed forces increase as the latter are perceived to be the antithesis of democracy, that is to say, disciplined, organised, structured and efficient. People who are dissatisfied with democracy might potentially see the armed forces as a viable alternative to those in power.

21 F. Rojas Aravena (2008), "El riesgo de la superposición entre políticas de defensa y seguridad" [The Risks of Overlapping Defence and Security Policy], in *Revista Nueva Sociedad*, Vol. 213, pp. 36-49

22 O.J. Pérez (2012), *op. cit.*

On the other hand, however, the correlation between trust in the armed forces and satisfaction with democracy could mirror the correlation with support for the political system. That is to say that the greater the satisfaction with democracy, the higher the level of trust in the armed forces, since these represent one of the most significant parts of the institutional landscape of a democratic state and, furthermore, they reflect the progress made in the region in terms of constitutional and democratic scrutiny of the armed forces.

DIAGRAM 4 PREDICTORS FOR LEVEL OF TRUST IN THE ARMED FORCES



Source: LAPOP AmericasBarometer. Source: Pérez (2012),²³ based on LAPOP 2010.

We can observe that the four variables that gauge opinions on action taken by the armed forces are statistically significant and in the direction that would be expected.

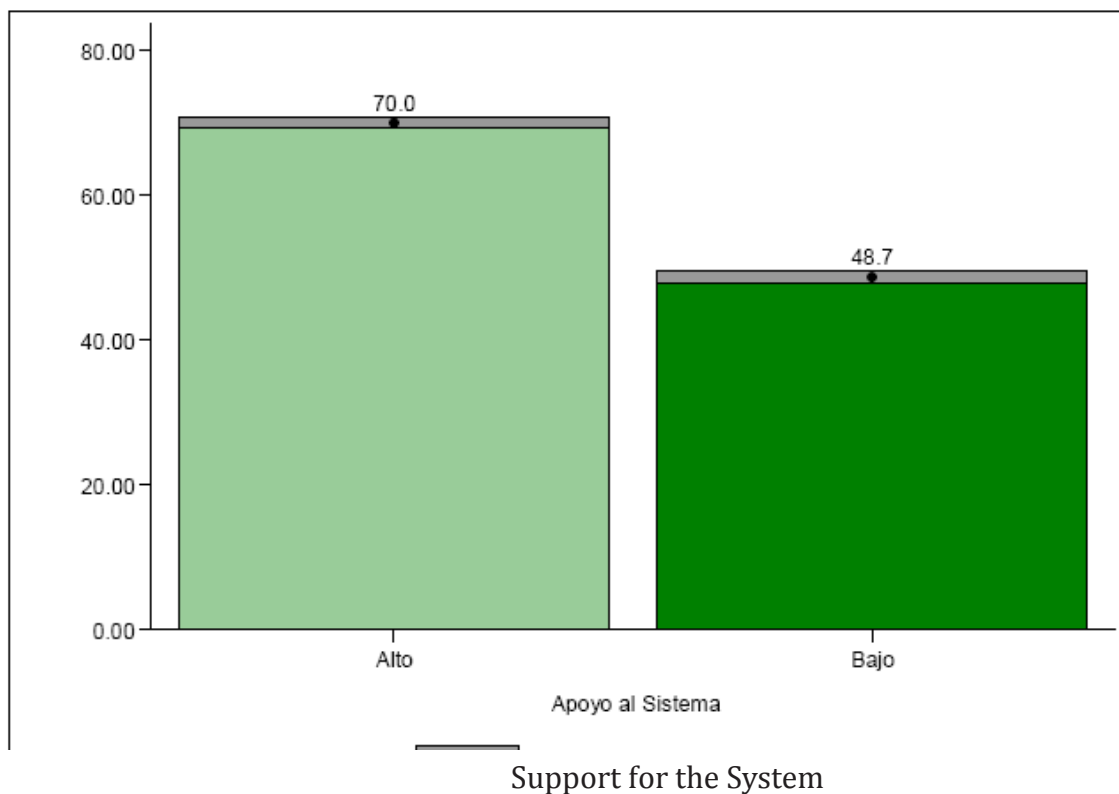
23 O.J. Pérez (2012), op. cit., p. 10.

That is to say, the more citizens express support for the armed forces in terms of human rights, natural disaster work, sound training and support for their activities in cases of high crime levels, the higher the levels of confidence in this institution.

The results also reveal that support for the political system significantly influences levels of trust in the armed forces. Greater support for democratic regimes also translates to greater trust in the armed forces.

Satisfaction with democracy is not a significant variable when it comes to trust in the armed forces. Moreover, it is only gender, with men revealing slightly higher levels of confidence in the armed forces than women, which is the statistically significant of the socio-demographic variables.

DIAGRAM 5 ESTIMATED VALUES FOR TRUST IN THE ARMED FORCES DUE TO SUPPORT FOR THE SYSTEM



Source: Pérez (2012),²⁴ based on LAPOP 2010.

Diagram 5 depicts the effect that support for the political system has on confidence in the armed forces. This graph shows the estimated values for confidence in armed forces in the cases of high or low levels of support for the system. We can see from

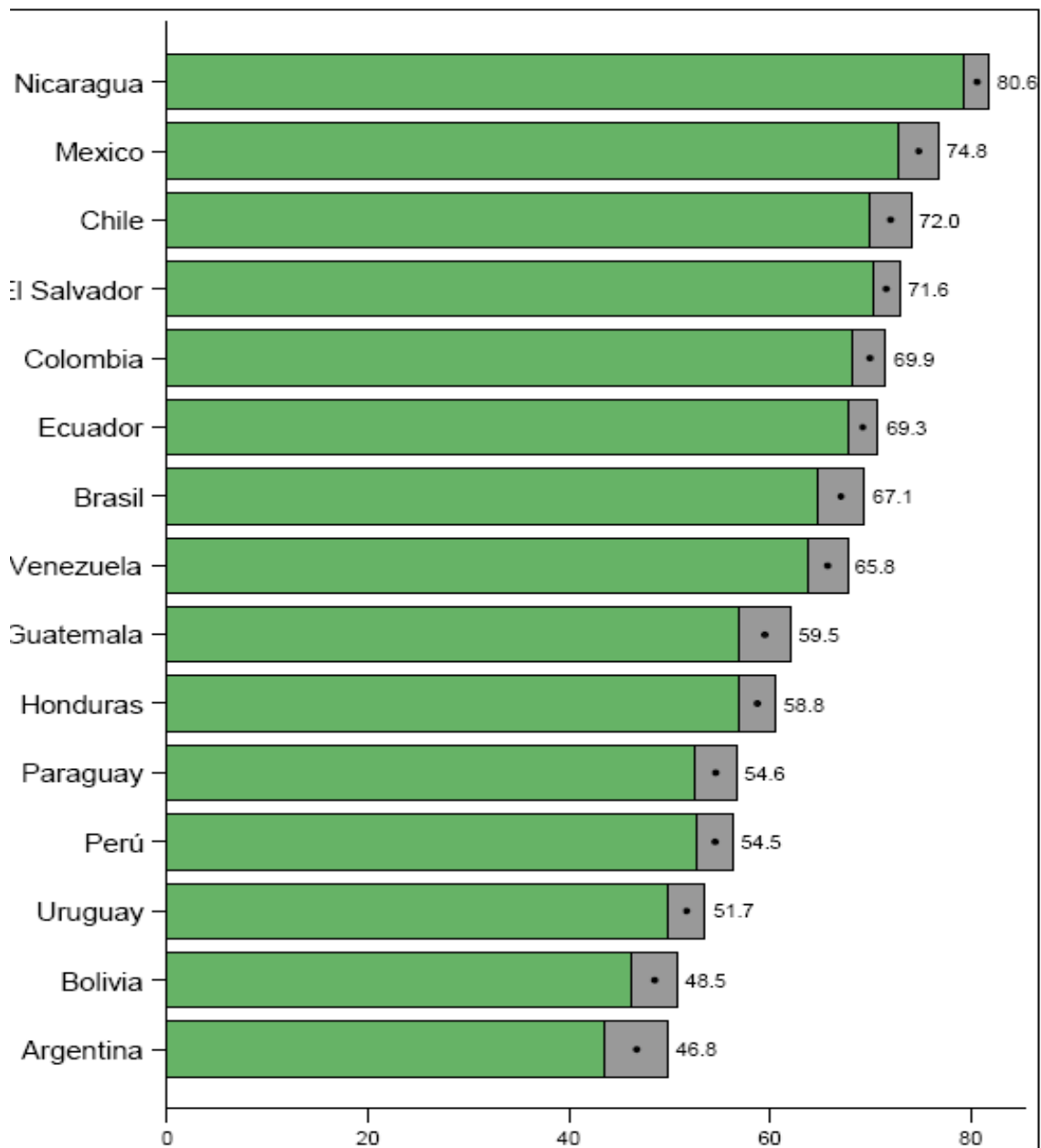
24 O.J. Pérez (2012), op. cit., p. 11.

this that people who demonstrate a high level of support for the system express trust in the armed forces at a level more than 21% higher than those who express a low level of support for the system. It should be pointed out that this relationship may be reciprocal. That is to say, that confidence in the armed forces may also have a considerable bearing on support for the system.

From a comparative perspective, we can point out that variables used to measure opinion of the functioning of the armed forces are those that have the greatest influence on levels of confidence.

Concerning the issue of organisation and training, responses vary hugely from country to country. Nicaragua is thus top of the list and Argentina, as a country where the level of professionalisation of the armed forces is very high, comes in at the bottom. This may lead one to think that public opinion is extremely critical in the latter case, while in the case of Nicaragua, these results may correspond to a positive opinion of the professionalism of the armed forces when compared with shortcomings in the rest of the Nicaraguan state.

TABLE 6 TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THE ARMED FORCES OF (COUNTRY) ARE WELL TRAINED AND ORGANISED?



The Armed Forces are well trained and organised

Source: Pérez (2012),²⁵ based on LAPOP 2010.

25 O.J. Pérez (2012), op. cit., p. 12.

The most significant factors when determining levels of trust in the armed forces are support for the political system and opinions about the work that the armed forces carry out or should carry out.

As far as the opinion factors linked to the work of the armed forces are concerned, we can conclude that the majority of citizens in all countries support the idea that the armed forces should participate in crime-fighting activities. In addition, the majority express support for the work done by the armed forces concerning natural disasters. We observe relevant differences between the countries in question when considering assessment of the role the armed forces play in safeguarding human rights and the level of training and organisation of these military institutions. Nicaragua tops the list of the countries studied here in terms of positive opinions in both cases and Bolivia, Argentina and Honduras express opinions that are more negative. Factors that have a bearing on support for the military getting increasingly involved in fighting crime are trust in the armed forces, ideology and being a victim of crime.²⁶

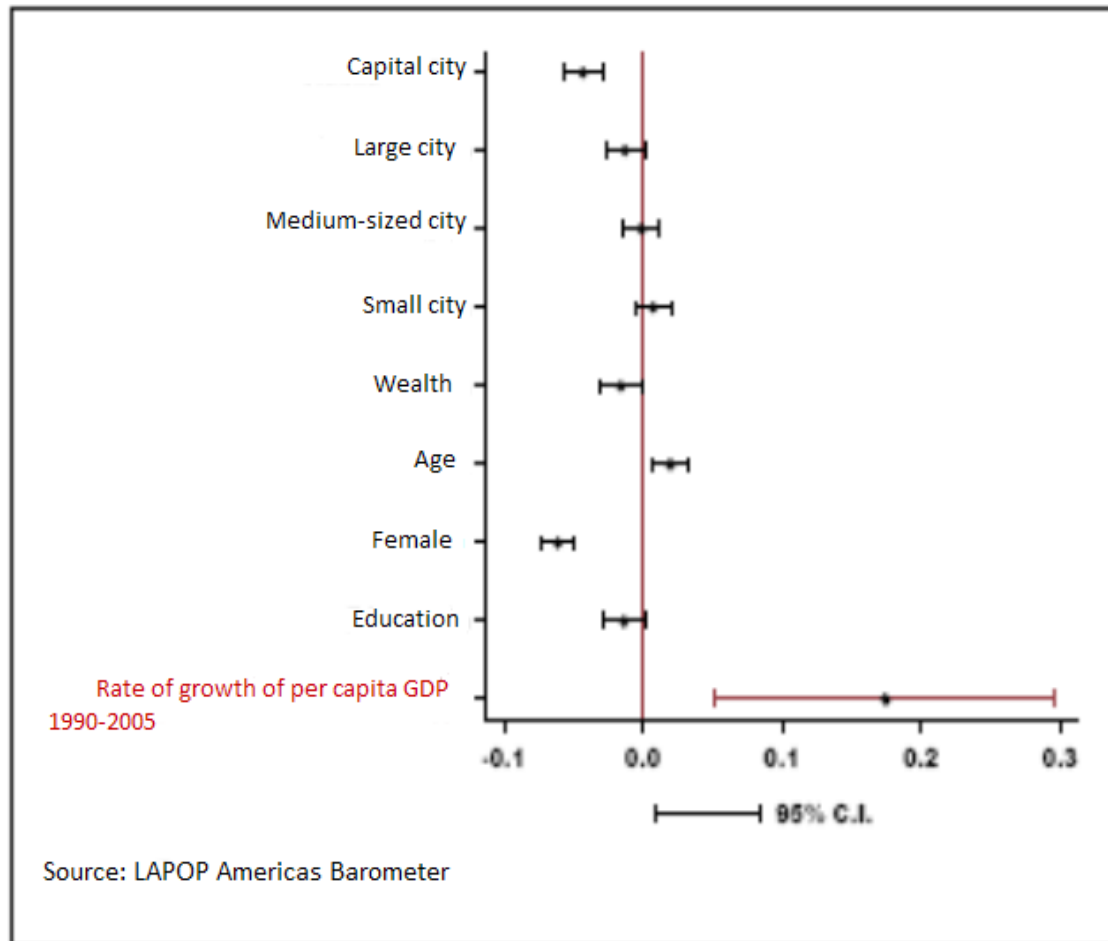
Other work, such as that conducted by Montalvo,²⁷ does not find any empirical evidence to show that military repression in the region bears a statistical relationship to levels of trust in the armed forces despite the seemingly positive correlation between the economic performance of governments and trust in the armed forces. Thus, at first glance and given the lack of detailed research into this relationship, Montalvo shows how GDP growth per capita, calculated as the annual growth rate by country from 1990 to 2005, bears a positive correlation to trust in the armed forces.²⁸ In other words, as the rate of annual growth increases, individuals tend to express higher levels of confidence in the military in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although it can be concluded that one result of economic progress could be a rise in faith in public institutions in general, and not just in the armed forces.

26 O.J. Pérez (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

27 D. Montalvo (2009), "Do you trust your Armed Forces?", *AmericasBarometer Insights*, No. 27.

28 D. Montalvo (2009), *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

DIAGRAM 6 MULTILEVEL ANALYSIS OF DETERMINANTS OF TRUST IN THE ARMED FORCES: THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, 2008



Source: Montalvo (2009)²⁹ based on LAPOP (2008)

As for the Southern Cone, three factors common to the countries in the Southern Cone may be identified to explain the renewed citizen interest in subjects such as defence, security and the armed forces:³⁰ (1) the scope of strategic alliances with other nations, which varies greatly in these cases;³¹ (2) the consolidation of civilian command

29 D. Montalvo (2009), "Crime and Support for Coups in Latin America", *AmericasBarometer Insights*, No. 32, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), University of Vanderbilt, p. 3.

30 M. Malamud (2008), *Opinión Pública y Fuerzas Armadas en el Cono Sur* [Public Opinion and Armed Forces in the Southern Cone], *América Latina - ARI* Vol. 5/2008, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid.

31 Whilst in the case of Argentina, 27% favour Europe, this falls to 18% for Brazil, 9% for Chile and

of defence through the transfer of areas of work pertaining to the armed forces to other state bodies;³² and (3) a questioning of the role of the military.³³ Similarly, a fourth topic is of particular relevance in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay; that is (4) the social debts left behind by previous military regimes. A climate favourable to the actions of government as regards the disappeared prevails as well as, in particular, a firm consensus among citizens as to the violation of human rights as a major outstanding issue.

6. SUPPORT FOR MILITARY COUPS

Another way of approaching the issue of public opinion and the armed forces is to analyse the backing provided in these countries to the idea of a military government. This analysis must be undertaken with extreme caution as it is highly probable that no explicit correlation between trust in the armed forces and support for a military authoritarian government exists. Conversely, the rise in popular support for this sentiment could be motivated by the failure of democratic regimes to satisfy the basic needs of the population, to boost economic growth or to address the growing concern felt by citizens regarding security, criminality and delinquency.

With respect to the attitudes displayed by Latin American citizens concerning military governments, the Latinobarómetro Report from 2011³⁴ reveals that 66 % of those surveyed state that they would not support a military government under any circumstance (versus 63% in 2010). Guatemala is the country least likely to dismiss a military government with only 40% stating they would do this. That means that

for the US and only 2% for the rest of the countries in Latin America (survey conducted by CARI). In Chile, preferences show 38% in favour of Brazil, 9% in favour of Argentina, 4% for Uruguay and 3% for Bolivia. In Brazil, 99% of respondents considered that relations with the US were vital for the country's interest. This was 96% for Argentina and 56% for Bolivia. All of these examples are cited by Malamud (2008), *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

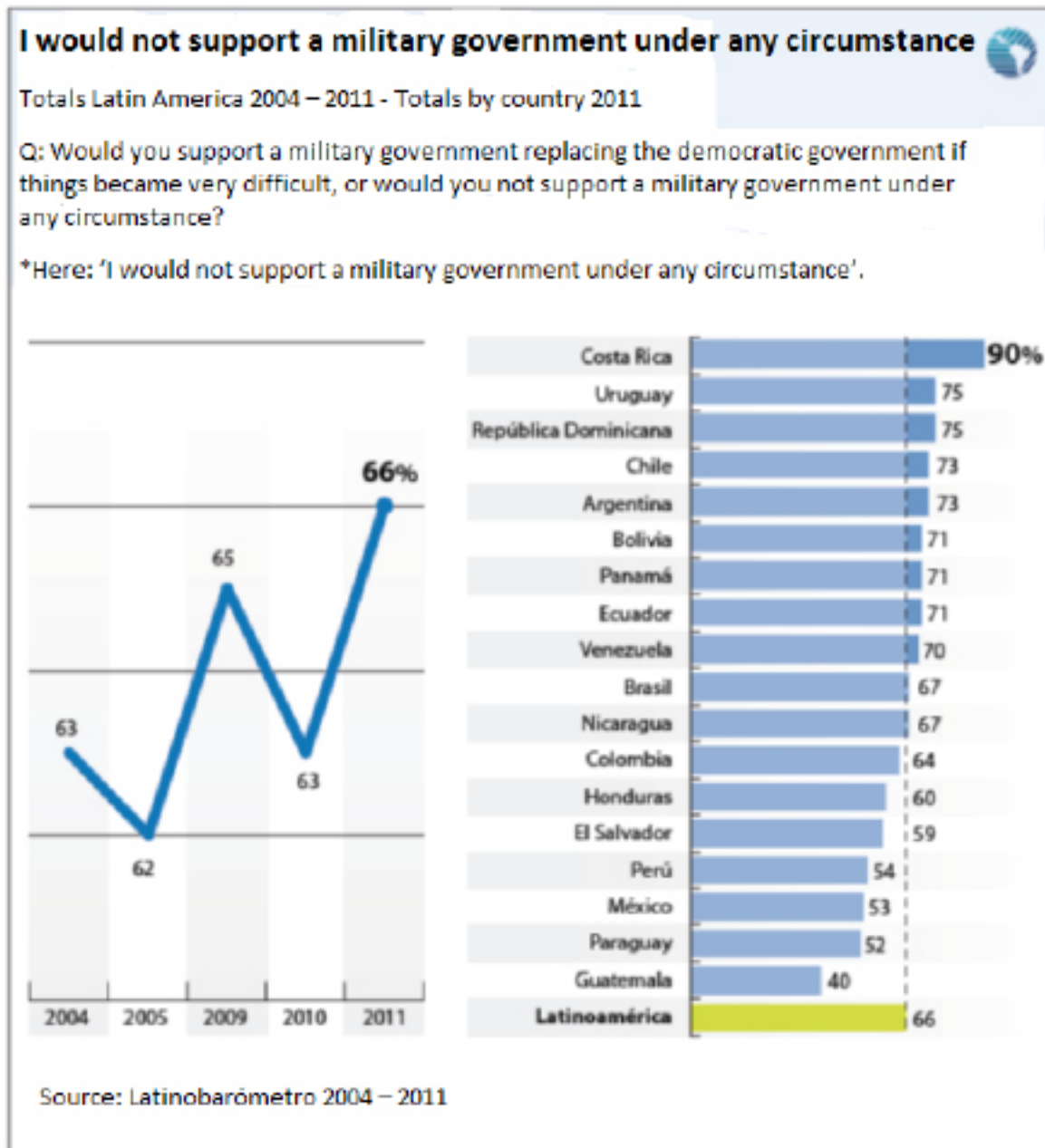
32 Malamud notes the strong political trend towards transferring responsibilities and positions of power historically held by the armed forces to other state agencies in the Southern Cone. Nonetheless, there is a fundamental difference between the two countries mentioned: in Argentina the trust that citizens place in the institution is comparatively low (mainly in urban areas); in Brazil, however, confidence in the armed forces among the population is very high. Thus, 69% of respondents viewed the armed forces as a trustworthy institution. Malamud (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

33 Argentinian citizens maintain that the main aim of the armed forces is to "defend sovereignty" (31%). This is followed in joint second by "combatting drug trafficking" and "maintaining operational capacity" with 20% each, then by "fighting terrorism" with 17% and, lastly, "participating in peace operations" with 12% (Malamud, 2008), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

34 Latinobarómetro Corporation (2011), *op. cit.*

60% of respondents would not reject a military regime outright. These figures rise to 52% in Paraguay, 53% in Mexico and 54% in Peru. The 60% in Honduras that express disagreement vis-à-vis a military government merits evaluation, especially after the coup d'état there in 2009.

DIAGRAM 7 AND TABLE 7 SUPPORT FOR A MILITARY COUP



Source: Latinobarómetro Corporation (2011).³⁵

35 Latinobarómetro Corporation (2011), op. cit., p. 49.

The Americas Barometro³⁶ also addresses the probability of a coup d'état occurring in any of the countries of the region. As depicted in Table 8, the Latin American average indicates that a majority of people (44.5%) believe that it is not at all likely that there will be a coup in the coming 12 months. Those who believe this to be unlikely make up a third meaning that 77.8% consider it to be unlikely or not at all likely that a coup d'état could take place.

TABLE 8 PROBABILITY OF A COUP D'ETAT IN LATIN AMERICA

Latin American level to the question “¿ how likely is it that your country may have a coup d'état the next twelve months?”	
Option	Percentages
Likely	10.0
Somewhat likely	12.1
Unlikely	33.3
All likely	44.5
Unresponsive	0.0
Total	100.0

Source: FLACSO-IPSOS. Opinion survey on governance and democratic coexistence in latin america 2009-2010 (2010).

36 FLACSO (2010), op. cit.

TABLE 9 PROBABILITY OF A COUP D'ETAT BY COUNTRY

Percentages grouped by country to the question “¿ How likely is that in your country can be a coup for the next twelve months?”		
Country	Very or somewhat likely	Little or no probable
Argentina	24.0	75.8
Bolivia	26.3	73.7
Brazil	14.8	85.2
Chile	6.2	93.8
Colombia	20.9	79.1
Costa Rica	8.2	91.8
Ecuador	38.7	61.3
El Salvador	15.8	84.2
Guatemala	29.9	70.1
Honduras	31.2	68.8
Mexico	33.9	66.1
Nicaragua	25.1	74.9
Panama	11.0	89.0
Paraguay	40.0	60.0
Peru	15.2	84.8
Dominican Republic	14.2	85.8
Uruguay	10.4	89.4
Venezuela	31.9	68.1

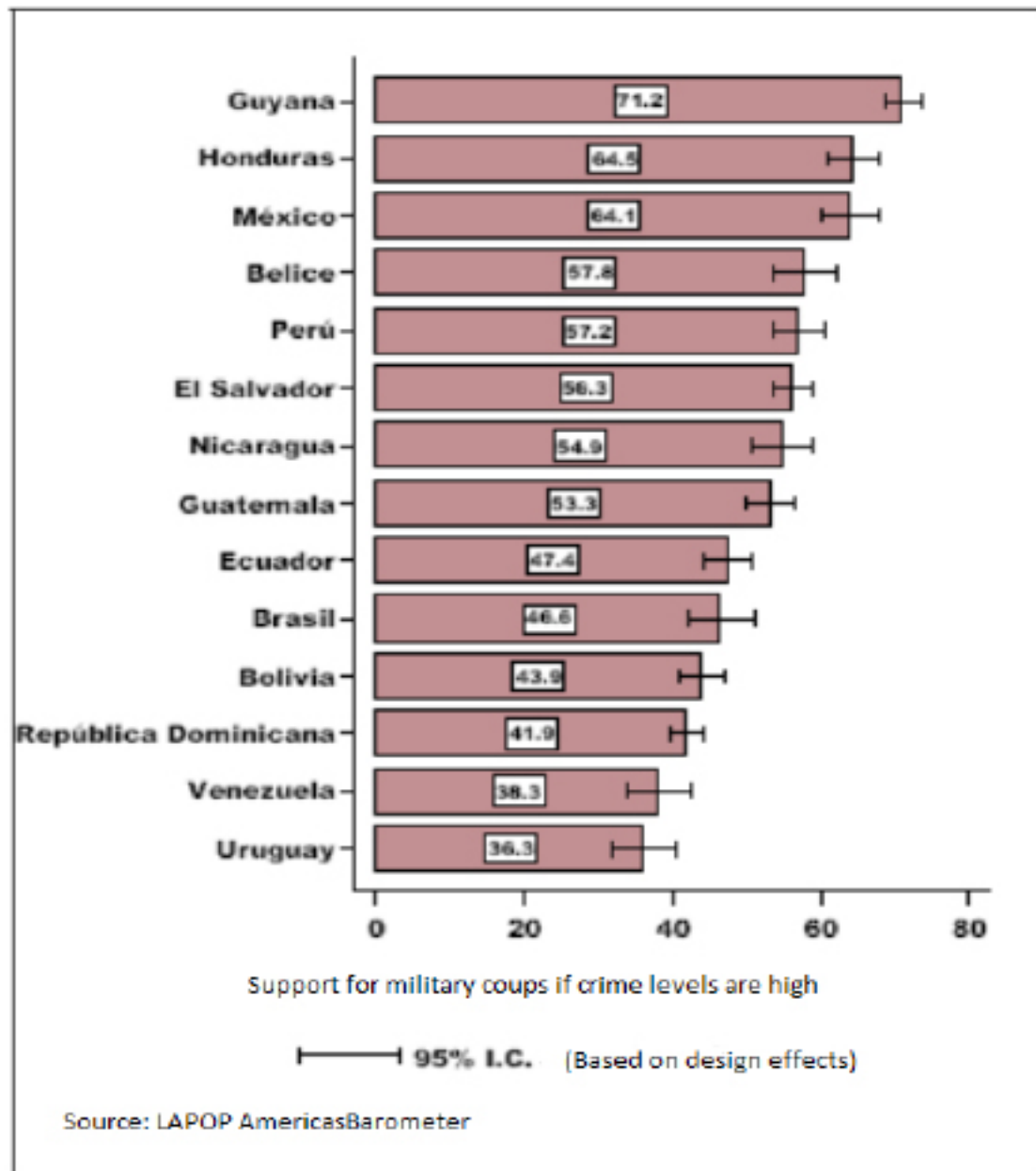
Source: IPSOS-FLACSO. Opinion survey on governance and democratic coexistence in latin america2009-2010 (2010).

If we breakdown the data country by country (Table 9), we can observe that in all countries within the region more than 60% of the population believe that a coup d'état is only slightly likely or not likely at all. There are two countries where more than 90% state that the probability of this occurring is slightly likely or not likely at all: Chile (93.8%) and Costa Rica (91.8%). The countries where comparatively more

people believe a coup d'état to be very or somewhat probable are: Ecuador (38.7%), Honduras (31.2%), Mexico (33.9%), Paraguay (40%) and Venezuela (31.9%).

Nevertheless, if we add high levels of crime to this question, as the AmericasBarometer does, the country-by-country data vary significantly.

DIAGRAM 8 SUPPORT FOR A MILITARY COUP UNDER CONDITIONS WITH HIGH LEVELS OF CRIME



Source: Pérez (2009)³⁷ based on LAPOP 2008.

37 O.J. Pérez (2009), op. cit., p. 2.

With the exception of Uruguay, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Brazil and Ecuador, the rest of the countries in the region see those questioned express levels of support of over 50 -on a scale of 0 to 100- for the idea that military coups may occur under conditions of high levels of crime. Honduras and Mexico top the list. One aspect worth underscoring is the exception of the Honduran case against the backdrop there of the fall of President Zelaya in June 2009 as the result of military intervention. Since as far back as 2008, Honduras has become, “the single case in Latin America with the highest level of triply dissatisfied citizens, with relatively low support for democracy and with high support for coups, confrontational political methods, and rebellion” (Seligson and Booth, 2009).³⁸

As has been stated above,³⁹ it seems clear that individuals who are most affected by considerable levels of insecurity are also most likely to support extreme measures to combat crime, for example military coups. Evidence thus suggests that violent crime in Latin America is such a severe cause for concern that citizens are “willing to sacrifice certain freedoms in order to feel safer”.⁴⁰

Without prejudice to the aforementioned, the most striking part is that, in general, the repeated institutional crises of the past decade have not been orchestrated militarily nor have they been utilised in order to instigate a military regime or “solution”. This does not detract from the fact, however, that in various cases the level of commitment shown in the crisis by the army or part thereof could be more significant (e.g. the case of Honduras).

Similarly, data from FLACSO (2010)⁴¹ confirm, more forcefully perhaps, that Latin Americans are not willing to support a coup d'état and a military government. Therefore, 77% of Latin Americans questioned (as opposed to the 63% indicated by the Latinobarómetro in 2010) think that their country is not predisposed to a coup d'état. Of these, Chile (94%), Uruguay (90%) and Costa Rica (84%) are most notable.

A second group of countries show mid-range values: Venezuela (70%), Brazil and Nicaragua (67%), Colombia (66%) -in fact the exact mean value- and Honduras (60%), where a constitutional president was recently ousted by the Congress and the Supreme Court.

38 M.A. Seligson and J. A. Booth (2009), “Predicting Coups? Democratic Vulnerabilities, The AmericasBarometer and The 2009 Honduran Crisis”, *AmericasBarometer Insights, 2009 (Special Report on Honduras)*. Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), Vanderbilt University, p. 4.

39 J.M. Cruz (2009), “Public Insecurity in Central America and Mexico”, *AmericasBarometer Insights Series*, Vol. 28, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), University of Vanderbilt. O.J. Pérez (2009), op. cit.

40 J.S. Tulchin and M. Ruthenburg (2006), “Toward a Society Under Law”, in Tulchin, Joseph S. and Meg Ruthenburg (eds.), *Toward a Society Under Law: Citizens and Their Police in Latin America*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center, p. 5.

41 FLACSO (2010), op. cit.

The countries least likely to reject a military government are El Salvador (59%), Peru (54%), Mexico (53%), Paraguay (46%)⁴² and Guatemala (40%). Amongst these five countries are two of the three cases of elected military presidents (Humala and Pérez Molina). At the same time, they include two of the countries that top the list in a global insecurity ranking due to their high rates of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants and in which the armed forces are involved in the fight against crime. The other country, Mexico, is experiencing an era of extreme violence at the hands of the drug-trafficking cartels, which has led to active participation of the armed forces in the struggle to confront them.

Younger people have more of a tendency to believe that a coup is possible compared with older people. Thus, 30% of young people between 18 and 24 years of age believe that such an act is possible, in comparison to 15% of adults over 55. This trend is particularly apparent in Uruguay, one of the countries where respondents believe that a coup d'état is less likely,⁴³

Corruption is the reason cited by Latin Americans for considering that the president should be removed from office before finishing his or her term in government, the view expressed by 66% of citizens consulted. If the actions of a president are detrimental to the country, 57% of Latin American women believe that he or she could and should be removed from office. This trend becomes more prominent in the case of Argentina where in the age groups spanning 25 to 40 years of age, nine in every ten people tend to believe that if certain circumstances arise that worsen the country's situation then a coup d'état should occur. In Argentina, 66% of the population even say that a coup d'état is the solution they envisage to tackle problems with crime.

By way of conclusion, confidence in the armed forces in Latin America is relatively high, yet two out of every three people questioned would not accept a military government under any circumstance.

42 These data seem to pre-empt the political crisis that emerged in 2012 when the Paraguayan Congress chose to impeach Lugo following violence that occurred during the eviction of farmers in the town of Curuguaty in the southeast of the country. This decision was viewed within the region as an institutional coup d'état, which brought Federico Franco to power, and which resulted in the suspension of Paraguay from Mercosur and Unasur.

43 FLACSO (2010), *op. cit.*, p. 51.

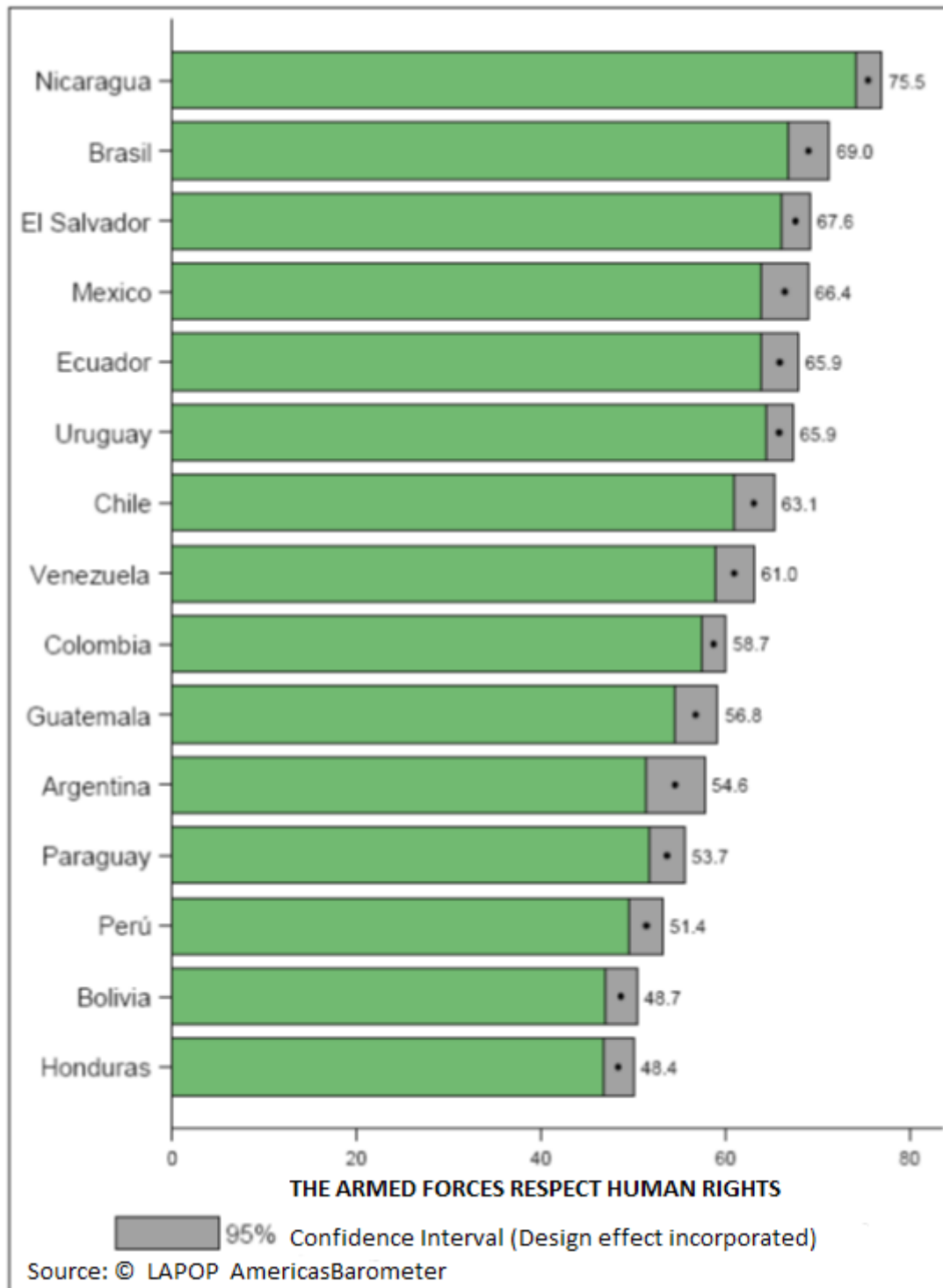
7. ARMED FORCES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Another crucial problem with civil-military relations in a post-dictatorial period is the way in which the human rights violations committed by regular (and irregular) security forces during the years of dictatorship have been dealt with under democratic government. Over the course of transition negotiations, the illegitimate acts committed during the “dirty wars” by the military class and by middle-ranking officers were a complicated matter to address. Before abandoning power, those in the military tried to institutionalise a system of impunity by implementing legislation on amnesty in advance. This procedure ensured that for many years legislation on human rights violations was extremely unsatisfactory. The fact that such special legislation existed and the ease of transferring proceedings with high political impact to the military judicial system lead in practice to de facto immunity in Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras and Peru, as well as in other countries.

Once again using the new AmericasBarometer data, we thus observe whether Latin American citizens believe that the armed forces respect human rights in the region today. In most countries, the majority of those questioned expressed support for this statement; in 13 of the 15 cases analysed this was above 50%. It is only in Bolivia and Honduras where a significant number of those surveyed consider that the armed forces do not respect human rights. It is once more worth stressing the “Honduran exception”, even though only 30% of Hondurans cite crime/security as the principal problem, this is fewer than half of the 61% who say the same in Venezuela (Latinobarómetro Corporation, 2011).⁴⁴

44 Latinobarómetro Corporation (2011), *op. cit.*, p. 71.

TABLE 10 RESPECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS BY ARMED FORCES



Source: Pérez (2012),⁴⁵ based on LAPOP data (2010). (Question: To what extent do you believe that the armed forces of [country] respect human rights of the [people of the country] today?)

45 O.J. Pérez (2012), op. cit., p. 15.

Nicaragua once again expresses the most positive opinions as regards the armed forces respecting human rights. Honduras has the lowest value. Since 2009, this country has suffered a wave of crime and violence, also including a series of assassinations of political and human rights activists, journalists and trade unionists that have exposed a gravely difficult situation for the rule of law and democratic governance. Although there is no proof that the armed forces in Honduras were directly involved with these murders, the high levels of violence call into question the duty of the armed forces to establish the public safety needed to safeguard public order and the lives of fellow citizens.

8. PARLIAMENTARY ELITES AND THE ARMED FORCES

If we instead transfer our attention from public opinion polls to surveys of the political elite (in this case members of parliament), the Parliamentary Elite in Latin America Project (PELA)⁴⁶ provides us with more information in order to round off our overall view of the role of the armed forces in democratic transition and consolidation processes.

In general, Latin American members of parliament do not consider control of the armed forces to be the aspect most relevant to democratic consolidation. Furthermore, 65% believe that relations between the armed forces and the government are not threatening, whereby a lower level of fear stands out in Andean countries (33%) versus the view that this represents a slight or no threat in Chile and Uruguay. As regards the confidence that members of parliament have in their armed forces, we see a fall in confidence as we move geographically from the north to the south. This ranges from a high level of confidence (highest at 75% in Mexico) to 50% in Chile and Uruguay due to their recent past. On that account, if we consider the way in which political leaders perceive the institution that is the military, the data establish that the risk of military insubordination has all but disappeared.⁴⁷

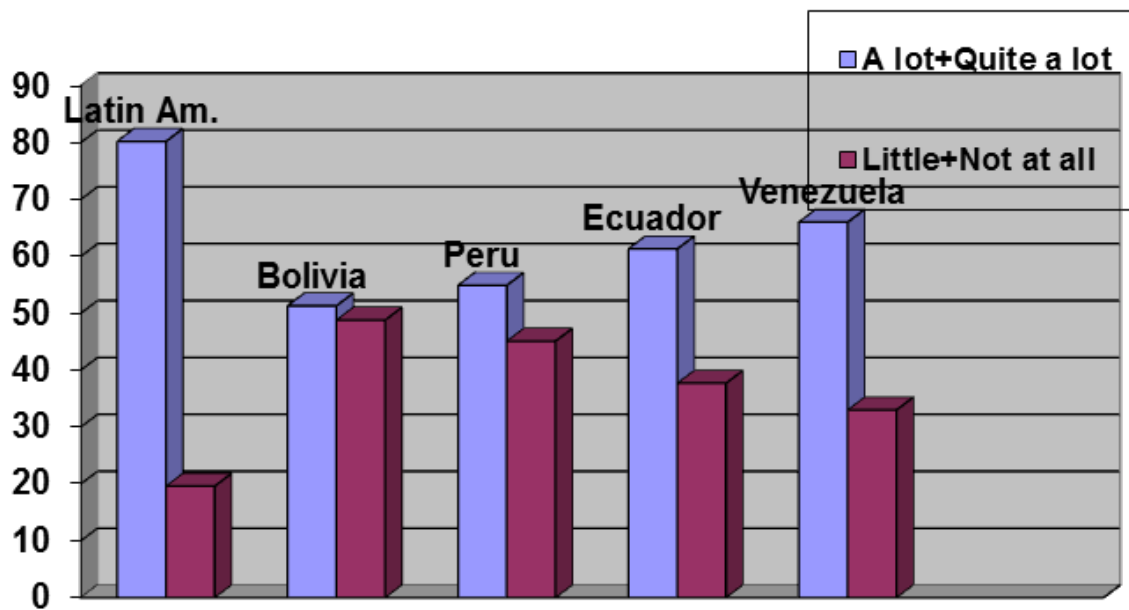
When evaluating the level of threat posed by current relations between the armed forces and the government to the democracy of each country, practically all of the Latin American MPs surveyed, irrespective of their ideological position, consider

46 PELA (2005), *Proyecto Elites Parlamentarias* [Parliamentary Elite Project]. Dir. Manuel Alcántara. University of Salamanca.

47 M. Alcántara (2005), "Diputados y militares. Una visión desde el Parlamento de las Fuerzas Armadas" [Members of Parliament and the Military. The Armed Forces Viewed from Parliament], in José Antonio Olmeda (comp.), *Democracias frágiles, las relaciones civiles-militares en el mundo iberoamericano*. [Fragile Democracies, Civilian-Military Relations in the Ibero-American World]. Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch-Instituto General Gutiérrez Mellado, pp. 229-250.

them to pose little or no threat (80.2%). Nonetheless, the opinions vary significantly depending on the country of the member of parliament questioned. As a result, whilst more than half of Bolivian congressmen (51.3%) and 45.1% of Peruvian MPs consider the relationship between the armed forces and the government in their country to represent a serious threat, for more than 90% of those in Paraguay, Argentina, Honduras, El Salvador and Colombia, this aspect did not present a risk to democracy in their countries (PELA, 2005).

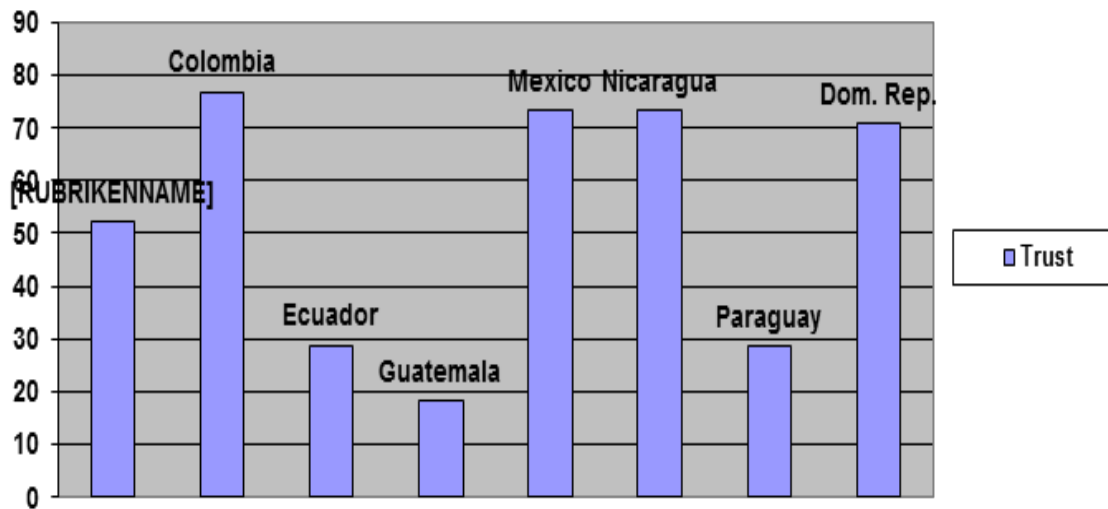
TABLE II RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARMED FORCES AND GOVERNMENT AS A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY (%)



Fuente: Author's own based on PELA data, (2005).

The trust placed by Latin American members of parliament in the armed forces is not particularly high. Only 50% of those surveyed stated that they were very or quite confident about the role that they play in the public life of their country. Nevertheless, there are significant variations across the countries. Thus, while MPs in Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic place most trust in the institution (here the proportion expressing a lot and quite a lot of trust in the activities of the armed force exceeds 70%), on the contrary we that see elected representatives in Guatemala, Paraguay and Ecuador have much lower levels (only between 18 and 29% of these state that they have a lot or quite a lot of trust in the army in their country).

TABLE 12 TRUST IN THE ARMED FORCES BY COUNTRY (%)



Source: Author's own based on PELA (2005)

Unlike the data shown in the previous table, ideological differences between elected representatives seem to explain the different levels of trust in the armed forces: those who place themselves towards the left of the political spectrum are less likely to place their trust in the institution (42.3% express a lot or quite a lot of trust) as opposed to those on the right who show higher levels of trust (62% have a lot or quite a lot of trust).

In general, members of parliament in Latin America take a positive stance on the role that the armed forces play. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is extremely negative and 10 is extremely positive, the regional average sits at 6.36.

9. CONCLUSIONS

As we underlined at the beginning of this article, the armed forces have occupied an important role in progress and setbacks to regional democratic politics. At times, they have accompanied oligarchical projects, whereas on other occasions they have endorsed popular and populist development projects. One does not get a full picture of Latin American politics without considering the presence of the military. The return to democracy and the consolidation of these regimes over the course of the last thirty years forces us to contemplate how the citizens of Latin America see the new role performed by the armed forces in a regional democratic context. To this end, we have analysed data from four regional polls: the 2011 Latinobarómetro Report, LAPOP polls, the study conducted by FLACSO in 2010 and data from the University of Salamanca's Parliamentary Elite survey.

These all show us that, despite several differences, the armed forces continue to derive considerable support and trust from the citizens of the region, double that placed in other institutions such as parties or national legislative bodies, and far surpassing the support enjoyed by the various national police forces.

Latin American citizens reaffirm solid support for the armed forces, highlighting their work with human rights, the role they play in natural disasters, their organisational capacity and training as well as the action that they take with a backdrop of high levels of crime.

The results also reveal that support for the political system significantly influences levels of trust in the armed forces. That is to say, that greater support for a democratic regime does indeed translate into greater trust in the armed forces.

As regards approval rates for a military coup, the 2011 Latinobarómetro Report shows that 66% of those surveyed would not support a military government under any circumstance (versus 63% in 2010). Guatemala is the country least likely to dismiss a military government with only 40% stating they would do this. That means that 60% of respondents would not reject a military regime outright. These figures rise to 52% in Paraguay, 53% in Mexico and 54% in Peru. The 60% in Honduras that express disagreement vis-à-vis a military government merits evaluation, especially after the coup d'état there in 2009. Empirical evidence points to the fact that violent crime in Latin America appears to be such a severe cause for concern that citizens are willing to sacrifice certain freedoms in order to feel safer.

Finally, if we refocus our attention on the political class (in this case national parliaments), we can observe that, as a whole, Latin American members of parliament do not consider control of the armed forces to be the most relevant variable for democratic consolidation. Furthermore, 65% believe that relations between the armed forces and the government are not threatening, whereby a lower level of fear stands out in Andean countries (33%) versus the view that this represents a slight or no threat in Chile and Uruguay. As regards the confidence that members of parliament have in their armed forces, we see a fall in confidence as we move geographically from the north to the south. This ranges from a high level of confidence (highest at 75% in Mexico) to 50% in Chile and Uruguay due to their recent past. Hence, as far as political leaders' perception of the military institution is concerned, the data clearly suggests that the risk of military insubordination has all but disappeared.

We therefore conclude that appropriate adaptation of the armed forces to new democratic constitutional framework, together with the role that they have played in democratic normalisation within the region, has meant that the citizens of Latin America have continued to lend them support, thereby providing them with significant legitimacy reserves when compared with other regional institutions.

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