



The  
Economist

## The Latinobarómetro poll

# The democratic routine

Resilience in the crisis and a robust recovery have brought a sunnier mood

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**A democratic wave on the Pacific coast** 1

*Which of the following statements do you agree with most? %*

	Democracy is preferable to any other type of government					In certain circumstances authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one				
	1996	2001	2009	2010	Change since 2009	1996	2001	2009	2010	Change since 2010
Ecuador	52	40	43	64	21	18	24	25	12	-13
Colombia	60	36	49	60	11	20	16	14	10	-4
Peru	63	62	52	61	9	13	12	16	15	-1
Mexico	53	46	42	49	7	23	35	14	10	-4
Chile	54	45	59	63	4	19	19	11	11	nil
Guatemala	51	33	42	46	4	21	21	30	17	-13
Nicaragua	59	43	55	58	3	14	22	10	9	-1
Paraguay	59	35	46	49	3	26	43	31	33	2
Argentina	71	58	64	66	2	15	21	19	19	nil
Venezuela	62	57	84	84	nil	19	20	7	9	2
Brazil	50	30	55	54	-1	24	18	18	19	1
Honduras	42	57	55	53	-2	14	8	12	16	4
Costa Rica	80	71	74	72	-2	7	8	9	12	3
Bolivia	64	54	71	68	-3	17	17	13	9	-4
Panama	75	34	64	61	-3	10	23	13	17	4
Dominican Rep.	na	na	67	63	-4	na	na	24	23	-1
Uruguay	80	79	82	75	-7	9	10	8	15	7
El Salvador	56	25	68	59	-9	12	10	12	19	7

Source: Latinobarómetro

SUPPORT for democracy in Latin America continues to edge up, as does backing for private enterprise. Crime has become a bigger worry than unemployment. And Brazil is seen as more influential than the United States across much of the region. Those are some of the findings of the latest Latinobarómetro poll taken in 18 countries and published exclusively by *The Economist*. Because the poll has been taken regularly since 1995, it tracks changes in attitude across the region.

Two related things stand out in the results of this year's poll, taken in September and early October. The first is Latin America's fairly sunny mood. The second is the increasing stability of attitudes towards democracy and its core institutions. Support for democracy has risen noticeably in several countries on the Pacific rim of South America (see table 1). For example in Peru, where economic growth has averaged 6% a year since 2002, support for democracy has risen from a low of 40% in 2005 to 61% this year. It also rose in Mexico, where the economy has recovered after suffering a big drop in output last year.

But only around half of respondents in Mexico and Brazil, the region's two most populous countries, are convinced democrats, which drags down the regional average (see chart 2). Some



44% of respondents across the region pronounced themselves satisfied with how their country's democracy works in practice, the same figure as last year but a big increase on the 25% in 2001 (chart 3). Some 34% said they had confidence in their country's Congress and 45% in their government, the same as last year in both cases but up sharply from 2003 (17% and 24% respectively).

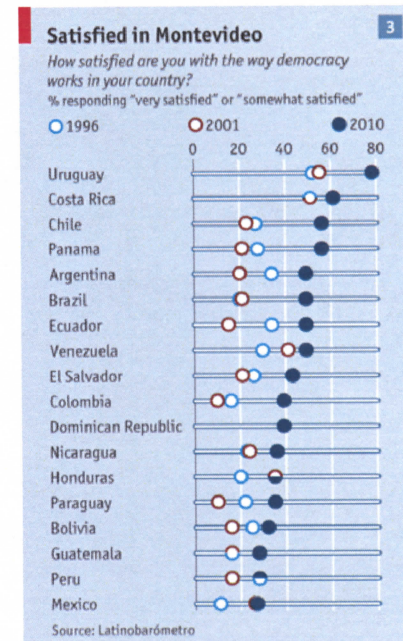
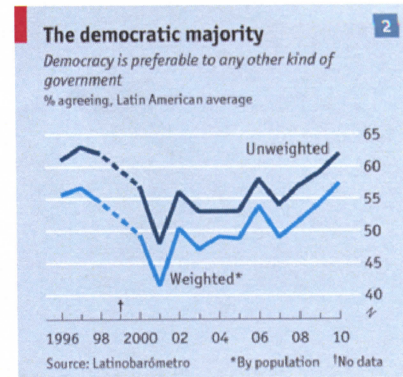
A decade ago economic woes in Latin America undermined support for democracy. That it has held up during the world financial crisis is probably because many Latin American countries suffered only a brief recession and have enjoyed a strong recovery. In addition, a stronger social safety net has helped to shield the poor. (The United Nations' Economic Commission for Latin America reported this week that the proportion of Latin Americans living in poverty rose only marginally in 2009 and has fallen again this year, to 32%.)

But the mood varies widely from country to country (see chart 4). Brazil's strong economic performance and the popularity of its outgoing president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, is reflected in a widely shared sense of progress. That is scarcer in Mexico and Central America, where the recession was more severe and violent crime has worsened.

For only the second time since the polls began, more respondents across Latin America as a whole cite crime, rather than unemployment, as the most important problem facing their country (see chart 5). Some 31% say that either they or a close relative have been victims of crime over the past year, but that is down from 38% last year and is the lowest figure since 1995.

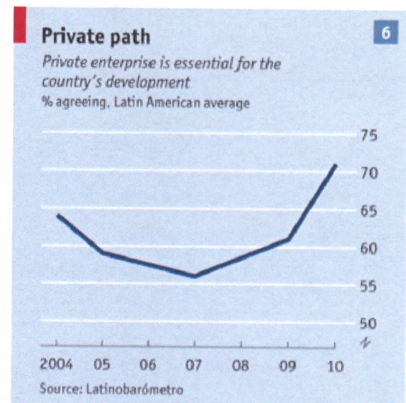
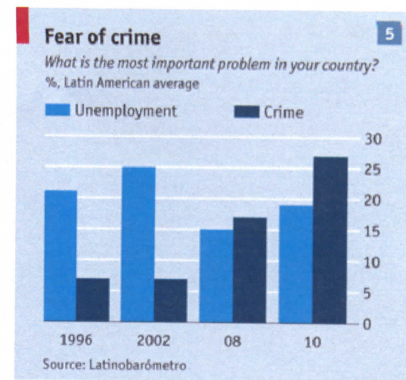
A more robust economic performance is reflected in rising support for private enterprise and the market economy: some 71% of respondents across the region say that private enterprise is indispensable for development, up from 56% in 2007 (see chart 6). Some 58% agree that the market economy is the only system that will make their country developed, up from 47% last year. Interestingly, 62% of respondents in Venezuela hold that view (and 80% there back private enterprise) even though their left-wing president, Hugo Chávez, is expropriating many private companies.

Brazil is the country which exercises most leadership in the region, mentioned by 19% of respondents (up from 18% last year), followed by the United States (9%, unchanged from last year) and Venezuela (9%, down from 11% last year). But the United States is seen as the most influential country by respondents in Mexico and much of Central America, whereas Venezuela enjoys that distinction in Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua.



This online version of the story contains two extra charts that did not appear in the print edition. The charts have been renumbered accordingly.

Latinobarómetro is a non-profit organisation based in Santiago, Chile, which has carried out regular surveys of opinions, attitudes and values in Latin America since 1995. The poll was taken by local opinion-research companies in 18 countries and involved 20,204 face-to-face interviews conducted between September 4th and October 6th 2010. The average margin of error is 3%. Full details [here](http://www.latinobarometro.org) (<http://www.latinobarometro.org>)



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