

2.3 Political efficacy and representation

A fundamental element of democracy is the principle that people are free to express opinions and have equal opportunities to be represented in government decision making. People who feel they can influence political processes are more likely to participate in civic life through voting, or by engaging with politicians and political parties. Political efficacy refers to individuals' feeling that they can participate in and influence political processes. People who feel they have no political voice are less likely to comply with laws and regulations, and more likely to engage in protests such as boycotts, or to exit the democratic process entirely by not engaging or abstaining from voting (Prats and Meunier, 2021). For this reason, political efficacy plays a key role in reinforcing democratic institutions by promoting active citizenship and motivating people to engage in democratic processes.

In Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries, on average only 31.4% of the population think that the political system allows people like them to have a say in what the government does. Although the lack of available data limits the comparison, this is similar to the average for OECD countries (30%). However, there are differences across countries. Out of the seven LAC countries with available information, only in Argentina do most people (57%) believe that the system allows them to have a say in government actions. In most of the other countries where data are available (four out of seven countries), between 30% and 34% of the population believe their voices are being heard (Figure 2.6).

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the LAC region witnessed a significant breakthrough in democratisation, with almost all countries adopting a democratic system of government. Although democracy in the region showed resilience even during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent crises, there are indications of democratic erosion and backsliding into authoritarianism in several countries (International IDEA, 2021). For instance, satisfaction with democracy has declined in 15 out of 18 LAC countries over the last decade, from an average of 56% of the population expressing satisfaction in 2012 to 41% in 2021 (-15 p.p.). Haiti stands out with the lowest level of satisfaction with democracy in 2021, with a mere 11% of the population saying they were satisfied with the way democracy works in their country, a significant decline of 33 p.p. since 2012. Several other countries also experienced substantial declines over that period, including Brazil (-35 p.p.), Peru (-31 p.p.), Colombia and Panama (both -29 p.p.), and Argentina (-26 p.p.). Uruguay goes against the prevailing trend by showing the highest value with 82% of their population expressing satisfaction with democracy (Figure 2.7).

The decline in satisfaction with democracy may hamper people's willingness to participate in democratic processes, such as national elections. Voter turnout in parliamentary or congressional elections is a basic indicator of citizen participation and political efficacy. Indeed, in the LAC region voter turnout fell in 20 out of 27 countries, with the average declining from 69.4% to 62.7% (- 6.7 p.p.) between 2010 and 2023 (Figure 2.8).

Methodology and definitions

The World Values Survey (WVS) started in 1981. The 7th round of the WVS was conducted in 2017-21 and includes 64 countries and territories. Samples employed are random probability representative of the adult population. The usual sample size is 1 300 per country.

The Americas Barometer by the LAPOP Lab conducts surveys of democratic values and behaviour focusing on LAC countries. Each country survey is implemented based on a national probability design. Survey participants in LAC countries are voting-age adults interviewed face-to-face in their households.

Further reading

González, S. (2020), "Testing the evidence, how good are public sector responsiveness measures and how to improve them?", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 38, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c1b10334-en>.

International IDEA (2021), *The State of Democracy in the Americas 2021: Democracy in Times of Crisis*, <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2021.93>.

Prats, M. and A. Meunier (2021), "Political efficacy and participation: An empirical analysis in European countries", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 46, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4548cad8-en>.

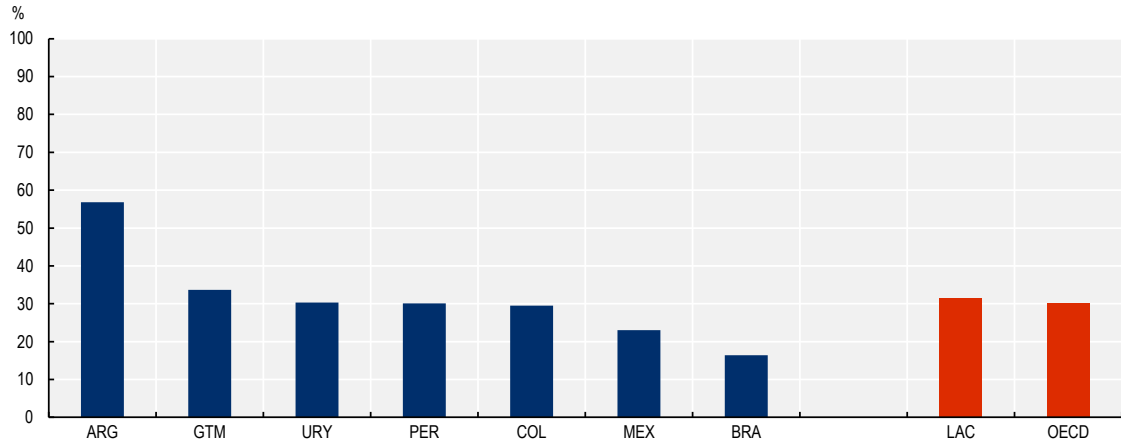
Figure notes

Figure 2.6. Refers to the question "How much would you say the political system in your country allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?". OECD average is based on 21 countries.

Figure 2.7. Data refer to the share of people who answered "satisfied" and "very satisfied" to the survey question: "In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in (country)?" Data for Argentina are from 2017. Data for Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru are from 2018. Data for Uruguay are from 2022.

Figure 2.8. Voter turnout is the percentage of registered voters who voted in each election.

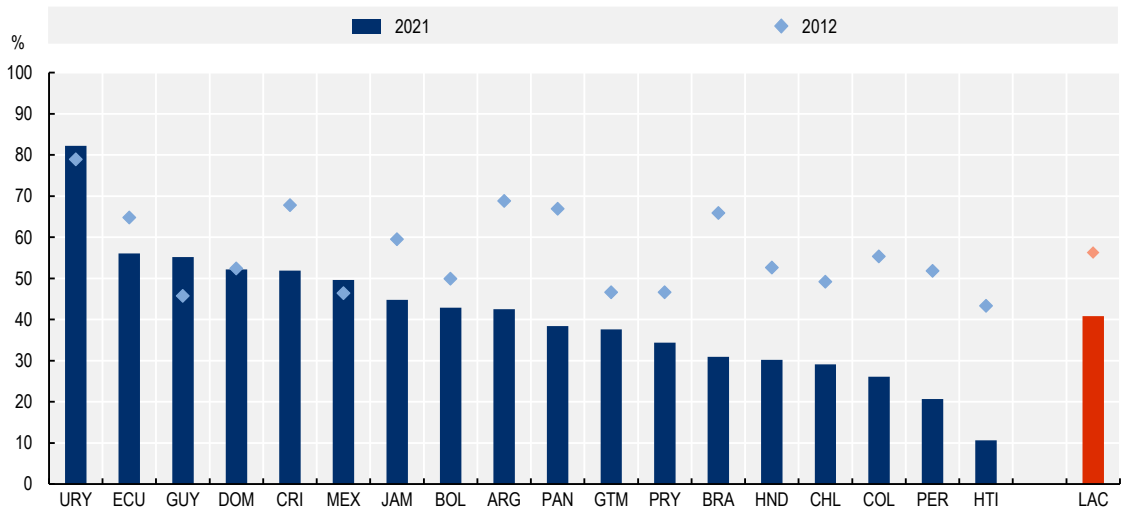
Figure 2.6. Having a say in what government does, 2022 (or the nearest year)



Source: Calculations based on the World Values Survey, 2017-22; OECD Trust Survey (<http://oe.cd/trust>).

StatLink <https://stat.link/soh8er>

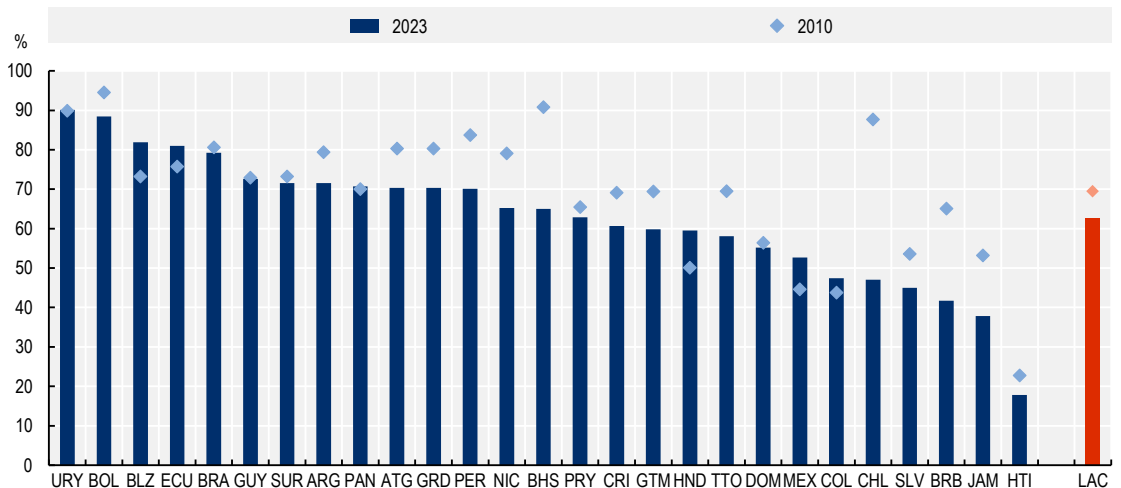
Figure 2.7. Satisfaction with democracy, 2012 and 2021



Source: The Americas Barometer by the LAPOP Lab.

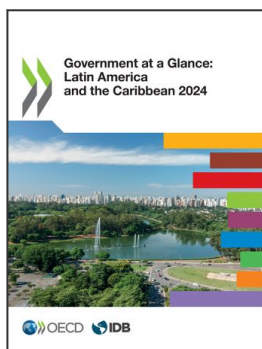
StatLink <https://stat.link/ywpsnz>

Figure 2.8. Voter turnout in parliamentary elections, 2010 and 2023 (or the closest available year)



Source: International IDEA (2023), Voter Turnout Database.

StatLink <https://stat.link/8h5fvw>



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