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Polarization over president high in Argentina: LAPOP

by Jim Patterson (<http://news.vanderbilt.edu/author/patterjm/>) | Posted on Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2015 — 12:42 PM



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Argentines had become increasingly polarized about President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner even before a federal prosecutor was found dead under suspicious circumstances last month, according to surveys by the [Latin American Opinion Project \(LAPOP\)](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/index.php) (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/index.php>) at Vanderbilt University.

The Jan. 18 discovery of the body of prosecutor Alberto Nisman in his Buenos Aires apartment, dead from a gunshot wound to the head, came hours before he was to present a case against Kirchner. Nisman was prepared to argue that the Argentine government had covered up Iran's involvement in a 1994 terrorist attack on a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires in exchange for improved terms of trade.

"Argentines have responded to Nisman's death with incredulity, anger and resignation, as many believe it signals another blow to the democratic institutions of a country long stricken by institutional weakness and high levels of corruption," said Mason Moseley, a postdoctoral fellow at the Penn Program on Democracy, Citizenship and Constitutionalism at the University of Pennsylvania, former Ph.D. student at Vanderbilt and author of the [new AmericasBarometer Topical Brief on Argentina](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/ITBo17en.pdf) (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/ITBo17en.pdf>) (For a version of the report in Spanish, see [here](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/ITBo17es.pdf)) (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/ITBo17es.pdf>).

LAPOP data shows that between 2008 and 2014 the percentage of respondents who said Kirchner was doing a

“very bad” or “very good” job more than tripled, from 6.4 percent to 19.5 percent.

Put simply, Argentines views of the president have moved toward the poles since her tenure began.”“The portion of individuals who maintained neutral views of Kirchner fell from nearly 50 percent to less than one in three,” Moseley said. “Put simply, Argentines views of the president have moved toward the poles since her tenure began.”

In addition to being deeply polarized, Argentines seem to lack faith in the country’s political institutions. LAPOP data shows that Argentina registers 41.8 percent on a 100-point scale measuring public trust in the chief executive, representing a 20-point drop between 2012 and 2014. In addition, many Argentina citizens perceive that their country’s public officials are corrupt, ranking among the top third in the Americas.

Investigators have yet to officially determine the cause of Nisman’s death. In a poll by The Economist, more than 70 percent of Buenos Aires residents said they believed he was a murder victim. Kirchner called Nisman’s death a suicide at first, then changed her mind and said Nisman was a pawn in a larger conspiracy to discredit the government.

“With the presidential election approaching in October, and Kirchner constitutionally prohibited from seeking a third term, 2015 promises to be a pivotal year in determining the future of Argentina’s democracy,” Moseley said.

LAPOP develops, implements and analyzes the AmericasBarometer public opinion surveys. Since the 1970s, LAPOP has gathered a treasure trove of opinion data containing political perspectives from Latin American and Caribbean citizens. LAPOP data and reports are available to interested researchers at the [LAPOP website](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/) (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/>).

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